

the **Parent Guide**



WHAT IS **BULLYING**

Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending himself or herself!

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is done on purpose.

We are pleased that your child is participating in our program. As parents and guardians, you expect your child to have a safe and positive experience. As leaders of these activities, we want all children to feel safe and welcome in our organization.

We are working hard to prevent bullying and to stop bullying if it happens. This Parent Guide contains some facts about bullying, warning signs to help you know if your child is being bullied or is bullying others, and tips for supporting and talking to your child about bullying.



WHAT ARE THE THREE COMPONENTS OF BULLYING?

1. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is done on purpose.

The person who bullies tries to hurt someone on purpose. It could be through physical actions, through words, by leaving someone out intentionally, or by posting mean comments or embarrassing photos online.

2. Bullying usually happens more than once. While bullying usually happens again and again, it may be hard for adults to know if an aggressive act is just a “onetime” problem or a pattern of abusive behavior. Adults should always take action when they see bullying happening.

3. Bullying is about power. In bullying, there is a difference in power between the person(s) who bully and the individual who is bullied. This power imbalance may involve differences in physical size or strength, popularity, social or economic status, athletic, academic or other abilities, or access to embarrassing information. Or there may be a difference in numbers, with several kids ganging up on one person.

BULLYING CAN TAKE DIFFERENT FORMS. IT CAN BE *Direct* OR *Indirect*



Direct (face to face) bullying

usually involves face-to-face actions that can be...

(physical) hitting, kicking, tripping, spitting, pushing, destroying property, or using rude hand gestures

(verbal) taunting, name calling, insulting, making threats or inappropriate sexual or racial comments



Indirect (behind someone's back or hidden) bullying

includes spreading rumors, trying to hurt someone's reputation, harming friendships or relationships, sending mean or embarrassing messages or photos online or through cell phones, or leaving someone out of a group or activities.

Bullying is abuse. Like other kinds of abuse, it isn't the fault of the person who is bullied, even if he or she annoys or irritates others. And it isn't simply “kids being kids.” No one has the right to bully someone else.



HOW DOES BULLYING AFFECT KIDS?

Young people who are bullied can have serious mental, physical, educational, and social problems.

They are more likely to develop depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem. Some may develop health problems, start to withdraw from activities they used to enjoy, or do poorly in school. Some may have thoughts of suicide. People who have been bullied may carry the effects of being bullied into their adult lives.

Kids who bully others are more likely to get involved in “antisocial” behaviors, such as breaking rules, shoplifting, damaging property,

and using alcohol and other drugs. Boys who bully are more likely to be involved in crime when they are older.

Kids who witness bullying can be negatively affected too. They often feel afraid for their own safety. They might feel powerless to change the situation or guilty for not taking action to defend kids who are being bullied. Or they may be drawn into joining the bullying.



What are the signs my son or daughter is being bullied?

You can look for warning signs if you think your child is being bullied.

- has lost or damaged clothes or other belongings
- has cuts, bruises, scratches or other unexplained injuries
- has few, if any, friends to spend time with
- seems afraid, anxious, has low self-esteem
- seems afraid to go to the activity, walking to and from the activity, or riding the bus
- takes a different route to or from the activity or the bus stop
- doesn't want to share rides with other kids in the program
- has lost interest in the activity, doesn't want to go, or won't participate even though he or she was excited about it at the beginning
- worries about transportation to and from the program, if other kids are involved
- seems sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home
- often has headaches, stomachaches, or isn't hungry
- has trouble sleeping or has bad dreams

If your child shows any of these signs, it doesn't always mean he or she is being bullied, but it's worth checking into.



WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

What if I think my son or daughter is being bullied?

Share your concerns with your child's activity leader. Try to find out more about what's happening. If your child is being bullied, he or she may be embarrassed or afraid to tell you. Try asking your child questions such as these:

- Who do you spend time with when you're there?
- Do you have any special friends there? Who are they?
- Are there any kids there you really don't like being with? Who are they? Why?
- Do you ever feel left out of things? How?
- Is anybody teasing you or picking on you? What's been happening?
- Has this happened at school or in any other places?

What can I do to stop it?

If you know or suspect that your child is being bullied, talk to his or her activity leader:

- Explain all of the facts you know.
- Tell the leader you want to help solve the problem and you expect the bullying to stop.
- Discuss how the activity leader will keep your child safe when he or she is at the program.
- Call your child's schoolteacher(s) to see if your child might be experiencing bullying at school. If this is happening and the same children are involved, let the activity leader know about it.
- Keep your school informed about any more bullying in the program.
- Talk often with your child and his or her leader to make sure the bullying stops.
- If your child has been physically assaulted or another child is seriously threatening to injure him or her, you may need to call the police.

It is usually best . . .

