

Back to School Bullying Toolkit



Bullying is a form of harmful, unwanted aggression over time, and is commonly seen among children. Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength. Direct forms of bullying include physical or verbal behavior, and indirect forms of bullying are for example, social exclusion and rumor spreading, or aggression online such as cyber-bullying.

Bullying & Mental Health

Bullying in childhood is associated with current mental health problems, and also adult mental health problems.

Importantly, bullying is viewed as one of the most modifiable risk factors for children's mental health.

Bullying in childhood is associated with anxiety and depression in adulthood. Additionally, the longer a child experiences bullying (for example, a one-time event vs. over the length of the school-year) is associated with more risk of mental health problems.

Children who are targets of bullying are also more likely to engage in bullying behavior themselves, have negative attitudes about school, school avoidance, and reduced academic achievement.

- **Bullying & Gender Identity and Expression**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students are targets of bullying at significantly greater rates than their straight and cisgender peers (Reisner et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2021). In fact, according to data from the [Trevor Project](#), 25% of LGBTQ children and teenagers report being bullied in the past year.

- **How to Reduce the Likelihood of Being Bullied**

A positive family environment, healthy interactions with caregivers, caregiver involvement, support, communication, and warmth are shown to reduce the likelihood of a child being bullied in school. Children who have more support in schools are less likely to be bullied.

- **How to Protect Against Harmful Consequences of Bullying**

Warm, supportive relationships with caregivers and siblings reduce likelihood of developing mental health challenges related to bullying.

What To Do If Your Child is Being Bullied

Bullying is extremely common in school-aged children. About 20% of children have experienced bullying (NCES, 2019). All children can become targets of bullying.

Children are often reluctant to talk about bullying. If your child uses the term bullying at home, you should assess and ask more questions about the context. It's important to understand the difference between bullying and typical peer conflict.

Enforcing rules around behavior in schools, establishing communications between families and schools, and having open conversations about bullying with children have been shown to decrease bullying.

Caregiver Strategies to Help Your Child

- **Take immediate steps to protect your child from bullying.**

Confer with caring adults in your child's life including teachers, school counselors, or the principal. Continue your advocacy until they take your reports of bullying seriously and act.

- **Encourage your child to advocate for themselves with teachers in the classroom.**

Confer with caring adults in your child's life including teachers, school counselors, or the principal. Continue your advocacy until they take your reports of bullying seriously and act.

- **Communicate with your child if you're worried they're being bullied.**

It's important to talk with your child early and often if you're concerned they're being bullied. Express your concern about bullying to your child, and listen to what they have to tell you.

Teach your child what to do and how to intervene when or if your child experiences bullying. Consider engaging your child in role plays and don't expect your child to know what to do.

- **Model healthy relationships.**

Model compassionate, respectful relationships from the time your child is small.

- **Monitor technology use with your child.**

This can be especially helpful if you're concerned about cyber-bullying.



References & Resources

- **BullyBust:** Promoting a Community of Upstanders.
- Healy et al., 2022 "Empirical and theoretical foundations of family interventions to reduce the incidence and mental health impacts of school bullying victimization." International Review of Psychiatry.
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- **PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center**
- Reisner, S. L., Greytak, E. A., Parsons, J. T., & Ybarra, M. L. (2015). Gender minority social stress in adolescence: disparities in adolescent bullying and substance use by gender identity. The Journal of Sex Research, 52(3), 243- 256.
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- **The Trevor Project**
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