

Social competences
and Fundamental Rights
for preventing bullying



safer

Project number: 621528-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN



GUIDE FOR parents & members of the educating communities



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. The European Commission's support for the production of this document does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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**Be the HERO
for reducing
bullying to ZERO!**



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Introduction

Bullying is a very serious and distressing experience for the children.

Many children and adolescents carry the effects of bullying into their adult lives and relationships.

In any situation involving bullying, it is important that, as adults, we listen to children and young people without judging them and blaming them but rather help them to find the support that they need.

The aim of this short guide is to provide information to parents, caregivers, and members of Educating Communities to help them respond effectively to any concerns children and teens may have about bullying and/or if they are involved in a bullying situation.

Bullying can happen anywhere and to anyone, in lots of different ways. Actually, it is to be found wherever groups of individuals meet and socialize. It could be in a physical place, such as the playground, the classroom, the sports field or the park. It also might take place online or through phone calls, through social media, online games or by text messages. Online and offline bullying are nowadays very much interconnected and can start offline and go online, and vice versa.

As adults and community, we all have the responsibility to discontinue it, no matter where or how it happens. All children and young people have the right to feel safe, secure, accepted and valued. In order to achieve this, teachers, school directors and staff, students and their parents, sport associations, churches, youth organizations, etc. - in practice all members of any local and school community need to work together.

As children are growing up, their relationships become more complicated. The peer group includes persons with similar interests, beliefs, social status, etc. Peers spend a lot of time together (especially in school) and within this group they look for support, understanding and approval which they do not receive from adults. During adolescence, it is important for the children to try out, "playaway" and learn communication skills, to gain social experience, to get information on various topics, "discover" the opposite gender, etc.

However, young people do not go through this period so easily and without problems. Conflicts, disputes and destroyed friendships are not rare occasions. However, bullying happens to be the "ugly face" of children's relationships at this age - the deliberate use of force and/or power to intimidate a peer. If conflicts and quarrels between former friends are more or less common and usually occur between equals, bullying can take very extreme forms and is usually systemic and directed toward more exposed and vulnerable peers (or younger children).

Conflicts between children in school or elsewhere can easily go or continue online. Children often take advantage of this opportunity on Internet even to make fun of someone, as a joke and they do not see, neither understand the harm they could cause to other children. Online bullying is the most common online risk for children in many countries in particular Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, and Portugal. There is strong interconnection between bullying in school and online bullying as the last is often rooted in real-life relationships between children. But unlike school bullying, online bullying usually remains hidden from the parents and the teachers (or other close to the child adults) for a very long time.

This short guide provides tips and advice how parents and caregivers can prevent and tackle bullying inside and outside the school, and how to recognize signs of offline and online bullying.

This guide is produced in the framework of the **SAFER (Social competences and Fundamental Rights for preventing bullying)** project that develops and implements an innovative method for preventing bullying, aimed at fostering **inclusive education** which is based on the enhancement of **social and civic competences** acquisition as well as on the knowledge, promotion and ownership of **common positive values and fundamental rights**, not only at the level of students and schools but also **at the level of community**.



Myths and Realities about bullying and cyberbullying

Bullying often evokes personal dramas and flash backs into our childhood and adolescence as many people were victims of bullying and/or perpetrators. The difficulties linked to the comprehension of the phenomenon as a whole concern both children, young people and adults. Often bullying and online bullying is underestimated, misunderstood, not detected and unreported.

The circulating misunderstandings and myths about (online) bullying might be dangerous and misleading.

Let's reveal some of the myths and facts for you:

Myth:
Bullying is a common normal behavior of childhood and adolescence, and you should just ignore it.

Fact: Bullying is not "normal" or acceptable in any form and ignoring might not always make it stop. As a parent you have to do your best to prevent or/and stop it (if it happens to your child or you witness it between other children). Bullying is affecting the self-esteem and confidence of the children on a long term. Although aggression is part of the relationship between children and young people and should not always be considered as something negative, it absolutely must not be the prevailing mode. Socialization must always be based on the respect and understanding of others.

Myth:
Students have to "learn to defend themselves".

Fact: A widespread and potentially dangerous

belief is that those who argue that even the weakest should "learn to defend themselves".

Supporting this conviction exposes us to the risk of considering acts of prevarication as almost obligatory stoppage of the path of acquisition of a strong character, scope in our society, where competitiveness has assumed more and more a general desirable target. However, it is a conviction that leads to the victim being blamed, which is further downplayed, and not on those who persecute her/him.

Myth:
Bullying is a mischief behavior.

Fact: Minimizing the phenomenon by reducing it to a simple prank, to a trifle. The difference between a prank and a complex dynamic of bullying is very obvious. Ignoring the real and intricate dimensions of the problem makes it worse and legitimizes the bully behavior.

Myths:
The victim provoked the bully.

Fact: A further myth that shifts the attribution of blame to the victim, is to hold him/her responsible for such irritating conduct in order to legitimize bullying. The interpretation of this belief is the classic phrase: "he/she asked for it". Characteristic attribution towards the profile of the "victim provocateur".

This position and belief is dangerous because it could target individuals with problems of attention and hyperactivity who, because of this disorder, are very difficult to control their attitude and to comply with the rules of civil coexistence: they do not respect their turn to speak, touch the things of others, interrupt the games, etc. It is understandable that such attitudes annoy others, but this is not a good reason to justify or legitimize acts of prevarication.

Myth:

A bully is physically strong and comes from underprivileged families

Fact: Another cliché concerns the stereotype of the bully, seen in the collective imagination as a physically strong subject and coming from underprivileged families. This is not always true, many times bullies come from good families and often do not even need physical strength to overpower others, as they possess particularly developed verbal and relational skills. When such skills are used for offensive purposes, they can cause equally serious discomfort. Alternatively, they may delegate other (gregarious) persons in the execution of harassment.

Myth:

Bullying can only happen in extremely degraded and marginalized contexts (“In this school there is no bullying”).

