

## TEN ACTIONS ALL PARENTS CAN TAKE TO HELP ELIMINATE BULLYING

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The latest research shows that **one in three children is directly involved in bullying as a perpetrator, victim, or both**. And many of those who are not directly involved witness others being bullied on a regular basis. No child is immune-kids of every race, gender, grade and socio-economic sector are impacted. But it doesn't have to be this way. As parents we have the power to help reduce bullying. Here are Education.com's top ten actions you can take to help address bullying:

1. **Talk with and listen to your kids-everyday.** Research shows that adults are often the last to know when children are bullied or bully others. You can encourage your children to buck that trend by engaging in frequent conversations about their social lives. Spend a few minutes every day asking open ended questions about who they spend their time with at school and in the neighborhood, what they do in between classes and at recess, who they have lunch with, or what happens on the way to and from school. If your children feel comfortable talking with you about their peers before they're involved in a bullying event, they'll be much more likely to get you involved after.
2. **Spend time at school and recess.** Research shows that 67% of bullying happens when adults are not present. Schools don't have the resources to do it all and need the help of parents to reduce bullying. Whether you can volunteer once a week or once a month, you can make a real difference just by being present and helping to organize games and activities that encourage kids to play with new friends. Be sure to coordinate your on-campus volunteer time with your child's teacher or principal.
3. **Be a good example of kindness and leadership.** Your kids learn a lot about power relationships from watching you. When you get angry at a waiter, a sales clerk, another driver on the road, or even your child, you have a great opportunity to model effective communication techniques. Don't blow it by blowing your top! Any time you speak to another person in a mean or abusive way, you're teaching your child that bullying is OK.
4. **Learn the signs.** Most children don't tell anyone (especially adults) that they're been abused. It is therefore important for parents and teachers to learn to recognize signs of being victimized, such as frequent loss of personal belongings, complaints of headaches or stomachaches, avoiding recess or school activities, and getting to school very late or very early. If you suspect that a child might be being bullied, talk with the child's teacher or find ways to observe his peer interactions to determine whether or not your suspicions might be correct. Talk directly to your child about what is going on at school.
5. **Create healthy anti-bullying habits early.** Help develop anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits early in your children – as early as preschool and kindergarten.

Coach your children on what not to do – hitting, pushing, teasing, “saying na-na-na-na-na,” or being mean to others. Help your child to focus on how such actions might feel to the child on the receiving end (e.g., “How do think you would feel if that happened to you?”) Such strategies can enhance empathy for others. Equally if not more important, teach your child what to do – kindness, empathy, fair play, and turn-taking are critical skills for good peer relations. Children also need to learn how to say “no” firmly if they experience or witness bullying behavior. Coach your child about what to do if other kids are mean – get an adult right away, tell the child who is teasing or bullying to “stop”, “walk away, ignore the bullying and find someone else to play with. It may help to role play what to do with your child. And repetition helps: go over these techniques periodically with your kindergarten and early elementary school aged children.

6. **Help your child’s school address bullying effectively.** Whether your children have been bullied or not, you should know what their school is doing to address bullying. Research shows that “zero-tolerance” policies aren’t effective. What works better are ongoing educational programs that help create a healthy social climate in the school. This means teaching kids at every grade level how to be inclusive leaders and how to be empathic towards others and teaching victims effective resistance techniques. If you school does not have effective bullying strategies and policies in place, talk to the principal and advocate for change.
7. **Establish household rules about bullying.** Your children need to hear from you explicitly that it’s not normal, okay, or tolerable for them to bully, to be bullied, or to stand by and watch other kids be bullied. Make sure they know that if they are bullied physically, verbally, or socially (at school, by a sibling, in your neighborhood, or online) it’s safe and important for them to tell you about it – and that you will help. They also need to know just what bullying is (many children do not know that they are bullying others), and that such behavior is harmful to others and not acceptable. You can help your children find positive ways to exert their personal power, status, and leadership in school. Work with your child, their teachers, and their principal to implement a kindness plan at school.
8. **Teach your child how to be a good witness or positive bystander.** Research shows that kids who witness bullying feel powerless and seldom intervene. However, kids who take action can have a powerful and positive effect on the situation. Although it’s never a child’s responsibility to put him or herself in danger, kids can often effectively diffuse a bullying situation by yelling “Stop! You’re bullying” or “Hey, that’s not cool.” Kids can also help each other by providing support to the victim, not giving extra attention to the bully, and/or reporting what they witnessed to an adult.
9. **Teach your child about cyber bullying.** Children often do not realize what cyber bullying is. Cyber bullying includes sending mean, rude, vulgar, or threatening messages or images; posting sensitive, private information about another person; pretending to

be someone else in order to make that person look bad; and intentionally excluding someone from an online group. These acts are as harmful as physical violence and must not be tolerated. We know from research that the more time a teen spends online, the more likely they are to be cyber bullied – so limit online time. There’s a simple litmus test you can teach your children about online posting: if you wouldn’t say it to someone’s face or you would not be comfortable having your parents see it – don’t post it (or take it down now).

