

5 Signs of a Bully: Is It Your Child?

Not my little angel is a common thought among parents who may receive news from teachers or school administrators that their child is a bully. Tips to know if it's true or not.

By Jennifer Kelman

February 7, 2011

[0 Comments](#)



Mean Girls thumb

All of us believe that our child, who is sweet and lovable at home, behaves and shows the utmost respect while at school. Most parents are horrified and downright defensive if they are told that their child is the one who is descending upon the other kids with a controlling blow and being labeled a bully by classmates.

****What every parent should know: ****

1. Bullying is about power and control. It is often the case that children who are bullying others in school are feeling powerless and out of control. It is common for them to feel unacknowledged or that somehow things are just not fair to them. Parents may scratch their heads as they can't understand that their child would feel any of those things, but it is a good idea to check in with your child to see how they are feeling. Even if they have a hard time expressing themselves to you directly, pay attention to how they are communicating with you and with others. Are they responding to most things anyone says feeling criticized? Do they put others down or correct them constantly? When feeling frustrated do they look to others to blame for their feelings or frustrations? These could be warning signs that your child is feeling a bit out of control.

2. Bullies tend to lack empathy. One of the hardest things for any of us to acknowledge is that our child does not show empathy toward others. Empathy develops at a young age and is crucial for the overall development of a child and then an adult. Children who are bullying may show signs indicating that they are lacking in this area of development. They are unable to feel how they may be hurting this other child by their taunting, teasing or sometimes even physical violence. As parents and educators, it is our job to encourage empathy while pointing out the feelings of others. Sometimes a simple example of "put yourself in their shoes for a moment" helps the child to begin to feel what it might be like for the other child and it could open up a dialogue about what your child might be feeling that is causing them to exert this power over others.

3. Children who live in chaotic homes may be more prone to becoming a bully.

While not all children who live in homes where things are chaotic due to divorce or unstable relationships become bullies, many of these kids do have the potential as it may be the only area they can exert some of their own control or express their feelings of anger or frustration. These kids may not have the appropriate outlet to express their feelings of pain or anger and so they take it out on other kids who are perceived to be weaker.

4. Bullying may increase social status. This almost sounds counter-intuitive, but many times the bully increases their social status among classmates as they dictate the social norms for others around them. Others fall in line with what the bully says or does for fear of facing the ridicule for not going along with the prescribed way of being. This is common among girls prescribing the "right" clothing to wear or the latest haircut. This can be especially tough for classmates who may not be able to have the material things that are being prescribed in order to have that social status and may be ripe for being bullied.

5. Social media sites are easy outlets for the bullies to exert their power. With the advent of the Internet and the ever increasing use of social media sites, kids are communicating mainly through these means. Even though they are not anonymous these sites do provide a false sense of anonymity while posting. Kids feel freer to say anything they want without realizing the impact of their words. There are instances when entire pages are created in order to defame and demoralize another individual. These spread like wild-fire and the recipient of these becomes open to more ridicule by others whom they may not even know. As a parent it is crucial that you monitor the sites that your children are on and pay attention to the content of their posts. Even though it may be difficult and potentially devastating to learn that your child may be the class bully, it is crucial that it is not waved off as just a stage. Bullying behavior that is exhibited at a young age can be a life-long way of relating unless it is taken seriously and things are put in place so that your child can begin to express themselves in a more appropriate manner.

Jennifer Kelman MSW has worked with children in a variety of psychiatric and medical settings. She is the creator of Mrs. Pinkelmeyer, who inspires self-esteem in children through her love, warmth and silliness, and author of the new children's book, Mrs. Pinkelmeyer and Moopus McGlinden Burn the Rrrump Rrrroast.