Fact: The phenomenon, contrary to what is generally thought, can find generative ground in all environments frequented by young people, regardless of the socio-cultural conditions of the neighborhoods in which the school belongs. Precisely, this observation must be a push factor to all schools, even those who consider themselves extraneous to the problem, to actively implement training courses that aimed building up knowledge of the phenomenon of bullying to school staff, students and parents.

Myth:

Bullying is a school phenomenon.

Fact: Unfortunately, the phenomenon of bullying can take place in all the contexts of life of children and young people. Think, for example, of situations of bullying during extracurricular activities such as sports or music.

Sometimes, unfortunately, it also happens among the boy scouts or in friend. Obviously, since school is the place where our children

spend most of their day, the likelihood of bullying being more widespread is higher than elsewhere.

Myth:

Classes and schools with few students are less susceptible to bullying.

Fact: The phenomenon of bullying does not depend on the number of students present at school or in the classes. However, in small contexts, it is certainly easier to control and prevent the phenomenon.

Myth:

Bullying is a phenomenon that ends spontaneously with the growth of the children.

Fact: While it is true that from a quantitative point of view bullying is facing a decrease with increasing age, on the other hand it is shown that with growth, the forms of oppression acquire increasingly frightening contours.

Myth:

Being bullied leads you to bring out the character and teaches you to be respected.

Fact: Being bullied is not a useful experience to develop more self-confidence; on the contrary, bullying generates feelings of despair, sadness, and low self-esteem for those who suffer it.



What is bullying?

Although definitions vary, most include that bullying is a form of aggressive behavior that occurs in an intentional and repeated manner causing another child to feel hurt. Bullying can take multiple forms, including spreading rumors, threatening, physical or verbal assault, engaging in insidious practices such as excluding a child from a group to hurt him/her, or any other gestures or actions that occur in a less visible manner¹. In addition, those targeted by such aggressive behavior have difficulty stopping the action directed at them and struggle to defend themselves

- There is also a real or perceived “imbalance of power,” which is described as when the student with the bullying behavior has more “power,” either physically, socially, or emotionally
- There is a pattern of bullying behavior

Bullying is also when one student (or a group of students) keeps picking on another student again and again to make them feel bad. They say or do mean things to upset them, make fun of them a lot, try to stop them joining in, or keep hitting or punching them.

Kids and teens who bully use their power – such as physical strength, knowing something embarrassing, or popularity – to control or harm others. There are three characteristic features that distinguish bullying from other forms of unfavorable behaviors and practices: bullying is always done intentionally; it is repeating and happens also when there is imbalance of Power.

Note: For a legal definition, consult your state's law on bullying.



- **Bullying is deliberate - harming another person intentionally**
- **Bullying involves misuse of power in a relationship.**
- **Bullying is usually not a one-off, but the behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated over time.**
- **Bullying can happen anywhere, at any time, and can be verbal, physical or emotional. It can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious or hidden.**

¹ UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/egypt/bullying?fbclid=IwAR1779VIKUCcDLK9god96qsrFHOIRGGISSRIKgnpsFm1vS4vrrxtXmf5Mzo>

What is not bullying?

Children and youth often use bullying to describe a lot of things that are not actually bullying – such as single episodes of social rejection or dislike, nastiness or spite, random acts of aggression or intimidation, mutual arguments, disagreements, or fights. These situations may be just as serious as bullying is. These actions can cause great distress. However, they do not fit the definition of bullying and they are not examples of bullying unless someone is deliberately and repeatedly doing them to given person.

- **Conflict between two or more people who have a disagreement, a difference of opinion or different views (where there is no power imbalance) does not always mean it's bullying.**
- **Not liking someone or a single act of social rejection is not bullying.**
- **One-off acts of meanness or spite are not bullying.**
- **Isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation, or violence are not bullying.**



What are the main types of bullying behaviour?

There are four types of bullying behavior that described in the table below:



Physical bullying	Verbal bullying	Social bullying	Cyber bullying
<p>Physical bullying is the name given to any act where the perpetrator uses their physicality to try to hurt or irritate the victim. Physical acts can range from seemingly minor actions, such as flicking items at someone repeatedly, up to actions which put the victim's life at risk. It is worth noting that minor physical actions can still have a severe effect on the mental health of the person who is being targeted.</p> <p>Other types of physical bullying include; hitting, pushing, tripping and throwing objects at the victim. In addition to physical threats and actions against the victim, the perpetrators of the bullying may also seek to use their physicality to damage personal items that belong to the victim. For example, they might steal the victim's school bag or rip up a book which belongs to their target.</p>	<p>Verbal bullying is a type of bullying where the perpetrator relies mainly on words to try to hurt their victim. In previous times, children may have been taught the mantra "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me", however this mantra is now considered to be counterproductive. Verbal bullying can have a serious effect on the mental health of victims, and may actually have more of a lasting effect than physical bullying. Verbal bullying serves to lower self-esteem and undermine the confidence of the victim.</p> <p>Types of verbal bullying include; name-calling, routine criticism, teasing, hurtful, comments and verbal threats. Verbal bullying does not always have to be spoken out loud; it can also take the form of hurtful notes and similar things that are passed to the victim.</p>	<p>Social bullying is a type of bullying where the perpetrators try to isolate their victim from wider social networks. To do this, they damage that person's relationships or reputation. By ostracising a person from a specific group, the perpetrator is reducing the opportunity for their victim to seek support. In some cases, the bully may appear to be friendly when they are communicating directly with their victim, but they could be manipulating other people to act against that person.</p> <p>Social bullying can include; ostracizing a person from an existing social group, spreading rumors about a person, sharing secrets that were told in confidence, giving a person "the silent treatment", and deliberately embarrassing someone in public</p>	<p>Cyber bullying is a relatively new form of bullying which is carried out using modern forms of communication, such as the internet or mobile phones. These types of technology make it much harder for victims to get away from their tormentors. Victims may feel like they cannot stop using social media or their mobile phone, because these things are now considered to be very important forms of communication. Cyber bullying also allows greater anonymity for the perpetrators. It is possible for cyber bullies to target people who are thousands of miles away and who they may never have met in real life.</p> <p>Examples of cyber bullying include; prank phone calls and texts, abusive messages on social media, fake social media accounts being made about the victim, catfishing, hacking.</p>

Bullying can be very visible, obvious and happens in front of others (overt) or hidden (covert) and hard to notice by those who are not directly involved or present.

