

What if My Child is Bullying?

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Bullying in schools, families, and other groups affects the physical and emotional safety of everyone in the group. Adults can help children stay safe by teaching children skills to deal with bullying. In addition, children using bullying behavior need support in learning different ways of interacting with other children.

One parent emailed us the following question; our answer follows.

Question: What if my child is the bully? Sometimes he calls other kids names and pushes them around to get what he wants.

Answer: Children who bully in this way need safer tools for getting what they want, better skills for handling the disappointment of **not** always getting what they want, clear boundaries about what the rules are for behavior, and consistently enforced consequences for breaking those rules.

Safer tools can mean learning to ask instead of grab and learning to look for ways in which everyone can get at least some of what they want.

Skills for handling disappointment can mean learning how to think first and calm down when you are upset, learning to wait your turn, and finding other things to do when you cannot do what you want right away.

Clear rules means being very specific – **no putdowns, no name-calling, no pushing, no hitting**. Bullying in schools and other groups often escalates quickly without clear rules and consistent adult follow-through on those rules.

It is important that kids see that everyone--especially the adults around them--are following the same rules. Consistent consequences need to be thought through ahead of time to make sure that they are reasonable and will be upheld by all the adults responsible for supervision.

The bottom line is that the child needs to be stopped from continuing the bullying behavior quickly, clearly and directly. If this doesn't work, there might be further consequences like sitting down for a few minutes

instead of playing, having to do something inside away from other kids for a little while, or losing some privilege like watching television or playing on the computer.

Bullying in schools and other groups can improve when adults support **all** of the children – children using bullying behavior as well as those being bullied – in learning more effective skills for staying safe, for being powerful, and for getting what they want. Getting support for stopping bullying behavior sooner rather than later can make a big difference. Teachers, counselors, parenting classes, and friends can all be valuable resources.