

Report # 1

What To Do If Your Child Is Accused Of Being A **Bully**

by Steve and Lisa McChesney

Has your child been labeled a bully?

What do you do when they've been accused?

Parents, just like children, fall into the 'transference of blame' syndrome. I've heard various excuses from parents; "Their father left us", "There is a new baby in the house causing the sibling to strike out" or "Kid's pick on him/her", etc. Finger pointing in every direction!

Some of that may be true and they are acting out aggressive feelings, however, it doesn't justify the behavior. Try and find out what is upsetting your child. Talk through any family problems that you may be having or problems in school.

Parents may think there is no problem - that it's just a bit of teasing, or that it's natural for children to fight with one another. Take all allegations of bullying seriously. What may seem natural to you may be causing great harm to others.

When ever I ask a child WHY? The answer is usually "because he/she..." I stop them there, and say that their answer has to start with the word "I". They will begin again with "They were..." I stop them again and say "Start with 'I'". I will go back and forth with them until they finally start with "I was..." Believe it or not, that is a major breakthrough in getting to the resolution.

What should a parent do? Well, the first thing is to let the child know that bullying is totally unacceptable behavior and has to stop. From that point it has to be an open discussion WITH the child, not AT the child. Listen to their side of the story. Remember if you are too harsh, the child will not open up and talk.

They may be copying brothers, sisters, parents, or other relatives that they look up to. Parents must set a good example themselves.

The bullying may be attention-getting tactics. Make sure the child is getting positive reinforcement for the good things that they do. Pay attention to them and notice when they are doing kind things, not just when they need scolding.

If you want to punish the child with grounding or taking away privileges, it may work in the short term but generally is not enough to change the behavior.

Explain that bullying, whether its physical or verbal, causes great suffering in others. Let them know that you still love them, it's their behavior that must change.

They may think that they are not bullying. Explain that we are human and that we all have the capacity to bully. Also explain that name-calling, teasing, starting or spreading rumors, and ignoring are all bullying behaviors, not just hitting and pushing.

If the child isn't willing to talk at first, let them know that you will be available to listen when they are ready. Also let them know that you will help them to change the behavior and correct the situation. Ask them how they think the bullying could stop. What do they think has to change in order for them to change? It's a great way for them to work through, and create a solution themselves.

Avoid calling your child a 'Bully'. The more you put the label out there, the more likely he/she will feel that's what they are and that they can't change. Always refer to it as 'bullying behavior'.

Depending on the age of the child, they may not know any better. Young children, especially, need to be told that hurting another child is not acceptable. Let them know that using force or threats is not a way of getting what they want.

Sometimes children who are bullying don't realize the pain they are creating both mentally and physically. Help your child understand what the victim might be feeling.

After you have thoroughly discussed the situation with your child, make an appointment to talk with their teacher. Be willing to listen to the teacher's perspective without being judgmental.

Let the teacher know that you are willing to work with the school to help stop your child from bullying. Suggest perhaps that the teacher find a 'cooling off' spot where your child can go to calm down if the aggression starts.

Also let the teacher know of any family problems that you might be experiencing. I know the first instinct is to keep private things private, but you would be surprised how human beings can identify and relate. It gives you more support and assistance.

Children who bully are often suffering from low self-esteem. Give your child love and reassurance. Do things to help build their self-esteem.

If your child seems very disturbed or his/her behavior is extreme, it could be a sign of a physical or mental disorder. Seek the advice of your doctor who may be able to refer you to counseling or provide medical assistance.

Of all the behavior modifying techniques, I find the self-esteem building tools to be the best. When a child (or adult, for that matter) feels good about themselves, they tend to be friendly, happy, well adjusted individuals. That should be the first building block in developing a strong, positive foundation.



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