The visible (overt) bullying involves physical actions such as punching or kicking, or verbal bullying such as name-calling or insulting.

Hidden (covert) bullying can be very hard for others to see or take place when no one is watching. It can include repeated hand gestures, whispering, weird or threatening looks, excluding someone, or restricting where they can sit or who they can talk with. Sometimes it can be dismissed by the initiator as 'just having fun'.

The Internet allows real conflicts to be brought online and children take advantage of this opportunity. Online bullying is the use of the internet to cause emotional harm to other people. This is also the most common online risk for children in many countries. Online bullying is often rooted in real-life relationships (mostly at school), but what makes it especially hurtful is that it happens on the Internet, ie. it can be continuous (24/7) and can be seen by many people (e.g. a fight between two students may have few eyewitnesses, but an offensive comment on the Internet can be seen by hundreds of people), but usually remains hidden from those closest to the child, since he/she hides it him/herself.

Remember, bullying can often happen between friends. Friendship loyalty and the confusion of an on-again-off-again friendship can make some children and young people reluctant to seek help.

Physical

Hurting someone's body or possessions

Verbal

Hurting someone by saying or writing mean things

Social

Hurting someone's reputation or relationships

Cyber

Hurting someone using electronics like a cellphone or a computer



What are the bullying roles?

Bullying incidents generally involve three different roles: bullies (those doing the bullying), victims (those being bullied), and bystanders (those who witness the bullying).

Bully

Students who bully others often do so to gain status and recognition from their peers. Their bullying behavior is reinforced when they intimidate their victims and when the peer group col-



cludes by not challenging the initiator or reporting the bullying to school staff.

Bullying can be rewarding, increasing the initiator's social status while lowering the social status of their target. The culture of a school will strongly influence the extent to which it occurs.

The bully may be motivated by the need to be popular and liked by his peers, and to command/gain the respect of his peers, including by injecting fear. It is of great importance to remember that children who are bullied at school are very likely to be victims of domestic violence or abuse in their families or elsewhere. This could be a role model of behavior or a coping strategy to deal with their own problems. This is important to keep in mind when dealing with similar situations - the abuser also needs support and help.

Victim

Someone who is continuously intimidated. Research shows that children who are the most targeted by bullying and abusive behaviors tend to be children who are:

- **Different:** in appearance, cultural or religious background, social status, or have health issues or disabilities.
- **Super achievers**, exceptionally gifted or who receive significant attention.
- **Socially shy and introverts** who are less likely to speak out loud or more likely to feel intimidated.
- **Newly arrived in a community:** like those who recently moved to a new school or team.
- **Quiet** and peaceful.

Sometimes it is none of the above, as proven historically anyone can be vulnerable to abusive and bullying behaviors.

Bystanders

Bystanders are students who are observing bullying. They can be powerful influencers — how they react can either encourage or inhibit those who bully others.

Around the perpetrator, there is often a small group of children who actively support him, but without taking the leadership role. They may also be perpetrators (eg also insult, hit, push, etc.) or support by approving, laughing, keeping attention on what is happening. Bullying also has passive observers - those who do not take any attitude to what is happening (neither supporting the bullying nor opposing it). In most cases, they are the key to stopping the bullying. When children develop an attitude that bullying is unacceptable, they are more likely to support the victim and seek help from an adult.

There are three main types of bystanders:

- **followers (assistants)** - do not initiate, but take an active role in the bullying behavior
- **supporters (reinforcers)** - do not actively attack the target, but give positive feedback to the initiator, providing an audience by laughing and making other encouraging gestures
- **defenders** - dislike the bullying behavior and trying to help the victims by intervening, getting teacher support (using safe communication) or providing direct support to the victim.
- **outsiders** - stay away, do not taking sides with anyone or become actively involved, but allow the bullying to continue by their 'silent approval'.

Bystanders can play several different roles:

- helping students who are bullying and actively joining in

- encouraging or showing approval to the students who are bullying
- doing nothing or being passive
- defending or supporting the student who is being bullied by intervening, getting help or comforting them.

Bystanders who take no action or behave in ways that give silent approval (watching, nodding, turning a blind eye) encourage the bullying behavior to continue.

It's common for children to have different roles at different times. Some children are both bullied and bully others, and at other times they may witness bullying (helping the initiator or defending the target). Every situation is different.

Some people think bullying is just part of growing up and a way for students to learn to stick up for themselves. But bullying can make students feel lonely, unhappy, and frightened. It's not just the students being bullied who are affected. Students who bully others are also more likely to have problems and be unhappy. Being bullied can affect everything about a child: how they see themselves, their friends, school, and their future. Students who are bullied often experience depression, low self-esteem that may last a lifetime, shyness, loneliness, physical illnesses, and threatened or attempted self-harm. Some students miss school, see their marks drop or even leave school altogether because they have been bullied.

How to spot if a child/teen is being bullied?

It might be hard to know if a child is being bullied. Some children hide their feelings and don't find it easy to tell an adult what is happening.

