

Triple P - Positive Parenting Program®: Because Children Don't Come With Instructions



Bullying is very common in primary school-aged children. As many as one in seven children are bullied at least once a week. Most children will experience bullying at some time. Bullying may occur in front of other children, but is usually hidden from adults. Being bullied can be an upsetting experience and it can affect their attitude to school. The most common reactions to bullying are embarrassment, shame, fear about not being accepted, and low self-esteem. Children who are often tormented by a bully may get anxious, feel sick, have stomach pains, have sleep problems or nightmares, may



wet the bed or refuse to go to the place where the bullying happens, such as school.

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What is Bullying?

Bullying means using one's power to hurt, threaten or scare others, for one's own gain. It ranges from minor teasing to threats and physical violence. It can take many forms:

- ❖ Verbal -teasing, put downs, name calling
- ❖ Physical -pinching, tripping, pushing, fighting.
- ❖ Gesture -threatening facial expressions and gestures
- ❖ Extortion -being left out of activities
- ❖ Harassment -through telephone calls, emails, text messages, Internet chat rooms and websites.

What Causes Bullying?

Children may bully others because they do not know any better way of solving problems, and their usual way of resolving conflict is with aggression. Other children may bully others to gain popularity or to fit in with a group. Some children feel bad about themselves and bully others to make themselves feel more powerful.

How to tell if your child is being bullied

Many children (at least 1 in 5) do not tell anyone that they are being bullied. However, there are other signs to look for which may indicate that your child is being bullied. These include:

- ❖ Shyness around other children

- ❖ Difficulty expressing their thoughts
- ❖ Low self-esteem or putting themselves down
- ❖ Appearing anxious, fearful or distressed
- ❖ Not wanting to talk about school
- ❖ Trying to avoid certain situations, such as refusing to go to school
- ❖ A decline in academic performance
- ❖ Isolation, such as having no one to play with at lunch breaks
- ❖ Ripped clothing, lost property or coming home hungry
- ❖ Increased risk taking

What to Do if your child is being bullied

Parents of a child who is bullied may worry about their child. It is hard for parents to know what to do, particularly when their child does not want the school or the bully's parents to be contacted. Children may worry about being bullied more if they are seen to have told tales. Bullying should never be ignored and children should not be left to handle a bully on their own. Adults need to act right away. Let your child know what you plan to do. Talk to the adults in charge of where the bullying occurs. Some bullying stops as soon as the school, club or other parents become aware of the problem. The bully may be spoken to, watched more



closely and helped to find other ways to solve problems.

How to Help Your Child Manage Bullying

▼ Listen to your child

If you know or suspect that your child is being bullied, encourage them to describe exactly what has happened. Ask whether it has happened before and if so, how often.

▼ Ask What Your Child Did

Sometimes children have tried their own ways of dealing with the problem. Usually they try something once or twice but give up because the bullying continues.

▼ Stay Calm

Children who are teased or bullied need to feel they can talk to their parents about the problem. Stay calm. If you over-react and threaten to call the bully's parents or the school, your child may plead with you not to say anything. They may also stop telling you about bullying. Also, do not assume that it is all the bully's fault. Your child may have teased or provoked the bully.



▼ Agree That There is a Problem

Tell your child that the bullying is a problem and that you need to work out a solution together.

▼ Explain Possible Reasons for the Bullying

Children are more likely to try a new way of handling the problem if they understand what is going on and why the problem continues - *Let's try to think about why this happens.*

▼ Ask for Your Child's Opinion

At first, many children do not know how to solve the problem. They may need help to come up with ideas. Start by asking your child a fairly general question - *So how do you want to handle this problem? or what else could you try if Kim and Morgan tease you again?* Do not say whether you think the idea is a good one. Say something like - *OK, that's one option. Let's think of a few more before we decide what to do.*

▼ Offer Your Own Suggestions

If you think of other options, write them down after your child has finished. You might suggest your child:

- ❖ Stand straight and tall, look the bully in the eye and politely but firmly say *Stop it. I don't like it. Leave me alone.*
- ❖ Try not to show you are upset. Walk away if you find it hard to hide your feelings.

- ❖ Be confident and assertive with bullies, for example - *Your teasing doesn't bother me or I'm not going to listen to you.*
- ❖ Ignore ongoing teasing by walking away.
- ❖ Tell an adult you trust. Expect them to take action.
- ❖ Make friends with other children and play with them during lunch breaks.

▼ Choose a Solution

Once you have about 10 options, ask what your child thinks about each one. Put a tick beside the options that seem reasonable. Cross out those that seem unlikely to work. Help your child choose the best solution to try out.

▼ Practice the Solution

Act out with your child exactly what to do the next time bullying occurs. Play the role of the bully and have your child play themselves - *Let's pretend I'm Kim and I come up to you and say 'Why don't you get lost, sissy!' What will you say? Show me what you will do.* Let your child act it out and then tell your child what you liked about what they did. Suggest things they might do differently.

▼ What Schools Can Do

If the bullying is occurring at school, arrange a meeting with your child's teacher. Talk about your concerns and find out whether the school is aware of the problem. Schools are in a good position to detect bullying and to get involved in positive ways. A comprehensive school approach is required to ensure that children understand that bullying is not acceptable and they have rights and responsibilities. The school can encourage all children to identify bullying and do something about it.

Remember:

It is not helpful to teach or tell your child to fight back, as this can often lead to more bullying. Children who are bullied may not be as strong as the bully, so their fear of losing fights can be quite real. There are better ways of managing bullies. Often the best solution to bullying involves teaching your child to cope with bullies and making changes in the situation where the bullying occurs.



For more information on the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program® call Timiskaming Child and Family Services at 1-800-568-KIDS or visit www.tripleontario.ca

