



# Bullying Prevention

*When Your Child Is  
the Victim, the Bully,  
or the Bystander*





# What Is Bullying?

Bullying is not a conflict or a fight. Bullying is physical, verbal, or emotional abuse that is deliberate, repeated, and targeted at those who are viewed as less powerful.

Children differ greatly in the power they have in any group, based on factors such as their age, size, strength, and popularity. Children who bully abuse their power by intentionally and repeatedly hurting other children whom they regard as less powerful.

Bullying can begin in the preschool years and continue throughout adolescence and beyond. It can happen at school, traveling to and from school, at home, in the neighborhood, and anywhere that digital communication devices are available.

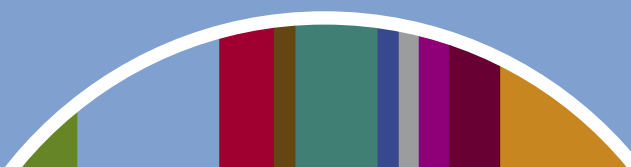
Bullying takes several forms and occurs with varying levels of severity:

- ▶ **Physical bullying** includes poking, pushing, hitting, and beating up.
- ▶ **Verbal bullying** includes name-calling, taunting, insulting, and threatening to harm.
- ▶ **Relational bullying** includes ignoring, excluding, spreading rumors, and getting others to hurt someone.
- ▶ **Cyberbullying** includes sending or posting embarrassing, threatening, or hurtful text or images using cell phones, computers, or other digital communication devices.

# ***Bullying Basics***

We now know that:

- ▶ Bullying is **NOT** prewired, harmless, or inevitable
- ▶ Bullying **IS** learned, harmful, and controllable
- ▶ Bullying **CAN HAVE** devastating and enduring effects
- ▶ Bullying **SPREADS** if supported or left unchecked
- ▶ Bullying **INVOLVES** everyone — bullies, victims, and bystanders
- ▶ Bullying **CAN BE** effectively stopped or entirely prevented



# When Your Child Is the Victim

Children who are victims of bullying often need help to develop a safety plan, obtain support from adults and peers, and develop assertiveness skills and self-confidence. Children who behave in a confident manner are less likely to be targets for bullies.

## Look, Listen, Learn

**TIP** Look carefully for signs that your child is being bullied. Warning signs include fear of going to school, loss of interest in friends and activities, unexplained bruises or torn clothes, problems with sleeping or eating, headaches or stomach problems, and signs of moodiness, anxiety, or depression.



**TIP** Develop common ground for discussing bullying with your child. First share your own childhood experiences with bullying and how these experiences have affected you.

**TIP** If your child tells you about being treated in a way that sounds like bullying, take it seriously. First listen without interrupting; then ask clarifying questions. Reassure and support your child. Tell your child that bullying is unfair, unacceptable, and not the fault of the victim. Assure your child that bullying can be stopped and prevented, and you are ready to help.

**TIP** Keep a written record of all bullying incidents. By knowing when, where, and how the bullying occurs, you and your child can develop a better safety plan and provide more detailed information to school or law enforcement officials.

**TIP** Teach your child when and how to ask for help. Assist your child in identifying several adults and peers who can help your child avoid, stand up against, or stop the bullying.

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**TIP** Learn about the bullying prevention policy in your child's school. If there is no policy, encourage its development. Tell the principal, counselor, or teacher the problems you see, and let them know that you expect them to work with you and your child on solutions. When school officials know about bullying, they can help stop it.

**TIP** Work with your child to learn and practice assertiveness skills, such as confidently expressing one's feelings, defending one's rights, or walking away. Teach your child how to look the bully in the eye, stand tall, stay calm, use a firm voice, and speak up against bullying. Do not encourage your child to submit to the bully (by cowering, crying, or giving in) or to counter-attack (by threatening, shouting at, or fighting with the bully). Giving in encourages the bully to continue, and fighting back usually leads to escalation and greater harm.

**TIP** Encourage your child to become friends with other children. Have your child invite potential friends to your house. Help your child join group activities that encourage making friends and building social skills, such as team sports and social clubs. Children who are loners are more likely to get picked on.

# When Your Child Is the Bully

When you hear or see that your child is bullying others — take it seriously. Children who bully need to understand that bullying is not acceptable, funny, or cool. They need to develop empathy for their victims, and learn alternative ways to use their power to help rather than to hurt those who are vulnerable. Children who are allowed to continue bullying others will lose friends and develop many social problems that continue to get worse, even into adulthood. In fact, they are more likely to develop antisocial or even criminal behavior when they are older. Now is the time to change your child's bullying behavior.

## Strategies for Change

**TIP** Although it may be difficult to hear others criticize your child, listen carefully and do not blame others for your child's behavior.

**TIP** Discuss with your child what bullying is, why bullying is never acceptable, and how bullying hurts everyone, including the bully.

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**TIP** Set firm and consistent limits on your child's behavior. Discipline your child for bullying-related behaviors. Use effective, non-punitive discipline, such as loss of privilege, together with an explanation of why the behavior was wrong and how it can be changed.

**TIP** Help your child develop empathy and respect for others by discussing real-life examples of the effects of helpful or hurtful behavior on others and the value of respecting others.

**TIP** Encourage your child to develop new and constructive strategies for using his or her power to help others and to help stop and prevent bullying. Children who have bullied others can become effective bullying preventers.

**TIP** Be a positive role model. Show your child how to take pleasure in helping others and how to get what you want without taunting, threatening, attacking, or excluding others. Children can learn to treat others with respect by watching and practicing helpful behavior.



# When Your Child Is a Bystander

Parents rarely discuss with their children the importance and responsibility of being the bystander who watches or hears about bullying. But bystanders can often make a crucial difference in determining whether bullying happens, continues, and becomes more severe — or whether it is stopped or prevented from happening. Now is the time to prepare your child to become a helpful bystander.

## Making a Difference

**TIP** Discuss with your child the importance, responsibility, and effects bystanders have in bullying situations. Give real-life examples of the ways that bystanders have been helpful or even heroic. Tell your child about times that bystanders have helped you when you were in need.

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**TIP** Discuss with your child many specific ways bystanders can have helpful effects or harmful effects on bullying. For example, bystanders can have harmful effects by laughing at, cheering on, or joining in the bullying. Explain that even when bystanders simply watch bullying and do nothing to stop it, their effect is to make the bully bolder and increase the problem of bullying. On the other hand, bystanders can prevent or stop bullying by aiding the victim, changing the activity, drawing support from other bystanders, or getting help from adults.



**TIP** Teach your child how to play a helpful role without getting hurt. If your child feels there is a danger that the bully will attack him or her, your child should leave and get help from an adult. If your child feels there is a danger of retaliation for reporting the bullying, your child should report it to you or use an anonymous or confidential way of reporting it to another trusted adult.

**TIP** Encourage your child to report bullying to a trusted adult and discuss some specific people your child might go to. Suggest going with a friend if that makes it easier. Talking to an adult is not 'tattling' — it is an act of courage, compassion, and safety.



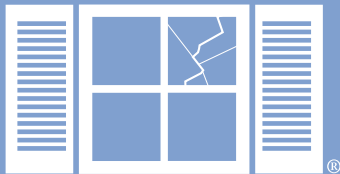
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## CAMPAIGN AGAINST VIOLENCE

MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY  
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Some content in this brochure was derived and adapted from the *Eyes on Bullying Program*.

For more information, strategies, tips, activities, and resources, visit the *Eyes on Bullying* website: [www.eyesonbullying.org](http://www.eyesonbullying.org)

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