

Where **kids** come first

Bullying

How to help my child



Hôpital de Montréal
pour enfants

Centre universitaire
de santé McGill



Montreal Children's
Hospital

McGill University
Health Centre

Every child has the right to feel safe at home, at school and in their own community but for many children, bullying is a reality that threatens that basic right. Bullying should never be considered a normal part of growing up. Parents and caregivers can play a key role in recognizing when a bullying problem has occurred, and supporting their children by responding immediately and taking preventative steps to stop the bullying.

Bullying can be **physical or psychological**, and involves behaviour that aims to make the other child feel afraid and uncomfortable. A child who bullies is usually trying to exert power over another child, or cause them harm. These negative actions can include some or all of the following:

- physical actions (hitting, kicking, punching),
- verbal actions (threats, name calling, insults, ethnoculturally-based or sexual comments),
- social exclusion (spreading rumours, ignoring, gossiping, excluding).

The bully carries out these actions regularly to establish their dominance over the child they are bullying.

The immediate effects of bullying include low self-esteem, but long-term effects such as anxiety or depression, self-harm or even suicide are other serious risks, especially if the bullying continues for long periods of time. There is also evidence that bullying may be associated with, or lead to psychotic symptoms.

Signs to look for

Children who are being bullied may have noticeable changes in their behaviour. You should suspect bullying if your child:

- has diminished interest in activities or interests that they used to enjoy,
- is more withdrawn,
- is anxious about going to school or another locale, and won't say why.

It is not always easy to get your child to talk about bullying, but you should be persistent in trying to find out what is going on. If you think your child is being bullied, it is important to let them speak about it without interrupting them. Show them that you understand, and, as much as possible, explore the situation without judgement. Don't offer advice or a solution right away.

What about cyber-bullying?

As a parent, you need to be aware of the different forms of cyber-bullying and how significant the problem can be for your child. Cyber-bullying can happen via email, through cell phone text messages, instant messaging or on a social media website. For example, a message posted on Facebook can be disseminated right away to hundreds and even thousands of people. Children are very aware of this reality and telling them not to use the computer or their cell phone won't solve the problem of bullying.



Take action

If your child says they are being bullied, you should immediately tell their teacher or the person supervising the activity where your child is being bullied. More often than not—especially with younger children—this may have a positive effect right away. If the teacher is not responsive, you can talk to the principal. All school boards have services to deal with bullying, so you can always go to the next level if your child's school cannot stop the problem.



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The Golden Rule

Bullying is a reality so it's important to help your children understand why it's wrong. Encourage them to speak up if they notice another child being bullied and discourage them from being involved in any type of relationship where someone is bullying another child. And remind them of the Golden Rule to help get your message across: they should treat others as they want to be treated themselves.

Online resources can also provide helpful information and resources to children and families dealing with bullying:

- www.cyberbullying.ca
- www.stopabully.ca



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