

HOW DO I...

Support my child if they're being bullied?

Advice for Parents and Caregivers

- **Bullying is serious and can have devastating effects on a child's mental health.** Taking effective action to stop — and prevent — bullying takes thought, planning, and engaging with your community.
- **Open the door to crucial conversations** with your child about bullying and discuss what bullying behavior is — repeated behavior, victimization, and feeling powerless or like there is no escape — and how it may manifest differently in school versus online. Build your child's confidence to report bullying and to find support.
- **If your child confides in you about bullying, listen to them.** For in-person bullying, help your child strategize ways to avoid the bully, like sticking with friends, staying near teachers, or planning safe routes. You can also practice assertiveness techniques together, so your child feels that they might be able to respond with calm and confidence.
- **It's important for kids to know they can take action for themselves, but also be clear that it's not up to them alone to stop bullying.** As a parent, let your child know how you will work with other adults and engage the larger community in being aware of, and putting a stop to, the bullying behavior.
- If a child is being bullied online, **collect evidence of the abuse, like screenshots, and block the aggressor.** Encourage a temporary break from social media after the incident. Work together to make specific safety plans before cyberbullying happens so they don't feel alone or more vulnerable if it does.
- **It's natural to feel angry or frustrated when your child is being bullied.** But remember, overreacting can backfire. Avoid coaching them to physically retaliate, confronting the bully yourself, or blaming the child for what's happening. Instead, let your child or teen guide the next steps. Listen openly, validate their emotions, and work together on safe and effective strategies to combat the bullying.



Scan to watch our
video on this topic.

7 Tips for Supporting a Child Who is Being Bullied

1. **Open up conversations.** Find quiet times over dinner or in the car to initiate conversations with your kids about bullying. Ask whether they've seen or experienced bullying at school or online and how the school handles it.
2. **Differentiate behaviors.** Unfortunately, kids are not always nice, but not all unkind behavior is bullying. Help your child understand how to tell the difference between common insensitive kid behavior and bullying. When someone is being bullied, there is a power imbalance between them and the bully, the abuse happens repeatedly, victimization, and lack of escape.
3. **Listen and validate.** Avoid blaming your child or suggesting that they are in any way responsible for what is happening. Don't excuse the bully, minimize their actions, or minimize your child's feelings.
4. **Try not to overreact.** It's natural to be upset if your child is being bullied. But don't overcorrect by restricting everyday activities, banning them from seeing certain friends, or encouraging them to respond to a bully with violence.
5. **Make a plan together.** Help your child develop a plan for who to tell about bullying if it happens and how they might put an end to it. If bullying happens in person, they may need to ignore the bully, avoid them, or stay near adults they can trust. For cyberbullying, they should save the evidence and take screenshots, block the bully, and take a social media break.
6. **Take it seriously.** Don't brush off instances of bullying as "kids being kids" or assume your child is being too sensitive. Bullying can lead to lower self-esteem, anxiety, depression, or worse — and it should not be taken lightly. Show your child that you won't stand for bullying by standing up for others when you witness bullying behavior.
7. **Seek help.** If the bullying is happening at school or with classmates, encourage your child to tell the principal or school guidance counselor. Also consider connecting your child with a therapist so that they have a place to process their experience.

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

[What Is Bullying?](https://www.stopbullying.gov)
StopBullying.gov

[How to Deal With Bullying in Schools](https://www.parents.com)
Parents.com

[How to Help Kids Deal With Cyberbullying](https://www.childmindinstitute.org)
The Child Mind Institute

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We've become the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.