While everyone is different, anyway there are some signs that can be taken into full consideration. Indeed, when a child or a teen is being bullied, he/she may:

-
- **look down or anxious**
 - **seem less confident in themselves**
 - **show signs of distress such as feeling upset, teary, or panic**
 - **avoid school or refuse to go to school or walk together with his/her classmates**
 - **find it hard to concentrate in school or do his/her homework**
 - **fear of going to school**
 - **often complain of feeling physically unwell**
 - **have outbursts of unexplained anger at home**
 - **seem withdrawn, isolated, and rejected by others**
 - **have very limited number of friends**
 - **don't want to hang out with friends/ classmates**
 - **sudden change in his/her behavior such as dressed up differently or doing improper/unusual activities in order to respond to peer pressure**
 - **suddenly starts bullying others**



- **have unexplained physical injuries such as bruises or scratches**
- **under perform at school**
- **have sleep disorders**
- **have food disorders - eat more than usual or much less than usual, including gain or lose weight.**
- **have unexplained health issues like headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems**
- **experience loss of appetite**
- **refuse to take part in sport/ extra-curricular activities in school or in his/her favorite sport/ sport club**
- **extensive use of Internet and digital device (laptop, mobile phone or tablet) or**
- **refusal to use digital device and interact online**

Underneath these behaviors, a child who is being bullied may be frightened or anxious, lonely, isolated, worthless, on-edge or desperate about the situation he/she is facing.

Of course, a child/teen's behaviors and moods can change quickly for many different reasons, so it's important to not make fast conclusions and to analyze if there are other situations/issues that can bother the child/teen (for example, major changes as a separation, bereavement...)

Why children and teens don't ask for help

Teens who are bullied often think they have to handle the bullying situation on their own. Asking for help is hard for them because they want to show courage and to handle the situation by themselves. Also, children, who may not know the word 'bullying', can feel sad or scared. Often, children do not share because they believe it will go worse.

While teenagers often prefer to handle things on their own, kids who are bullied often feel ashamed and don't know what to do. They can also think that it's their fault. They might think you'll get upset, that you will take away their devices, such as their mobile phone, tablet or computer/laptop, or they might just find it embarrassing to have a parent involved.

Furthermore, students may not report more subtle, indirect, and relational types of bullying (such as deliberately excluding peers or spreading rumors) because they don't realize that these are also unfair, unequal ways to treat others. Very often, especially in adolescence, children put up with/endure bullying because they think they deserve it. This is related to low self-esteem due to physical changes in their bodies, which might be unacceptable to a large part of adolescents. It may also be caused by very demanding and critical parent behavior toward the child.



Finally, some students try to tell an adult, but they don't feel heard. They get the message that bullying is no big deal, that they should just ignore it, or that bullying is just a part of the growing up process.

Children and young people don't tell adults for many reasons:

- **Bullying can make a person feel helpless. They may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or annoying.**
 - **They may fear a hostile response from those bullying them.**
 - **Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Kids may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether it's true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak. Many children don't want to upset their families.**
 - **Children or young people who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or could understand.**
 - **Kids may fear being rejected by their friends. Friends can help protect children from bullying, and they can fear losing this support.**
-

How should I talk to a child/teen about bullying?

Now, when you know what bullying is, you are almost prepared to have a conversation on the topic.

Of course, how do you approach such conversation with your child depends very much to your child's age. If you speak with a young child, you may want to use a picture book or their favorite TV show to help illustrate your point. This will give them an insight into how others treat people and what to do if someone does cause them distress.

If you speak with a teen, you should initiate an open and honest discussion based on asking open and not critical questions and listen patiently for the answers. Do not push the teen to talk, do not interrupt with comments or by criticizing him/her. In addition, such conversations are important for you to communicate values and learn about the teen's experience, so as to make it easier for them to turn to you if they witness or experience bullying, as well as showing your zero tolerance against bullying – no matter if your child is the victim or the bully. You can find some tips in the next paragraph.

Some tips can help you:

When to start a conversation about bullying:





You can use any convenient moment or situation – could be a piece of news about a bullied kid on the TV, or a story you heard for your kid’s friend, or something you have seen on the street/parking lot today! Share your emotion, thoughts, what you would do. It is also a good idea to talk about bullying incidentally, while doing something else.

TIPs: How to start conversation:

You can start conversation by saying: I see something is bothering you! Do you want to share it with me? or I heard something happened in school today. Can you brief me? I want to hear your point of view! Or I heard a story of school/online bullying today (tell the story) and I was wondering if something like this ever happens in your school/ to your friends or yourself?

Keep in mind that it is good to:

- **Encourage** your child/teen to tell you the whole story. Have an open discussion about what really happened from the very beginning to the end.
- **Listen** to the child/teen calmly and without interrupting and try to control your own emotions as a parent. Try not to let your anger, distress, worries show off. Your feelings can intensify the child’s or make it worse for them and might even deter your child from talking to you next time.

- **Reassure** them that they have done the right thing by talking to you.
- **Keep in mind** that your child may need to tell the story more than once.
- **Remind** your child that bullying is never OK, and that whatever they are feeling – e.g. hurt, scared, sad, angry – is understandable and very normal.
- **Empower** your child to act on his/her behalf by asking what he/she would like to happen and how they would like to act.
- **Think together** out loud about strategy of behavior that will prevent further bullying. Be aware that sometime, all they want to know is how to stop the bullying.
- **Keep in mind** that even though they often want to see justice for themselves, they are afraid that if the bully is punished, it will become worse for them in the long run.

Keep the conversation casual, not too serious all the time, make a joke, show curiosity about what really happens in school.

TIPs for casual conversation:

- What’s the funniest thing that happened today?
- What was the best and worst thing that happened to you today?
- What new thing did you learn about a friend or another student this week?
- What would you change about today?

Be ready to:

- **Listen.** It is the child’s story; let him or her tell it. They may be in emotional pain about the way they are being treated.
- **Create a trustful environment.** The awareness that your child is being bullied can raise range emotions in you as a parent. Do

not act as policeman or prosecutor. In order to support your child in the best possible way, you need to create an environment of calmness and trust.

