



Bullying: What it is and What You can Do

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As we start the month of October, the topic of bullying comes up (especially in schools), as October is National Bullying Prevention Month. One of the most common and complicated aspects regarding bullying is what exactly *is* bullying? As a school counselor, I hear the word “bully” get used a lot, but it is important to recognize the difference between *bullying* and *conflict*. Conflict is a normal part of life, and learning how to handle conflict appropriately will help give students the proper tools they need to be successful.

| Normal Peer Conflict | Bullying |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Equal power; friends | Imbalance of power; not friends |
| Happens occasionally | Repeated negative actions |
| Accidental | On Purpose |
| Not Serious | Serious with threat of physical or emotional harm |
| Equal emotional reaction | Strong emotional reaction from victim, and little or no emotional reaction from bully |
| Not seeking power or attention | Seeking power, control, or material things |
| Not trying to get something | Attempt to gain material things or power |
| Remorse – will take responsibility | No remorse – blames victim |
| Effort to solve the problem | No effort to solve the problem |

What to Do if Your Child is Being Bullied

When you discover your child is being bullied, you may feel a variety of emotions from anger to fear to sadness. These responses are completely normal, and it’s important to acknowledge your emotions so that you can focus on developing a plan with your child.

- *First, you need to talk to your child* about what has been going on, and fully listen to them without judgment so that they open up more to you. Learn as much as you can: what has been happening, how often, who is involved, and what steps have they already taken to have it stop. Make sure they understand that they are not to blame, and that they are not alone.
- *Support and Empower your child.* Empower them to create an action plan to stop the bullying. This includes ways you can support them, but also allows them to advocate for themselves and shows how working with the school can help. By creating a plan together, it will help increase your child’s self-confidence.

Visit <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/parents/helping-your-child.asp> for additional tips, including what not to do! *(continues on next page)*



What If My Child is the One Bullying?

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In bullying situations there are always two people involved – the *victim* and the *bully*. Learning that your child is bullying someone is never something a parent wants to hear, and often times they are surprised to hear about it! Your child also may not understand that they are harming someone or what kind of impact they are having on the other student. The good news? Your child can change his or her behavior!

- *Talk to your child about why they are bullying.* Focus on how they are feeling, and allow them to speak up if they are getting bullied themselves or if there is another factor that is causing them to choose those negative behaviors. Help them to understand empathy and how it feels to be bullied (role play can help!) and give them tools to handle situations and their emotions differently.
- *It takes time to change behavior.* All of our behaviors are repetitive in nature, and it takes time to break any habit or bring on change. At first, focus on small goals that build on one another, and provide praise when your child handles his or her feelings or a situation in a positive way instead of bullying. These actions will reinforce the behavior you are looking for.

Visit here for more information on what to do if you child is bullying others:

<http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c109.pdf>

Reference: PACER Center www.pacer.org