

ASK BYFS

Your Child is Teased or Bullied

Parent Question: Social bullying and teasing continues to be an issue for my child. What is the best approach?

Unfortunately no best approach exists for bullying behavior at any age - it takes patience and trial and error to problem solve this, adapting to fit your child's personality, situation, and special strengths. Bullying is different from fighting in that scare tactics are used to wield power over another child. Both girls and boys can bully by teasing, threatening, excluding, starting rumors, or even attacking another child. While bullying often happens at school, it can also occur on the way to school or in neighborhood play situations.

Parenting a child who bullies or is bullied is a particular challenge. If your child bullies, he or she may need more supervision or help developing skills or interests that improve their positive sense of self. Firm and consistent limits are important as are problem solving skills that are not aggressive or violent. Explain why aggressive behavior is not acceptable and help them think of other ways to meet their needs. Discipline that is non-physical, like loss of privileges or special time with a close friend or relative, works best as does building empathy and understanding of how their actions may have hurt someone else.

Helping a child who has been bullied requires working with him or her on problem solving skills as well, especially how to stay safe and not respond aggressively in response to bullying behavior. Teaching your child the 1-2-3-4 of nonviolent communication developed by Marshall Rosenberg is always good. In adult language the self-expression process described in the model on the nonviolent communication website consists of four steps:

1. To observe without evaluation, judgement, or analysis;
2. To look for feelings behind words that are expressed;
3. To look for unmet needs, connected to these feelings; evaluating which needs are not (yet) being met instead of evaluating actions in "right" and "wrong";
4. Make a request how another person could enrich life. Essential in this is that the other person is to be left free to honor or decline the request.

What this means in child language is a little different. For example, you will need to help your son or daughter with each category, identifying what behavior is bothersome, how they are feeling, what they may wish or need, and then the framing of the request for action, i.e., how they might prefer to be treated.

Let's say your child is called an unsavory name, he or she could be coached to say, "When you call me that, I feel bad about myself. I like to feel good about myself so would like you to stop calling me that name." Again, this is just an example and has to be in the child's own words and have meaning in their particular social environment. Adapting the language is crucial. But helping children break out the different parts of communication aids in their control of their own behavior and increases their understanding of self and others.

Teaching your child how to ask you or another trusted adult for help is crucial if they are not able to resolve these issues on their own. If you as a parent believe your child's physical or emotional safety is in jeopardy, you need to step in even if your child has not asked for help. Children need to know that adults will protect them - period - and that the world is a safe place.

For more information you might try the American Academy of Pediatrics website at <http://www.aap.org> or check out the article on "Peaceful Parenting" by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson in the winter 2007-08 Greater Good magazine.

Also check out the link [Bullying: It's Not OK](#) from "Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure" sponsored by American Academy of Pediatrics and the resources listed in our [Parenting Websites](#) section.

(Originally published April 2008)