- **Be supportive.** Tell the child it is not his/her fault and that he/she does not deserve to be bullied. Empower the child by expressing your full support and avoid judgmental comments about your child or the bully/ies. The child may already be feeling isolated. Hearing negative statements from the parents/other significant ones in the family/the coach or any other adult may only further isolate him or her.
- **Be patient.** Children may not be ready to open up right away and tell you the whole story at once. Sharing a bullying situation might be very difficult for a child due to fears, self-blame, shame, insecurity, including fear of rejection or change of the parents' opinion/behavior toward the child.
- **Act proactively - provide information and educate the children/teen** what bullying is and how to prevent it from happening. Always use language that is proper for the children's age, and they can easily and assertively understand.

- **Empower them to act: ask him/her what do you want to happen, what do you want you to do, what would you do? Explore together options for intervention strategies.** Discuss some options how to deal with a bully or how to prevent a future bullying situation with the child/teen.

Some of these questions might help you discuss bullying:

- **Have you seen bullying happening in your school/class? What did you do? How did you feel?**
- **Did you talk to someone about this?**
- **Have you ever felt scared to go to school/to playground/to a sport lesson? Why?**
- **Have you ever tried to help someone who was being bullied? What happened? What would you do if it happens again?**

It is of most importance children/teens know how to get help if bullying happens. They have to know that. **They Are Not Alone!**

(My) child is being bullied. What should I do?

To experience bullying is a scary, upsetting, emotional and shocking event. Children may feel vulnerable and helpless. Their self-esteem may have been seriously damaged, especially if the bullying has been going on for some time.

It's important to talk with them and take whatever the child/teen says seriously and find out



exactly what has been going on. Parents should also know that recovering the emotional balance of the child after experiencing bullying could take a long time (depending on the situation it could take between 8 and 18 months).

Here are some suggestions how to act in such situation:

Take good care of your child in the first place!

Before doing anything else, make sure the needs of your child are fully covered – that the child is fed, has a good sleep, and is not left alone. When showing this tender loving care, the children open up and share the whole story with you. Whenever you feel unsure what to do, the best action is to actively take care and support your child.

Be understanding...

Children who are being bullied are often frightened to talk about what is happening, either because they have been threatened or because they fear adult interference will make things worse. Be prepared for the child/teen to deny that there is anything wrong.

...and Encouraging

Encourage the child/teen to talk about what has been happening, also saying that you are concerned and that you want to help and support them, whatever the problem is, and that you can work together to solve the situation. Take their problem seriously – let them know you're happy they've told you. Listen to them and tell that you believe them.

Try also to Reassure...

Reassure the child/teen that it is not their fault that they have been bullied. Many children and teenagers blame themselves and this may make them feel even worse. Ask them what they want you to do. Work with your child to come up with some solutions.



... and REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE: there is a community that can help the child/teen and that is composed of the school, the parents and any organization the child/teen is in (sport organization, church, trainers or coaches, associations...) that is part of the educating community.

You can support the child/teen and plan a course of action involving all the Educating Community, because any child/teen's safety is in the community rather than the school or the parents alone.

How to deal with a child/teen who is bullying others?

It should be taken into account that children who bully other children are most probably experiencing something negative at home or at school in 90% of cases. Many children bully their peers because they are bullied by someone else, or - they are neglected and suffer lack of parental or friends'/peers' attention. What happens to them causes them emotional pain.

Many people do not know that the worst thing for children is the feeling of not being loved

and wanted, and this is measured by whether parents talk to them, whether they hug them, whether they tell them that they are loved and appreciated for who they are.

As a parent, finding out that your child is bullying another child at school is often a shock, but it is also important in this situation not to over-react, blame and yell at the child. You should try to understand what is causing this behavior and help your child move on. At the same time, it is important as parents to show that you are not going to tolerate such behavior to their peers.

Many children bully others while they are growing up. Most grow through it with the right guidance, support and education. Here are some things that you can do if your child is bullying other children:

- **Talk to your** child by staying calm – make sure you hear his point of view.
- **Focus** on changing the behavior, not labelling the child as ‘a bully’.
- **Acknowledge** what has happened; don’t deny it or pretend it was ‘no big deal’.
- **Make sure** your child knows bullying is unacceptable and why.
- **Be clear** that the bullying must stop at once, and that you’ll be checking to see that it does.
- **Find out** the deep reasons behind the bullying behavior of your child. Ask her/him what he/she feels when bullying other kids. Be prepared you may hear things that may upset you.
- **Encourage empathy** – ask your child to think about how the victimized child must be feeling, and to put this into words. Some children are still learning to be empathic and to be kind to others; these are skills you can help them build.

- **Apply reasonable family rules** about behavior and consequences.
- **Make sure** your child knows how to join in (online) games in a friendly way, how to say ‘no’ if their friends are doing something harmful, and how to handle conflict or boredom without trying to dominate or embarrass other people.
- **Work** with your child to develop a plan for what to do if they find themselves in a similar situation in the future.
- **Reflect** on what’s been happening in your child’s life that might have made them angry, bored, or looking for attention. Are there other problems that need to be addressed?

Children copy their role models and those they spend a lot of time with. Could the bullying be related to something that’s occurred in your family? If you are concerned about things that are happening at home, consider seeking support from your local GP, psychologist, Helpline, or one of these support services. Meanwhile, some kids think bullying is acceptable because their friends do it. If this is the case for your child, consider working as a team with other parents to address this problem, or connecting your child to other, more positive friendship groups.

All children and teens are capable of bullying at some point of time and it’s important to intervene in a helpful manner. Bear in mind that sometimes children are unaware of the effects bullying behavior can have on others. In most cases bullying is a relationship problem and children/teens who bully others may need help and support to learn better ways of relating to others.

Furthermore, many students engage in bullying for a short time only and then stop either



because they realize it's wrong or they are supported to learn more appropriate behavior.

