

Bullying Age 18 Summary

Why Bullying?

Since more than one in five children (21%) report experiencing bullying at some point, helping your teen learn to understand and deal with bullying behavior is important for their success in school and life.¹

Tip These steps are done best when you and your teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

STEP 1 GET INPUT

Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Engage your teen in a conversation to understand their thoughts and feelings. You could ask: *“How do the peers around you make you feel?”* “What’s your definition of bullying?” “What would you do if you felt bullied?” “What would you do if you saw someone else being bullied?”
- Practice active listening to your teen’s thoughts, feelings, and worries. Give them a safe space where they can talk about their feelings without judgement. Often, a teen needs to feel safe before they will talk about their upset. Be patient as they ultimately get to that part of the conversation.
- Paraphrase what you heard your teen say. Teen: “James asked me to come to a party tonight, and when I said no, he told me I was a loser and called me a name.” Parent modeling paraphrasing: “So, I hear that when you said no to James, he was hurtful towards you.” Parent reflecting feeling: “I hear you were hurt and perhaps humiliated as well.”
- Is it a one-time event? If so, it’s not bullying. Are there regular or ongoing interactions that are hurting your teen? Do they sound like words or actions intended to belittle and dominate your teen?

Trap What upsets a parent can differ significantly from what upsets a teen. Listen closely to what is most concerning to them without projecting your thoughts, concerns, and feelings.

**STEP
2**

Teach New Skills

- Teach your teen what to say and do if they are being bullied.
 - Teach your teen to be brief, speak up, and walk away to safety.
 - Secure a safety buddy. Have your teen find a friend and talk about how to easily and simply stand up for one another and walk away to safety.
 - **CAUTION:** If your teen has been dangerously threatened with severe harm, call the school and involve the teacher, the school psychologist, the vice principal -- someone at the school level who will take it seriously and pursue the issue immediately. All schools, by law, are supposed to have an anti-bullying policy with a clear procedure for dealing with it. Severe harm can be identified if there is a weapon or threat of a weapon involved, if hate has been voiced (racism, homophobia), serious bodily harm has already occurred or been threatened, sexual abuse or threat of, or illegal acts are involved such as robbery, destruction of property, or bribery.
- Teach your teen how to be an advocate against bullying and unkind behavior.
 - Model constructive language. Ask yourself if your teen repeated what you are saying to someone else in public, would you be upset? If your answer is yes, it's time to rethink and rephrase what you are saying or try not to say it.
 - Cultivate sibling kindness. Create chances for siblings to appreciate one another. At dinnertime, ask, "*What did you notice your sister do today that was kind?*"
 - Learn strategies that promote responsibility instead of resorting to yelling and/or punishment.
 - Advocate for your teen's emotional safety. Do not allow a relative, neighbor, or friend to criticize or demean your teen. Remove them and set a boundary with the adult.

Tip More than half of bullying situations (57%) stop when a peer intervenes on behalf of the student being bullied.²

Trap DO NOT encourage your teen to fight back with words or fists. Do not model a verbal attack inadvertently by criticizing the attacker. A hurtful retort (referencing character, calling names) could escalate the conflict and put your teen in immediate danger. Hold back on your comments, even if they fly through your mind. If your teen is in physical danger, contact school authorities right away. Coaching them to fight back will lead them into harm's way.

**STEP
3**

Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "I'd love to see..." statements like, "*I'd love to see you ask your friend to stop using those hurtful words with you.*" Or you could say, "*Show me how you would tell someone to stop their mean words.*"
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like, "*I notice how you stand tall when you say 'Stop!' That's excellent!*" or "*I notice how you've been practicing what you'll say and do. That's excellent!*"

- Accept feelings: “*I hear you’re upset. What can you do to help yourself feel better? How can we examine ways to take action?*”
- Practice deep breathing. It is a simple practice that can assist your teen anytime, anywhere, particularly if they are scared or nervous. It’s important to get in plenty of practice to make it easy to use when needed.
- Include reflection on the day in your bedtime routine: “*What happened today that made you happy?*”



Support Your Teen’s Development and Success

- Ask key questions: “*You are going to see James today. Do you remember how to assert yourself and get away if necessary?*”
- Reflect on outcomes: “*It seems like you couldn’t sleep last night because you were upset about how James acted at school yesterday. Did you have a hard time paying attention in class? What about trying out some role plays tonight so you can go in tomorrow knowing what you can say and do?*”
- Stay engaged.



Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your teen’s efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your teen’s behavior.
 - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: “*You talked with your classmate about what was bothering you -- that must have taken a lot of courage- Excellent!*” Recognition can include nonverbal recognition such as a smile, high five, or hug.
 - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the teen knows what to expect, like, “*If you follow your plan to have lunch with your safety buddy, we will stop for a snack on the way home from school.*” (if you XX, then I’ll XX) The goal should be to help your teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen’s internal motivation.
 - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren’t planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent is in the middle of a crisis (like a teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent offers to stop for a treat on the way home if the teen will stop arguing and leave the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, “*Let’s try out a few role plays and then put our worries away and enjoy snuggling up to a good book.*” Or, after your teen shares

important information about how things have been going at school, celebrate by going on a walk together.

References

1. Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2016. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017064.pdf>
2. Hawkins, D.L., & Pepler, D.J. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

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