

BULLYING: *What To Do*

What to Do if Your Child is Being Bullied

Reporting bullying to parents

Children frequently do not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed, ashamed, frightened of the children who are bullying them, or afraid of being seen as a “tattler.” If your child tells you about being bullied, it has taken a lot of courage to do so. Your child needs your help to stop the bullying.

What to do if your child is being bullied

1. First, focus on your child. Be supportive and gather information about the bullying.

- Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. What the child may “hear” is that you are going to ignore it. If the child were able to simply ignore it, he or she likely would not have told you about it. Often, trying to ignore bullying allows it to become more serious.
- Don’t blame the child who is being bullied. Don’t assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying. Don’t say, “What did you do to aggravate the other child?”
- Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask him or her to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened.
- Learn as much as you can about the bullying tactics used, and when and where the bullying happened. Can your child name other children or adults who may have witnessed the bullying?
- Empathize with your child. Tell him/her that bullying is wrong, not their fault, and that you are glad he or she had the courage to tell you about it. Ask your child what he or she thinks can be done to help. Assure him or her that you will think about what needs to be done and you will let him or her know what you are going to do.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don’t criticize him or her.
- Do not encourage physical retaliation (“Just hit them back”) as a solution. Hitting another student is not likely to end the problem, and it could get your child suspended or expelled or escalate the situation.
- Check your emotions. A parent’s protective instincts stir strong emotions. Although it is difficult, a parent is wise to step back and consider the next steps carefully.

2. Contact your child’s teacher or principal.

- Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the help of adults.
- Keep your emotions in check. Give factual information about your child’s experience of being bullied including who, what, when, where, and how.
- Emphasize that you want to work with the staff at school to find a solution to stop the bullying, for the sake of your child as well as other students.
- Do not contact the parents of the student(s) who bullied your child. This is usually a parent’s first response, but sometimes it makes matters worse. School officials should contact the parents of the child or children who did the bullying.
- Expect the bullying to stop. Talk regularly with your child and with school staff to see whether the bullying has stopped. If the bullying persists, contact school authorities again.

3. Help your child become more resilient to bullying.

- Help to develop talents or positive attributes of your child. Suggest and facilitate music, athletics, and art activities. Doing so may help your child be more confident among his or her peers.
- Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students in his or her class. Your child’s teacher may be able to suggest students with whom your child can make friends, spend time, or collaborate on work.

- Help your child meet new friends outside of the school environment. A new environment can provide a “fresh start” for a child who has been bullied repeatedly.
- Teach your child safety strategies. Teach him or her how to seek help from an adult when feeling threatened by a bully. Talk about whom he or she should go to for help and role-play what he or she should say. Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.
- Ask yourself if your child is being bullied because of a learning difficulty or a lack of social skills? If your child is hyperactive, impulsive, or overly talkative, the child who bullies may be reacting out of annoyance. This doesn’t make the bullying right, but it may help to explain why your child is being bullied. If your child easily irritates people, seek help from a counselor so that your child can better learn the informal social rules of his or her peer group.
- Home is where the heart is. Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he or she can take shelter, physically and emotionally. Always maintain open lines of communication with your child.

How to talk with educators at your child’s school about bullying

Definitions of bullying vary, but it is generally aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power and strength. Parents are often reluctant to report to educators that their child is being bullied. Why?

- Parents may be unsure how best to help their child and may be afraid that they will make the situation worse if they report bullying.
- They may be embarrassed that their child is being bullied.
- Sometimes, children ask parents not to report bullying.
- Parents may fear being seen as overprotective.
- They may believe that it is up to their child to stop the bullying.

Children and youth often need help to stop bullying. Parents should never be afraid to call the school to report that their child is being bullied and ask for help to stop the bullying. Students should not have to tolerate bullying at school any more than adults would tolerate similar treatment at work.

The school’s responsibility

All children are entitled to courteous and respectful treatment by students and staff at school. Educators have a duty to ensure that students have a safe learning environment. Fortunately, educators take their responsibilities to stop bullying very seriously. Several states have passed anti-bullying laws and require public schools to have an anti-bullying program in place. Ask for a copy of your school’s policy or check the student handbook to see whether your school has policies that will help resolve the problem.

Working with your child’s school to solve the problem

If your child tells you that he or she has been bullied or if you suspect your child is being bullied, what can you do?

- Keep a written record of all bullying incidents that your child reports to you. Record the names of the children involved, where and when the bullying occurred, and what happened.
- Immediately ask to meet with your child’s classroom teacher and explain your concerns in a friendly, non-confrontational way.
- Ask the teacher about his or her observations:
- Has he or she noticed or suspected bullying?
- How is your child getting along with others in class?
- Has he or she noticed that your child is being isolated, excluded from playground or other activities with students?
- Ask the teacher what he or she intends to do to investigate and help to stop the bullying.
- If you are concerned about how your child is coping with the stress of being bullied, ask to speak with your child’s guidance counselor or other school-based mental health professional.

- Set up a follow-up appointment with the teacher to discuss progress.
- If there is no improvement after reporting bullying to your child’s teacher, speak with the school principal.
- Keep notes from your meetings with teachers and administrators.

What can you expect staff at your child’s school to do about bullying?

- School staff should investigate the bullying in a timely manner. After investigating your concerns, they should inform you as to what they plan to do about it.
- Staff should meet with your child to learn about the bullying that he or she has experienced. They should develop a plan to help keep your child safe, and they should be watchful for any future bullying. Educators should assure your child that they will work hard to see that the bullying stops.
- School personnel should meet with the children who are suspected of taking part in the bullying.
- They should make it clear to these children that bullying is against school rules and will not be tolerated. If appropriate, they should administer consequences (such as a loss of recess privileges) to the children who bullied and notify their parents.
- Educators and parents should be careful not to “blame the victim.” Bullying is never the “fault” of the child who is bullied, and he or she shouldn’t be made to feel responsible for being bullied.
- However, if your child is impulsive or lacks social skills, talk with a school counselor. It is possible that some students who are bullying your child are reacting out of annoyance. This doesn’t make the bullying right, but it may help to explain why your child is being bullied.
- Give the school reasonable time to investigate and hear both sides of the story. Sometimes, a child who bullies will make false allegations about a child as an additional way of bullying them. Educators should not jump to hasty conclusions and assign blame without a thorough assessment of the situation. This entire process should not take longer than a week.
- Administrators and staff are responsive to bullying concerns. However, if your school administrator is unable or unwilling to stop the bullying, write to your school assistant superintendent for assistance.

When should law enforcement become involved?

- Consider involving the police if another child has physically assaulted your child or is seriously threatening him or her with bodily injury.
- Ask the school to keep a written record of all offenses committed against your child in case law enforcement officials need the information for further complaints.

Bullying prevention

Bullying happens in every school, but with an effective bullying prevention program, bullying can be reduced.

A Look Within **Midway** Midway ISD implements anti-bullying programs and character development at every level. [Click here to “Take a Look Within Midway” on-line.](#)