

Ten Actions ALL Parents Can Take to Help Eliminate Bullying



The latest research shows that *more than half of all children are, at least on occasion, directly involved in bullying as a perpetrator, victim, or both.* And many of those who are not directly involved witness others being bullied on a regular basis. No child is immune - kids of every race, gender, grade and socio-economic sector are impacted. But it doesn't have to be this way. As parents we have the power to help reduce bullying. Here are Education.com's top ten actions **you** can take to help address bullying:

1. **Talk with and listen to your kids - everyday.** Research shows that parents are often the last to know when their child has bullied or been bullied. You can encourage your children to buck that trend by engaging in frequent conversations about their social lives. Spend a few minutes every day asking open ended questions about who they spend time with at school and in the neighborhood, what they do in between classes and at recess, who they have lunch with, or what happens on the way to and from school. If your children feel comfortable talking to you about their peers *before* they're involved in a bullying event, they'll be much more likely to get you involved *after*.
2. **Spend time at school and recess.** Research shows that 67% of bullying happens when adults are not present. Schools don't have the resources to do it all and need parents' help in reducing bullying. Whether you can volunteer once a week or once a month, you can make a real difference just by being present and helping to organize games and activities that encourage kids to play with new friends. Be sure to coordinate your on-campus volunteer time with your child's teacher and/or principal.
3. **Be a good example of kindness and leadership.** Your kids learn a lot about power relationships from watching you. When you get angry at a waiter, a sales clerk, another driver on the road, or even your child, you have a great opportunity to model effective communication techniques. Don't blow it by blowing your top!

Any time you speak to another person in a mean or abusive way, you're teaching your child that bullying is ok.

4. **Learn the signs.** Most children don't tell anyone (especially adults) that they've been bullied. It is therefore important for parents and teachers to learn to recognize possible signs of being victimized such as frequent loss of personal belongings, complaints of headaches or stomachaches, avoiding recess or school activities, getting to school very late or very early. If you suspect that a child might be bullied, talk with the child's teacher or find ways to observe his or her peer interactions to determine whether or not your suspicions might be correct. Talk directly to your child about the situation.
5. **Create healthy anti-bullying habits early.** Help develop anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits early in your children, as early as kindergarten. Coach your children what *not* to do - hitting, pushing, teasing, "saying na-na-na-na-na," being mean to others. Help your child to focus on how such actions might feel to the child on the receiving end (e.g., "How do you think you would feel if that happened to you?"). Such strategies can enhance empathy for others. Equally if not more important, teach your children what to *do* -- kindness, empathy, fair play, and turn-taking are critical skills for good peer relations. Children also need to learn how to say "no" firmly, and how to avoid being mean to others. Coach your child about what to do if other kids are mean - get an adult right away, tell the child who is teasing or bullying to "stop," walk away and ignore the bully. It may help to role play what to do with your child. And repetition helps: go over these techniques periodically with your Kindergarten and early Elementary school aged children.
6. **Help your child's school address bullying effectively.** Whether your children have been bullied or not, you should know what their school is doing to address bullying. Research shows that "zero-tolerance" policies aren't effective. What works better are ongoing educational programs that help create a healthy social climate in the school. This means teaching kids at every grade level how to be inclusive leaders and how to be empathic towards others and teaching victims effective resistance techniques. If your school does not have effective bullying strategies and policies in place, talk to the principal and advocate for change.
7. **Establish household rules about bullying.** Your children need to hear from you explicitly that it's not normal, ok, or tolerable for them to bully, to be bullied, or to stand by and just watch other kids be bullied. Make sure they know that if they are bullied physically, verbally, or socially (at school, by a sibling, in your neighborhood, or online) it's safe and important for them to tell you about it and that you will help. They also need to know just what bullying is (many children do not know that they are bullying others), and that such behavior is harmful to others and not acceptable. You can help your children find other ways to exert their personal power, status, and leadership at school, and that you will work with them, their teachers, and their principal to implement a kindness plan at school.
8. **Teach your child how to be a good witness.** Research shows that kids who witness bullying feel powerless and seldom intervene. However, kids who take action can have a powerful and positive effect on the situation. Although it's never a child's responsibility to put him or herself in danger, kids can often

effectively diffuse a bullying situation by yelling “Stop! You’re bullying!” Kids can also help each other by providing support to the victim, not giving extra attention to the bully, and/or reporting what they witnessed to an adult.

9. **Teach your child about cyberbullying.** Children often do not realize what cyberbullying is. Cyberbullying includes sending mean, rude, vulgar, or threatening messages or images; posting sensitive, private information about another person; pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad; and intentionally excluding someone from an online group. These acts are as harmful as physical violence and must not be tolerated. We know from research that the more time a teen spends online, the more likely they will be cyberbullied – so limit online time.
10. **Spread the word that bullying should not be a normal part of childhood.** Some adults hesitate to act when they observe or hear about bullying because they think of bullying as a typical phase of childhood that must be endured or that it can help children “toughen up”. It is important for all adults to understand that bullying does not have to be a normal part of childhood. All forms of bullying are harmful to the perpetrator, the victim, and to witnesses and the effects last well into adulthood (and can include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, family violence and criminal behavior). Efforts to effectively address bullying require the collaboration of school, home, and community. Forward this list and articles you’ve read to all the parents, teachers, administrators, after school care programs, camp counselors, and spiritual leaders you know. Bullying is an enormous problem but if we all work together, it’s one we *can* impact.