

# Teaching Kids Not to Bully

It can be shocking and upsetting to learn that your child has gotten in trouble for picking on other kids or been labeled a bully.

As hard as it may be to hear this news, it's important to deal with it right away. Whether the [bullying](#) is physical or verbal, if it's not stopped it can lead to more aggressive antisocial behavior and interfere with your child's success in school and ability to form and keep friendships.

## Understanding Bullying Behavior

Kids bully for many reasons. Some bully because they feel insecure. Picking on someone who seems emotionally or physically weaker provides a feeling of being more important, popular, or in control. In other cases, kids bully because they simply don't know that it's not OK to pick on kids who are different because of size, looks, race, or religion.

In some cases bullying is a part of a pattern of defiant or aggressive behavior. These kids are likely to need help learning to manage anger and hurt, frustration, or other strong emotions. They may not have the skills they need to cooperate with others. Therapy often can help them learn to deal with their feelings, curb their bullying, and improve their social skills.

Some kids who bully are copying behavior that they [see at home](#). Kids who see aggressive and unkind interactions in the family often learn to treat others the same way. And kids who are taunted learn that bullying can translate into control over children they see as weak.

## Helping Kids Stop Bullying

Let your child know that bullying is not OK and can bring serious consequences at home, school, and in the community if it continues.

Try to understand the reasons behind your child's behavior. In some cases, kids bully because they have trouble managing strong emotions like anger, frustration, or insecurity. In other cases, kids haven't learned cooperative ways to work out conflicts and understand differences.

Be sure to:

- **Take bullying seriously.** Make sure your kids understand that you will not tolerate bullying at home or anywhere else. Set rules about bullying and stick to them. If you punish your child by taking away privileges, be sure it's meaningful. For example, if your child bullies other kids via email, text messages, or a social networking site, stop phone or computer privileges for a period of time. If your child acts aggressively at home, with siblings or others, put a stop to it. Teach more appropriate (and nonviolent) ways to react, like walking away.

- **Teach kids to treat others with respect and kindness.** Teach your child that it is wrong to ridicule differences like [race](#), religion, appearance, special needs, gender, economic status. Try to instill a sense of empathy for those who are different. Consider getting involved together in a community group where your child can interact with kids who are different.
- **Learn about your child's social life.** Look for insight into what may be influencing your child's behavior at school (or wherever the bullying happens). Talk with parents of your child's friends and peers, teachers, guidance counselors, and the school principal. Do other kids bully? What about your child's friends? What kinds of pressures do the kids face at school? Talk to your kids about those relationships and about the pressures to fit in. Get them involved in activities outside of school so that they meet and develop friendships with other kids.
- **Encourage good behavior.** Positive reinforcement can be more powerful than negative discipline. Catch your kids being good. When they handle situations in positive ways, take notice and praise them for it.

## Starting at Home

It's natural — and common — for kids to fight with their siblings at home. And unless there's a risk of physical violence, it's wise not to get involved. But keep an eye on the name-calling and fighting, and talk to each child regularly about what's acceptable and what's not.

Keep your own behavior in check too. Think about how you talk around your kids and how you handle conflict and problems. Kids who live with yelling, name-calling, putdowns, harsh criticism, or physical anger from a sibling or parent/caregiver may act that out in other settings.

If you behave aggressively — toward or in front of your kids — chances are they'll follow your example. Instead, point out positives in others, not negatives. When conflicts arise in your own life, be open about your frustration and how you cope with your feelings.

There will be situations that need [discipline](#) and helpful criticism. But don't let that slip into name-calling and accusations. If you don't like your child's behavior, stress that it's the behavior that you'd like your child to change, and you have confidence that they can do it.

## Who Else Can Help?

If a [stressful life event](#) at home may affect your child's behavior, get help from resources at school and in your community. Guidance counselors, pastors, therapists, and your doctor can help. If your child has a history of arguing, defiance, and trouble controlling anger, consider getting an evaluation with a therapist or behavioral health professional.

As frustrating as it can be to help kids stop bullying, remember that bad behavior won't stop on its own. Think about the success and happiness you want your kids to find in school, work, and relationships throughout life. Curbing bullying now is progress toward those goals.

**Reviewed by:** [KidsHealth Behavioral Health Experts](#)

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