

## **Bullying**

What is bullying?

Bullying can be in the form of verbal, physical or even emotional. Bullying happens when a person (the bully) crush the self-esteem or instil fear in another person (the victim). Usually, bullying manifests when the victim is afraid of the other child and “submits” to things he/she is actually unwilling to do in the first place.

The vicious cycle of bullying would start when the victim gives in to the bully. The bully will feel that he has won and continue to instil fear in the victim. Meanwhile, the victim will accedes to the request of the bully to seek temporary relief. In other cases, the bully sells the idea that the victim is only worthy if he does certain things. Thus, in order for the victim to feel good about himself, he has to perform tasks that the bully set him up to do. For instance, the victim may be asked to become the scapegoat of the bully so he can feel like a “hero”.

What are some signs of bullying?

- Change in a personality, for instance, withdrawn when before he is bubbly.
- School refusal.
- Drop in grades.
- He says he does not have friends, hates his friends, etc.
- Complains of physical aches and pains.
- Starts attempting to defend self, like buying lots of penknife, asking to be enrolled in martial arts.
- Getting aggressive and irritable with people around him especially at home but is very meek when he is in school.
- Appears anxious, clingy or cautious
- He may have difficulty sleeping.
- Talks about suicide

However, it is important to note that the above are only some of the signs and different children may manifest different signs.

What are the reasons behind children bullying other children?

Bullying could occurs for a variety of reasons.

1. The perpetrator may have a disorder. For instance, the perpetrator may have a tic disorder and is not able to control his actions or words. Another example is attentional disorder where the perpetrator may be more impulsive.

2. The perpetrator may feel insecure and is overwhelmed by this insecurity. To deal with his insecurity, he “preys” on victims who tend to be “weak” and have little confidence in themselves.
3. Sometimes, when a change occurs at home – for instance, the birth of a new sibling or marital discord – the bully may feel frustrated and neglected. Therefore, he may act out his frustrations and anger on somebody smaller than himself.
4. These bullies may be imitating what their parents do. Children are not discerning of right and wrong. They may act out certain behaviours that unwittingly hurt another child in the process.
5. Some bullies lack the ability to articulate their feelings and thoughts adequately. Therefore, these children use name-calling and hitting to express them.
6. Some bullies have the belief that “life is unfair”. In an attempt to right the wrong, they may use their own method which could be causing hurt to others.

How will a child’s emotional and mental health be affected if he/she faces constant bullying from his/her peers?

The victim’s mental resilience is usually worn thin after being repeatedly subjected to bullying. Most victims experience fear and dread as the main emotions. Some of the victims may even refuse to go school because of the fear and shame. Some fall into depression and have to go through a period of therapy including medication. Some carry their trauma with them into different schools and treat everyone with caution. The victims often have low confidence and lack of self-belief.

What are some recommended steps that parents can take to prevent and protect their child from being bullied?

In order to prevent and protect their child from being bullied, there are some things parents can do.

1. Parents are encouraged to have a good relationship and communication channel with their child. This is so that the child would tell the parents if anything happen in their environment.
2. Young children need to be taught what bullying is and be guided on how to deal with bullying. Any form of help is not overprotecting them. To overprotect the children is not to expose them to these situations and keep them in a cocoon.
3. Parents can coach the child in acknowledging and expressing their emotions rather than hiding it.
4. Parents may also like to allow their children to speak freely about incidents first without judging or commenting. This would build up confidence. Confident children who are emotionally secure with themselves and their abilities would help in preventing them to be bullies or victims.

5. Parents are encouraged to not find faults with their children. If a child is constantly blamed, he or she may internalize it and believe that when the bully “attacks” them, it is their fault. As a result, they will not seek help from the adult. A child, who is constantly blamed, could also externalize the anger and shame and take it out on another child.

What are some recommended steps that parents can take to prevent their children from becoming a bully? (NEW)

Sometimes, though the child’s action and behaviour may not be appropriate, it does not necessarily mean the child is a bully. For instance, when the child refuses to share what he has with others, there could be an underlying reason for this behaviour. In this case, if he is generally a kind child and only recently displays this behaviour, we will need to explore the reason why because children do not typically display negative behaviours suddenly.

There may be some underlying reasons for the change in behaviour:

- Being provoked too many times by the same person. Everyone has a limit and a breaking point. If the line is crossed, even the gentle person will retaliate.
- Changes in the environment. Child is not able to cope with new environment such as teachers leaving, parents going overseas or the arrival of a new sibling.
- Being insecure may also cause the child to hang on and protect what he has and not share with others.
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Parents can sit with the child and find out from him the reason for his behaviour.

Parents could position themselves as attempting to find out if that is any issues that he may be facing in school or at home. If he had anything wrong, he would have been punished in school. As such, parents are encouraged not to approach the child in an interrogative manner.

Once parents have found out the cause, they can teach the child strategies to cope with his feelings and avoid using physical methods. For example, instead of pushing or hitting, he could use words to tell other people not to disturb what he is doing. Another example would be allowing him to emote and ventilate his emotions if he is upset that a parent or teacher has left. Most children appreciate having some airtime for others to just hear what they have to say and feel.

Most children may not immediately confess their feelings and thoughts to parents or family member and may need a little coaxing and convincing that they will not be punished. They need to feel emotionally safe before they can express themselves. While some children may take five minutes, some children may take up till five days before they can articulate themselves. The key point is not to pressure them and be patient.

At The Therapy Room, a team of psychologists –led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist –has ample amount of experience working with children. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.

What should I do if I find out my child is bullying someone?

Parents are encouraged not to blame and shame the child since the child would have received such feelings in school. Instead, parents may like to check on the emotions of the child. Parents can ask themselves a few questions. Is the child upset, frustrated or angry? Is he able to articulate himself well? Is the child feeling neglected and unwanted? Is the child having trouble in his schoolwork or is he feeling frustrated about school? Does he feel free to express his emotions at home? Sometimes, the child feels that he is not allowed to express himself at home, and therefore, he would try to do it in school instead.

Should you have any further concerns, please feel free to contact our team of psychologists, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, who are experienced in managing cases of bullying. For the past years, The Therapy Room had also gone to schools and organizations to conduct talks and workshops. Please click [here](#) if you wish to contact us and find out more.

What should I do if I find out my child is bullied?

Parents are encouraged to find out if the other child (the bully) has a problem or disorder so as not to wrongly accuse the other child. Sometimes, children label some things as they perceive it. There have been times that a child is labelled a bully when he/she actually has poor coordination. A child who is not aware of his strength or have less developed motor skills may unwittingly push, pull or even hit a little too hard. The adult supervising the children can remind and guide them to be gentler. The adult can also frame it for the child on the receiving end of the action that it is not “bullying”.

After clarifications, parents are encouraged not blame and shame the child (victim) since they finally have the courage to speak up. Parents can inform teacher-in-charge that bullying occurred so that the teacher could address and monitor the issue.

In situations where bullying occurred in public spaces, parents can walk up to the bully and give a stern warning with the child by their side. This is to show their child that such behaviour is not tolerated.

Most importantly, parents of the victim are encouraged to teach the child to walk away from irrational confrontation and not indulge in the fight/banter/exchange and to approach for help immediately.

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