

What's Happening in Character?

19 Signs Your Child Is Being Bullied and What to Do about It

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Warnings signs that your child is being bullied

If your child is bullied it means that a peer or peers are intentionally causing her or him pain. Peer abuse! Just the thought can send shivers down our spines.

But the fact is 160,000 children skip school every day because they fear being attacked or intimidated by other students. Reports also confirm that bullying is starting at younger ages and is more frequent and aggressive than before. And the cruel behavior increases with age. Chances are your child may be bullied.

Also troubling is that our children don't always tell us that they have been bullied. I've spent many a meeting with kids who were repeatedly victimized and in clear emotional pain.

"Why didn't you go to a trusted adult for help?" I'd ask.

Their replies were concerning:

"I did tell my mom. She didn't believe me."

"I tried to tell, but I got too embarrassed."

"If I told my dad he would have only made things worse by yelling at the bully."

“Why bother? The stuff my mom told me to try wouldn’t work.”

Repeated bullying causes severe emotional harm and can erode a child’s self-esteem and mental health. Whether bullying is verbal, physical or relational, the long-term effects are equally harmful. Both boys and girls report high levels of emotional distress and loneliness as well as lower self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety and depression. Some situations the outcome is tragic: the child may take his or her own life.

So it’s time to get savvy and learn the warning signs of bullying. Bullying is always intentional, mean-spirited, rarely happens only once and there is always a power imbalance. The victim cannot hold his own and often will need adult help. Your child may not feel comfortable telling you about his pain, but if you know these signs your child is being bullied and tune in closer, you might be able to start **bullying prevention** in your home.

Signs Your Child Is Being Bullied

Here are possible warnings that a child may be bullied and needs your support. Of course, these signs could indicate other problems, but any of these warrant looking into further. See my blog, *Signs of Cyber-bullying* for signs of electronic bullying. Every child is different and any child can have an “off” day, so look instead of a pattern of behavior that is not typical for your child.

1. Unexplained physical marks, cuts, bruises and scrapes
2. Unexplained loss of toys, school supplies, clothing, lunches, or money
3. Clothes, toys, books, electronic items are damaged or missing or child reports mysteriously “losing” possessions
4. Doesn’t want to go to school or other activities with peers
5. Afraid of riding the school bus
6. Afraid to be left alone: wants you there at dismissal, suddenly clingy
7. Suddenly sullen, withdrawn, evasive; remarks about feeling lonely
8. Marked change in typical behavior or personality
9. Appears sad, moody, angry, anxious or depressed and that mood lasts with no known cause
10. Physical complaints; headaches, stomachaches, frequent visits the school nurse’s office
11. Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, cries self to sleep, bed wetting
12. Change in eating habits
13. Begins bullying siblings or younger kids. (Bullied children can sometimes flip their role and become the bully.)
14. Waits to get home to use the bathroom. (School and park bathrooms, because they are often not adult-supervised, can be hot spots for bullying).
15. Suddenly has fewer friends or doesn’t want to be with the “regular group”
16. Ravenous when he comes home. (Bullies can use extortion stealing a victim’s lunch money or lunch.)
17. Sudden and significant drop in grades. (Bullying can cause a child to have difficulty focusing and concentrating.)

18. Blames self for problems; feels “not good enough”
19. Talks about feeling helpless or about suicide; runs away.

What to Do if You Suspect Bullying but Aren't Sure

Kids often don't tell adults they're bullied so you may have to voice your concerns. Review the signs of bullying and then ask direct questions.

“You're always hungry: have you been eating your lunch?”

“Your CDs are missing? Did someone take them?”

“Your jacket is ripped. Did someone do that to you?”

Watch your child's reactions. Often what a child doesn't say may be more telling. Tune into your child's body language. Silence is often powerful.

If you suspect bullying and your child won't talk to you, then arrange a conference with a trusted adult who knows your child. If your child has more than one teacher you may need to meet with each educator or coach. Keep in mind that bullying usually does not happen in all school settings and in all classrooms. The trick is to figure out if your child is bullied and then where and when it is happening so you can get the right help for your child.

Hint: If your child has a classmate, you might be able to gain more information from the pal than your own child.

Meanwhile, keep an eye on your child. Children who are embarrassed or humiliated about being bullied are unlikely to discuss it with their parents or teachers and generally suffer in silence, withdraw and try to stay away from school.

Stress to your child you are always available, are concerned and recognize bullying may be a problem.

Emphasize that you believe your child and you are there to help.

Please seek the help of a trained mental health professional if the signs continue, intensify, or your gut instinct tells you “something is not right with my child!” Please!