

Bullying & Healthy Peer Relationships

A Resource for Parents

What is a healthy peer relationship & why are they important?

Healthy and positive peer relationships help children develop social and emotional skills, confidence, empathy, increase self-esteem, resiliency, a positive self-image, and much more. Positive peer relationships and acceptance have been found to also increase engagement in school and have been associated with higher GPAs. In adolescence, positive peer support promotes health and well-being. (APA, 2023)

Healthy peer relationships include:

- Companionship
- Validation
- Support
- Trust
- Caring & Kindness
- Comfort

Peer relationships start forming at a young age, and as a child, making new friends can be intimidating and unfamiliar. Children are also susceptible to bullying at a young age, so recognizing the signs and knowing how to deal with bullying is important.

What is bullying and what are the signs?

What is a bullying?:

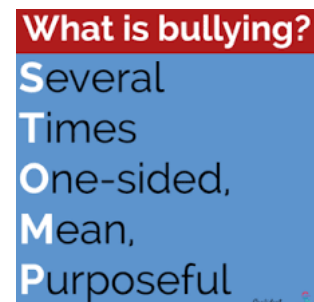
Bullying can come in many different forms..

- Physical bullying- shoving, tripping, punching, or hitting. Any physical touch that is unwanted.
- Verbal Bullying- taunting or teasing
- Psychological bullying- gossiping about or excluding people to make them feel bad.
- Cyberbullying- when people use the internet or social media to say hurtful things

Signs you child/teen may be getting bullied:

- Increase in anxiety and stress
- Low self-esteem, negative self-talk and confidence issues
- Depressed mood
- Avoiding school or attempting to avoid school
- Isolation & Withdrawal
- Change in academic performance
- Change in appetite and/or sleep

(Adapted from Kidshealth.org, 2023)



How to help your child develop healthy peer relationships?

As a parent:

- Let your children know they can **trust** you and have conversations with you about possible bullying and peer relationships
- **Nurture a positive family climate**- model the kind of relationships you hope your children will have, create healthy boundaries, & teach problem solving skills if a child were to be bullied
 - Did you know? Children involved in sibling bullying are more likely to be involved in bullying outside the home?
- **Teach emotional and interpersonal skills**- normalize talking about emotions, make learning about relationships a priority, encourage supportive relationships (what makes up a good friend?).
- **Nurture their self-confidence**- focus on their strength and draw them out, encourage positive self-talk
- **Teach them friendship-making skills**

(Adapted from GGSC, 2019)

What to do if your child is being bullied?

As a parent:

- **Manage your own feelings first**- stay calm and reassure the child you will see to their protection and safety, assure them the incident is not their fault.
- **Gently elicit the story from your child**- assess the severity, can you support the child to act first with problem-solving skills before direct involvement? Or do you need to contact school personnel?
- **With the school**, approach the school personnel that is in charge of the direct environment.
- Know when to **seek professional help** for your child- when symptoms of bullying and signs of bullying are not being resolved.

(Adapted from APA, 2023 & GGSC, 2020)

Additional Resources (Websites/Workshops/Books/Apps)

Parent Recommendations:

- “8 Keys to End Bullying: Strategies for Parents and Schools” by Signe Whitson
- “The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School- How Parents and Teachers can Help Break the Cycle” By Barbara Coloroso

- “Brighter Futures: A Parents’ Guide to Raising Happy, Confident Children In The Primary School Years” By Dr. Liz Dawes

Children Recommendations

- “Speak Up and Get Along!: Learn the Mighty Might, Thought Chop, and More Tools to Make Friends, Stop Teasing, and Feel Good About Yourself” By Scott Cooper
- “The Smeds and The Smoos” By Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler (ages 2-6yo)
- “Llama Llama and The Bully Goat” By Anna Dewdney (ages 2-5yo)
- “Mud Boy: A Story About Bullying” By Sarah Siggs (ages 5-11yo)

Adolescent Recommendations

- “The Survival Guide To Bullying: Written by a teen” By Aija Mayrock
- “Surviving Bullies and Mean Teens” By Mary P. Donahue, PhD