

How can I help my child if they are being bullied?

SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health has worked with lots of families whose children have been bullied. Many families who have worked with staff at SickKids CCMH have found these suggestions helpful. Keep in mind your child's age and abilities when applying these strategies. Give them a try and feel free to add your own!

Assess and respond. Finding out that your child is being bullied can be very upsetting and overwhelming. Try these tips in response to a bullying situation:

- Assess the severity. Is your child being physically hurt or threatened? Are they being taunted verbally? Collect as much detailed information as possible.
- Let your child's teacher know. Give them as much information as you can so that they can handle the situation in the best way possible. Schools often have protocols in place for bullying, and the teacher/school can be a great ally! Ask them to keep you updated with any changes.
- Monitor the situation closely. If you don't see an improvement don't hesitate to contact the school again. It helps to be persistent.

Communicate. It's important to make sure your child feels like they have a safe, non-judgmental place to talk about their feelings. Try these tips to make sure you and your child can communicate about the situation clearly.

- Take your child seriously. Bullying complaints can seem small at first but can grow into bigger problems. If you don't take your child seriously at first, they may not feel comfortable coming to you later.
- Let your child know what steps you are taking. If you're talking to their teacher let them know why, but don't go into all the details.
- Keep your child involved in the solution. Ask them what possible resolutions they can think of. Caregivers often want to solve bullying problems themselves, but your child can be a powerful part of the conversation and the solution.



Build your child's self-esteem. Bullying can hurt your child's self-esteem and make them feel down on themselves. Try these tips to help them remember how great they are.

- Explain why bullies bully. Talk to your child and let them know that bullies often put other people down because something is upsetting them at home or they don't feel good about themselves.
- Teach your child that it's good to be different. They should be proud of who they are. When your child learns to feel pride in themselves they'll know they deserve respect.
- Involve your child in activities to boost their self-esteem. Try enrolling your child in a movement class like karate or yoga. Many families find these types of classes helpful in fostering confidence.

Teach strategies. Helping your child at home is important but you can't always be there at school or on the playground. Go through these tips with your child to help give them as many bully-stopping tools as possible.

- Try to keep your cool. Bullies want to make you upset. If you ignore the bully or walk away, the bully might get bored and move on.
- Stay in a group. Bullies are usually too afraid to pick on groups of friends and walking in a group might make the bully back off.
- While it's never okay to hurt bullies, it is okay to talk back at them. Try using humour or acting silly to throw the bully off and make them walk away confused.



Further resources

Check out these links for more tips on how to help your child cope with being bullied.

1. AboutKidsHealth: Bullying <https://bit.ly/2QNa11N>
 2. PBS Parents: What to do if Your Child is Being Bullied <https://to.pbs.org/2eSyORU>
 3. Kids Health: Dealing with Bullies <https://bit.ly/2ITXW8j>
 4. Kids Health: Cyberbullying <https://bit.ly/2wUGvTi>
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Created by the Outpatient Services Team at SickKids CCMH. Photography is for illustrative purposes only and any person depicted in the content is a model.

440 Jarvis St.
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4Y 2H4

1645 Sheppard Ave. W.
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M3M 2X4

P.O. Box 339
Clarksburg, Ontario
Canada N0H 1J0