

The ABCs of School Bullying Tips for Parents and Teachers

From Ken Druck and Jessica Malia

With the start of the school year fast approaching, students and parents are again becoming concerned with classes, notebooks and pencils. But a new school year often brings back a far greater concern: bullying.

Bullying Can Happen Anywhere

Today, bullying is as prevalent as ever, perhaps even more so. The reason behind this is that today's "anywhere" includes not only the playground at lunchtime, but also cyberspace. Before technology such as cell phones and instant messengers, students were able to leave bullies behind when they went home from school each afternoon. But now, bullies can send messages to their victims through text messages on cell phones and instant messages on computers.

Because bullying is so difficult to escape, now is the time to talk to your child about how to handle a bully if faced with one. It's also the time to talk with your child if you suspect he is a bully.

Five Ways to Handle a Bully

1. Stay calm and alert. Consider the options and do nothing to escalate the situation.
2. Walk away. Fighting isn't worth it. You do not have to prove yourself by fighting.
3. Take a non-violent stand. Speak respectfully: "I don't want to fight you."
4. Report it to authorities, but discuss with them how you will be protected from retaliation.
5. Get away. Find safety or call for help.

Five Ways to Prevent Bullying

Conversely, parents often do not learn that their children are bullying other kids until they get a phone call from school or another child's parents. If you suspect that your child is picking on others, here are some ways to intervene:

1. Notice if your child lacks empathy, dominates others, is selfish or refuses to accept responsibility. This could be a warning sign of bullying tendencies.
2. If your child ever engages in bullying acts, he should apologize to the victims and undo any damage, such as replacing stolen or destroyed property.
3. Make sure your child doesn't hang out with other bullies who may be influencing his behavior. If he does, encourage new friendships.
4. Help your child understand that physical or emotional abuse is never acceptable.
5. Talk to your child, other parents, and teachers about what is going on. The more you know about your child's everyday activities, the better you can prevent at-risk behavior.

When parents talk to their children about how to handle bullying, they are better equipping their children to handle volatile situations on their own. By discussing problems before they escalate, conflicts can be resolved and school life can work for everyone.

*Ken Druck is author of *How to Talk to Your Kids About School Violence* and founder of the "Families Helping Families" program. Jessica Malia writes on education and educational media. For more information on preventing violence -- some for free, some for sale -- see the publisher's Web site, <http://www.howtotalktoyourkids.com/pressroom>.*