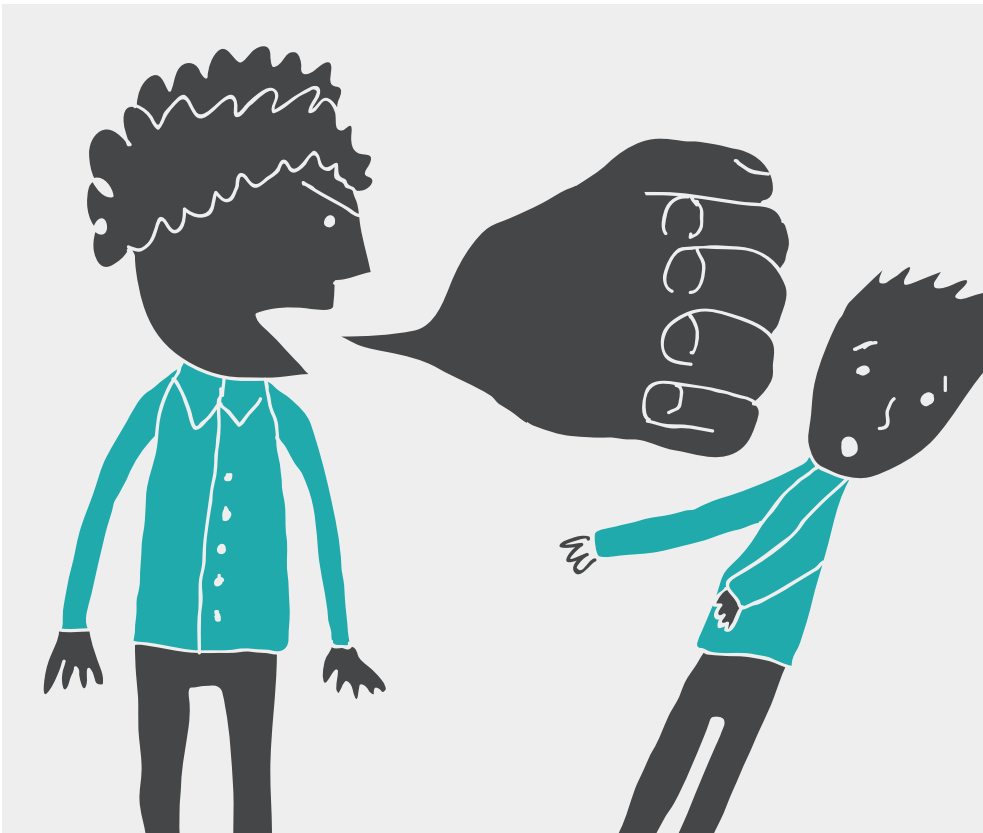
to let the program staff speak directly with the parents of the child who bullied your child instead of doing it yourself. Contacting another parent directly about a bullying problem often becomes very emotional. These situations are sometimes made worse by the families and it could become harder for organization leaders to help the kids involved.



HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD DEAL WITH THE SITUATION?

While you're working with the organization to stop the bullying, there are things you can do to support your child:

- Spend time with your child. Find out more about the situation. Don't ignore it or tell your child to ignore it. This sends a message that bullying is okay or something that he or she just has to get through.
- Don't ask your child what he or she did to deserve it. It's never the bullied child's fault. Ask your child to describe what happened, where the bullying took place, who was involved, and if there were any witnesses. Write down this information.
- Even if you don't agree with the way your child handled the situation, don't criticize him or her during this first conversation. Discuss other ways of handling a bullying situation later.
- Tell your child he or she was right to let someone know. Thank him or her for talking to you.
- Try to stay calm. Don't make negative statements about the bullying child. Think carefully about what you're going to do.
- Tell your child you'll do something about it and explain what you're going to do.
- If your child asks you not to tell, explain what happened was against the rules and you're worried the bullying will continue if adults at the program don't know about it. Never promise your child you won't tell. Working with the staff is an important step to getting the bullying to stop.



Some children who are bullied behave in ways that irritate others. These children may need help with social skills to help them interact better with their peers. If this is the case for your child, you might get some ideas from a school counselor or mental health professional about how to help with this behavior.



WHAT ADVICE CAN I GIVE MY CHILD IF HE OR SHE IS BEING BULLIED?

Here are some suggestions you might give to your child to deal with bullying in the future:

- Leave the situation if you can. Walk away.
- Find others who are friendly and stay with them.
- Try to keep your emotions calm.
- If someone is hurting you, yell for help from an adult.
- Don't try to get back at the person who is bullying you.
- Tell an adult you trust and your parents.
- If the adults don't listen, keep telling adults until you find someone to listen.



WHAT CAN I DO IF MY CHILD BULLIES OTHERS?

If a program leader contacts you about your child's bullying behavior, it's important to take it seriously. Although it may be hard to accept, acting quickly will help the bullied child as well as your own. Listen carefully. Don't immediately defend your child's actions. This is an opportunity to help your child learn more positive ways to relate with others.

Here are some things you can do:

- Work with the program staff to send a clear message to your child that you're taking the bullying seriously and it must stop immediately.
- Set clear and simple rules within your family for your child's behavior. Give positive attention when your child is following the rules and use nonphysical and logical consequences when rules are broken. Be consistent with consequences when they are given.
- Spend lots of time with your child. Talk and listen to him or her. Keep track of his or her activities and behavior. Know who his or her friends are and where he or she spends free time.
- Encourage your child to spend time with kids who are positive influences and who bring out the best in your child.
- Build on your child's talents by keeping him or her involved in positive activities such as clubs, music, and nonviolent sports.



If your child needs more help, due to being bullied or bullying others, talk with a school counselor or a mental health professional. Parents play a key role in keeping their children safe and healthy. Let's work together to prevent bullying so your child enjoys the many positive benefits of being involved in our programs.



1. D. Olweus, S.P. Limber, V.C. Flerx, N. Mullin, J. Riese, and M. Snyder, *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program Schoolwide Guide*, (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2007), xii.

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