In any case, there can be many reasons a child/teen might bully others, such as:

- **Peer pressure** – where another child is the 'chief bully' and your child feels he/she must join in the bullying to maintain the friendship and be accepted.
- **Unhealthy self-preservation** – teens might have been a victim of bullying themselves and decide to choose to be a bully in an unhealthy form of self-preservation. Or they may fear the bully turning on them, so join in the bullying behavior to direct attention away from themselves.
- **Poor anger management skills** – e.g. when teens haven't learned to control their emotions well and choose a few of the same people to take their anger out on, when things don't go their way
- **Poor impulse control** – e.g. might regularly lash out at the same kids in sport and games and is often an arrogant winner or a sore loser.
- **For social status (and power)** – some young people use fear or intimidation to try to be the most popular in an unhealthy peer group.
- **Poor self-worth** – when a young person pulls others down, out of envy or unhealthy comparison/ competition.
- **Lacking empathy** – for others who are different to themselves,
- **A combination** of any of the above.

What is very important is to discuss with the children/teens about positive ways to make friends and socialize with other children/teens, trying to find together what is acceptable behavior and what is not.

Here below some suggestions that can help you.

- **First of all, Ask** and try to understand why your child may be behaving in this way.

Ask them about what they think is going on, and why they are bullying someone else – remember not to criticize, blame or judge. Think about any issues or problems that the child/teen might be experiencing and that may be impacting on their behavior. Ask them what they think might help them to stop bullying.

- **Avoid shaming them and look for a pattern**

Communicate that they can talk to you about their own insecurities and fears. Take time to find out the underlying need for their behavior. Sometimes a student who bullies other children in one situation may themselves be bullied in another.

- Then try to **better Understand** Children/teens who bully need help to understand how their behavior affects others. They need support while learning to repair the harm they have caused. They need to develop their social and emotional skills.

- **Now Explain...**

Explain what bullying is and why it's not acceptable. Talk about the other person's feelings and help the child/teen to understand what it is like for the person being bullied

- **... but don't make excuses for your teen's behavior**

Remind the child/teen that bullying is a choice, and they can choose to stop. Talk

about the different forms of bullying (emotional, physical, and psychological, and be sure to include the online forms).

- **Finally Reassure**

Tell the child/teen that you have zero tolerance to bullying, but that you do support them. Reassure them that you are ready to help and support them in putting a stop to bullying behavior

- **... and Remember that YOU ARE NOT ALONE:** there is a community that can help the child/teen and that is composed of the school, the parents, and any organization the child/teen is in (sport organization, church, trainers or coaches, associations...) that is part of the educating community.

You can support the child/teen and plan a course of action involving the Educating Community members, because any child/teen's wellbeing is in the community rather than the school or the parents alone.

(My) child/teen witnessed bullying. What should I do?

Witnessing bullying can be distressing.

Bystanders can often experience feelings like helplessness, fear and worry and may even feel unsure if they should interfere, particularly if there are other people around. Bystander concerns include:

- not knowing what to do or not wanting to make the situation worse (for themselves)
- not knowing if their actions will make a difference
- feeling worried about their safety if they intervene
- feeling worried about the impact of acting on their friendships



- being anxious that they will be bullied because of intervening.

Remember that there are different roles when witnessing bullying:

- **Followers** (kids who assist the bully): These children may not start or lead the bullying, but may encourage it or/and join in.
- **Supporters** (kids who reinforce): These children are not directly involved, but they provide an audience. They may laugh or support the children who are bullying. This may encourage the bullying to continue.
- **Outsiders:** These children remain separate from the bullying situation. They neither reinforce the bullying behavior nor defend the child being bullied. Some may watch, but do not show they are on anyone's side. These children often want to help, but don't know how.
- **Defenders:** These children actively comfort the child being bullied and may come to the child's defense when bullying occurs.

A child/teen who witnesses or knows bullying is occurring also needs support.

Here below some suggestions that would help you as a parent of significant adult to the child:

First of all, try to encourage the child/teen to talk about what happened.

Let the child/teen know that you take a bullying situation seriously. Make them aware that speaking up while the bullying is happening can be scary, but it can make a big difference for the victim and for the whole group/class/community.

Reassure the child/teen

Let them know you understand their feelings and fears regarding any action that shows objecting and resistance to bullying. Respect the child/teen's judgment about whether it is safe to say something. They are the ones who really know the situation – so respect their feelings accept their assessment of the situation.

... Ask (positive and open) questions

Ask the child/teen what they want to do and if they want you to step in. Don't jump into without being asked to solve the problem. Explain to the child that being a good friend and an upstander, sometimes means giving honest feedback and pulling up your friends if they're bullying someone else. This can be pretty tricky, but of strategic importance.

Encourage the child/teen to take action

As hard as it can be, when someone stands up against the bullying behavior, often this stops the bullying instantly. If the child/teen is worried about being the first one to step in, you could suggest they should talk to a trusted friend and check whether he/she would support them.

...and Explain why

Tell the child/teen that reporting the bullying

is not only okay but it is a must, as in most of the cases the child will need help from adults to stop it. Point out that if they don't do anything the bullying will most probably continue and even get worse. Explain that it's normal to feel scared about stepping in. Also, put them in the victim's shoes - let try them to imagine what it's like to be the person who's being bullied.

... and Remember that YOU ARE NOT ALONE: there is a community that can help the child/teen and that is composed of the school, the parents and any organization the child/teen is in (sport organization, church, trainers or coaches, associations...) that is part of the educating community.

You can support the child/teen and plan a course of action involving the Educating Community members, because any child/teen's wellbeing is in the community rather than the school or the parents alone.

Finally, Check up regularly with the child/teen.

It is important to follow up with your child if the issue resolved. Keep the conversation ongoing and make sure all is settled and calm. Most probably it will take a while until an issue like (online) bullying is resolved, so check up regularly with your child about their experiences and their feelings. Ongoing support is really important.



What is and how can I deal with online (cyber) bullying?

Online bullying is a type of bullying that takes place on Internet and that occurs on social media, emails, games and other online platforms. Compared to other types of bullying, it's a repetitive behavior that aims to frighten, provoke or discredit the target by posting lies or embarrassing pictures of a person on social media, mocking, sending harmful messages or threats, impersonating someone and sending messages or posting content on his/her behalf. Unlike the face-to-face bullying, online bullying can continue 24/7 and being online is visible for much more people in comparison to school bullying. Physical threats/ abuses are not possible but the emotional and psychological damage that can be caused is much bigger. Cyber and face-to-face (or school) bullying usually occur at the same time, but cyberbullying leaves a fingerprint and evidence (such as text or voice messages) providing clues to help stop it later.