10. **Spread the word that bullying should not be a normal part of childhood.** Some adults hesitate to act when they observe or hear about bullying because they think of bullying as a typical phase of childhood that must be endured or that it can help children “toughen up”. It’s important for all adults to understand that bullying does not have to be a normal part of childhood. All forms of bullying are harmful to the perpetrator, the victim, and to witnesses and the effects last well into adulthood (and can include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, family violence and criminal behavior). Efforts to effectively address bullying require the collaboration of school, home, and community. Forward this list and articles you’ve read to all the parents, teachers, administrator, after-school care program, camp counselors, and spiritual leaders you know.

**BULLYING IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM, BUT IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER, IT’S ONE WE CAN IMPACT.**

## WHAT DO YOU SAY TO “THAT’S SO GAY” ...

### **STOP IT:**

Keep it simple with quick responses you could say:

- “Remember, we don’t use put-downs in this class.”
- “It’s not OK to say “That’s so gay.”
- “It’s not OK to use that phrase.”
- “What do you mean by that?”
- “Do you know what “gay” means?”
- “You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use that word “gay” to mean something is bad or stupid, it’s hurtful.”
- “Do you know why it is hurtful?”

If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don’t, make time later.

### **EDUCATE:**

If you have been hearing the phrase “that’s so gay” used to mean that something is bad or stupid, take the time to make sure that children know what “gay” means and know why it is hurtful to use it as an insult. Also, be clear that using that phrase is hurtful to children who may have parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, neighbors, friends or other family members who are gay. Include information about discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

## WHAT DON’T YOU SAY TO “THAT’S SO GAY” ...

### **DON'T IGNORE IT:**

- Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse. If other children do not see action, they get the message that there is nothing wrong with it.
- Harassment does not go away on its own.

### **DON'T BE AFRAID OF MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE:**

- Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment.
- Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling isn't always easy. With experience you will become more comfortable in handling it.

### **DON'T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOR:**

- Saying "Josh doesn't really know what it means" or "Sarah was only joking," excuses hurtful behavior.

### **DON'T TRY TO JUDGE HOW UPSET THE TARGET IS:**

- We have no way of knowing how a child is really feeling. Often, targets are embarrassed and pretend that they were not offended or hurt. Saying "Michael didn't seem upset by Laura's remark" trivializes the child's feeling. It tells the harasser that it's OK to make hurtful comments. It teaches not only the child targets but also anyone in hearing range that they will not be protected from harassment.

## **IS IT CONFLICT OR IS IT BULLYING?**

Conflict is a disagreement or a difference of opinion or interests between equals.

So we need to recognize the differences:

Normal Peer Conflict

Bullying

Equal power or friends

Imbalance of power; not friends

Happens occasionally	Repeated negative actions
Accidental	Purposeful
Not serious	Serious with threat of physical or emotional harm
Equal emotional reaction	Strong emotional reaction from victim and Little or no emotional reaction from bully
Not seeking power or attention	Seeking power, control or material things
Not trying to get something	Attempt to gain material things or power
Remorse – will take responsibility	No remorse – blames victim
Effort to solve the problem	No effort to solve problem

Conflict is part of everyday life. As adults, we maneuver ourselves away from conflict throughout our days, and sometimes we know that it just happens. It goes without saying, then, that some conflict is normal in our children's life. Many adults attribute the difficulties that we have faced in conflict with others as areas of growth that have built our resilience and helped us face life's adversities.

When dealing with our children, we have to both educate and protect them. We need to model behavior that teaches children how to communicate and go through conflict with others.

Modeling good conflict skills and encouraging kids to peacefully address disagreements is the first step in raising kids who can effectively solve conflicts.

Over

Here are some tips that you can use to help your child with conflicts:

- ✓ Teach your child to use "I" messages. This can be trickier than it sounds. You want your child to learn effective "I" messages such as "I am mad that my toy is broken" rather than "I hate that you broke my toy" Effective messages identify what a person is feeling and why without blaming.
- ✓ Focus on the conflict at hand. When people get upset, they tend to drag in past transgressions to fuel their anger. Focus on working through the current conflict.

- ✓ Listen. Ask kids how they suggest the conflict be resolved. Too often, parents try to intervene too quickly and take charge of the situation. Give kids the chance to work through differences.
- ✓ Encourage kids to admit when they've made a mistake. It's important for kids to realize when they've done something wrong and to admit it.
- ✓ Brainstorm specific solutions. When kids are new to resolving conflicts, they often don't know how to solve them. Sometimes having an adult name a variety of solutions can help kids begin to think of what works for them and what doesn't. Over time and with practice they will come up with their own solutions.
- ✓ Praise your child when you see them resolving conflicts well. Resolving conflicts peacefully is a complex skill. Notice what your child is doing right (such as calming down before trying to talk it out) rather than what he is doing wrong.

From ParentFurther