Reminder! Single incidents or random inappropriate actions by kid(s) toward other kid(s) are not bullying.

If your child/teen has been cyber-bullied, you have to make a screenshot and keep them as evidence - messages, images, everything – they are very important when it comes to reporting the bullying to the platform where it is happening, to the school, to the teacher, to the members of the educating community, to your local Safer Internet Center² or the police/cyber-crime unit. Keep in mind that in some countries online bullying is a crime³, but in others – it is not⁴.

² Safer Internet Centers in Europe: <https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en/policy/insafe-inhope>

³ Germany...

⁴ Bulgaria...



If the online bullying contains physical threats and you are really worried about your child/teen's safety, do not hesitate to contact the police immediately.

Bear in mind that each case of online bullying is different, and each child/teen can respond differently. There's no definite way to know if a child/teen is being bullied online, but if you think they might be, try asking them about it in a non-confrontational way.

Here are some warning signs that your child might be/is being cyberbullied?

- Drastic change in the use of devices (sudden increase or decrease).
- Begins to avoid several social situations.
- Displays extreme sadness, loss of interest and isolation of people and activities.
- Starts to become secretive by hiding screens when others are nearby.



- Sudden deactivation of social media accounts or the creation of new ones.
- Developed sleeping and/or food disorder (visible decrease or increase of eating)

Here below some deeper explanations:

Examples of online bullying include:

- Sending abusive or threatening text or email messages.
 - Spreading rumors via email or social networks
 - Posting unkind messages or inappropriate images toward someone.
 - Sharing someone's personal or embarrassing information online.
 - Creating false profiles, Imitating others online
 - Someone stealing your child's passwords or getting into their accounts and changing the information there;
 - Someone setting up fake profiles pretending to be your child, or posting messages or status updates from their accounts.
 - Excluding others online: someone trying to stop your child from communicating with others.
-

Online bullying is different to bullying in person in the following ways:

- A lot of people can see it or take part in it. Messages and images can be distributed quickly to a very wide audience – for example, rumors and images can be posted on public forums or sent to many people at once.
- It's often done in secret with the bully hiding who they are by creating false profiles or names, or sending anonymous messages
- It can be persistent and difficult to escape
- it can happen any time of the day or night
- It's difficult to remove it as it's shared online so it can be recorded and saved in different places.
- It's hard for the person being bullied to escape if they use technology often.

Research suggests that many students who are bullied online are also bullied in person. If a child/teen reports online bullying, it's important to check further to get the full picture.



What is my role as a parent?

Be a trusted adult:

Parents need to be the one trusted place kids can go when things go wrong offline and online. Yet they often are the one place kids avoid when things go wrong especially online. Why? Parents tend to overreact. Most children will avoid telling their parents about a (cyber)bullying incident fearing they will only make things worse – like stepping in without asking and calling the other parents, the school, blaming the victim or taking away Internet privileges. Unfortunately, they also sometimes underreact, and rarely get it “just right.”

Support but be fair:

Let your child know that you are going to address the bullying situation and ask them for specific examples that you can use. Be open to hear what the school has to say, as there may be a behavior issue in the classroom that you were not aware about, so getting all the facts from both the child and the school is important.

Take it seriously and follow up:

Let the school know so the guidance counselor/school psychologist can keep an eye out for in-school bullying and for how your child is handling things. You may want to notify your pediatrician, family counselor or Safer Internet Center(SIC) for support if things progress. It is crucial that you are there to provide the necessary support and love to your child. Make them feel secure. There are two things you must consider before anything else: is your child at risk of physical harm or assault? And how is he/she handling the attacks emotionally? Make sure that as parent you fully support your child in

either situation and contact all relevant parties that may intervene⁵.

Last, but not least: make sure that you do not behave aggressively to your child when you are upset with him/her. Using aggression as a parenting style often solves short-term problem of controlling children and get the needed compliance...at least initially. But all this comes at a cost. Aggression creates serious problems for children and the way they grow up and deal with the adult world. The aggressive parenting style very often leads kids to assume the role of a victim or aggressor/abuser because that's the role they've been assigned in their family or is a role model by their parents. Neither role increases the children's chances to develop their potential, skills and values.

Teachers also bully

As a parent you have to have in mind that some teachers also bully students/children in school. When a child confides in you that they are feeling targeted by a teacher, it can be difficult to know what steps to take. This can be a sensitive issue and it is important to get all the facts from your child so you are well prepared before approaching the school. It is important to note that generally speaking, teachers do a good job, often under stressful circumstances. However, there are times when pupils are being bullied by teaching staff and knowing how to deal with this is essential.

It is important, without disbelieving your child, to be able to distinguish whether this is bullying by a teacher or a conflict between your child and the teacher due to specific reasons. Here are some questions you can ask your child in a sensitive manner just to get all the facts right:

⁵ In some countries like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy... there is a special mechanism for preventing bullying and abuse at school which provides preventive and interventive measures in such cases.

- **How long has your child felt this way about this particular teacher?**
- **Have there been any issues of negative behavior from your child in the class?**
- **Has the teacher acted this way to other students?**

Let your child know that you are going to address this and ask them if you can use specific examples shared by him/her. Discuss with your child what sort of remarks are made and in what circumstances. Make sure that if there were humiliating or putting down verbal comments toward your child, to communicate it to the school.

Make some wary enquiries amongst the other parents' pupils in the class for any negative or hurting remarks that their children reported to them. If other parents also have concerns, then that might indicate a problem. It might be worth speaking informally to a teacher at the

school that either you or your child has a good relationship with. They may be able to give you some insight too on what is going on.

Depending on your relationship with the school, you might want to take the first step of resolving the situation by speaking face to face to the head teacher or the specific teacher your child has an issue with. A diplomatic way of dealing with such situation as early as possible is always the best. If you think and see that the situation is still pending/not resolved and it is becoming regular, you might want to consider making a written complaint to the director of the school/head teacher, and then to the governors/upper institution if the problem persists. It is also a good idea to have a copy of the school's mission statement or ethic rules and to be able to point out that your child is not being treated with the respect or courtesy. Furthermore, make a copy of the school's complaint policy to follow the necessary steps and go through the process in writing so you have a record of all communication and responses.



Some scenarios for testing what I've learnt

The scenarios below are designed to be realistic situations that you could encounter. They are meant to help you to think about what your response would be if you were confronted with any of these situations. After reading each scenario, you should answer the following questions. It might help to discuss your answers with other parents, other members of the community, teachers or child's school counselor.

- What would you ask/tell?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 1 – “Andrew”

During the last three months, Andrew has mentioned that other boys call him names like “fag” or “queer” and they have threatened to beat him up. He is so anxious that he refuses to use the bathroom at school all day. He runs home every day and has stopped walking with the other friends. His coach called you because he

has been repeatedly late to the playground. Andrew says that he is late because the mates at the football match take his clothes and hide them all around the locker room.

- What would you ask/tell him?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 2 – “Maria”

Maria has been a very popular girl since 1st grade and her friendships are important to her. Her friends are good students and are involved in many after school activities and sports. You have noticed that Maria does not include certain girls when they get together even though some of them are neighbors. You heard a telephone call where Maria made rude comments about how some girls dress, also making fun of their hair. She especially spoke about Amanda. You are friends with Amanda's parents.

- What would you ask/tell her?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?

- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 3 – “Ana”

Ana is a sensitive girl who tries hard to get along with everyone. Over the past several weeks she has been telling you about a classmate, Kate, who is being teased by several other girls in her grade. She says they are mean to her right in front of her face by whispering and not letting her sit with them at lunch. Ana says that she feels sorry for Kate but does not know what to do. Ana also makes you read some text messages she received about Kate. The texts were mean and hurtful and intended to destroy any friendships that Kate has. Ana becomes tearful and tells you that she is fearful the girls will do the same thing to her if tries to help Kate.

- What would you ask/tell her?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 4 – “Paul”

Paul is a 5thgrader in a public school. He told you one day that a group of classmates had been spreading hurtful rumors about him via Instagram and WhatsApp. In addition, they made fun of his academic excellence almost daily. They also force him to do their homework.

- What would you ask/tell him?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 5 – “Peter”

Peter is a 12-year-old boy in 6th grade. One day he shares with you that one of the classmates took photos of him without his permission and posted them on Instagram with offensive captions. Apparently, this is the same boy that have been bullying his classmates offline for a while now, but this is the first time he does it online.

- What would you ask/tell him?
- What would you do?

- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 6 – “Luisa”

Your daughter Luisa is growing and she’s changing. For this reason, she’s repeatedly teased and called “weird” by her classmate, Sam, even though she is simply being herself with new characteristics — she likes wearing shorter skirts, putting on some make up, and wearing her favorite polka-dot boots. Luisa initially reacts to the bullying by withdrawing, hiding her new colorful nature, and trying to be like she was. You noticed that and you feel the need to make her know that growing means accepting and making the others accept the changes.

- What would you ask/tell her?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 7 – “Steve”

During most of the semester, Steve was part of what had seemed to be a pretty tight group of students who often would sit together in class and volunteer to work as a team on class projects. For the last few weeks, when Steve would sit with the group, the other members would ignore him, acting as if he weren’t there. Steve has now started sitting on the other side of the room, away from the group. Steve’s mom has called to express concern that her son is becoming increasingly withdrawn at home and talks about wanting to change schools. The previous evening, she walked into Steve’s room and found horrible messages addressed to him on a social media app, which he had left open.

The messages were from the same group of students with whom Steve had been a friend to. When she confronted her son about the messages, he broke down and said that the messages have appeared every night for the past few weeks.

- What would you ask/tell him?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Scenario 8 – “Richard”

Your son Richard —usually a friendly, engaged student in his classroom—has started sitting in the back of the room and no longer gets involved much in class discussions. One day you went to his school and noticed that, as he was leaving class, two other students walking out of class right behind your son were whispering to each other and giggling.

- What would you ask/tell him?
- What would you do?
- What would your emotional reaction to the situation be?
- What steps would you take?
- How can you contribute to solving this situation?
- What would be the role of the community in helping you to solve the situation?



Be the HERO
for reducing bullying to ZERO!

Some final suggestions for parents and members of the community: closing tips about how to behave

Manage your own feelings first.

We often forget to do this. Stay calm, and project the assurance to your child/teen that you will see to their protection and safety. If they are the target of, or witness to the bullying, assure them it is not their fault.

Talk with the child/teen and gently try to elicit the story

When you first talk with your child/teen about bullying, be prepared to listen without judgment, and provide a safe and supportive place where the child/teen can work out his or her feelings. Children/teens may not be ready to open right away as they, too, are dealing with the emotional effects of bullying and may be feeling insecure, frightened, vulnerable, angry, or sad. When a child/teen begins to tell their story, just listen, and avoid making judgmental comments. It's important to learn as much as possible about the situation, such as how long the behavior has been happening, who has been involved, and what steps have been taken. Encourage the child/teen to talk and let them know they are not alone and you are there to help. Pose the following questions to yourself: Can you support the child/teen to act first without your direct involvement? This might involve coming up with concrete problem-solving strategies together. Or it may be too much for a child/teen to manage, and you need to work behind the scenes with school personnel.

Try to recognize the signs of bullying

We just said that children/teens have many reasons for not telling adults about bullying situations.

- They are ashamed of being bullied.

- They are afraid of retaliation.
- They don't think anyone can or will help.
- They have bought into the lie that being bullied is part of growing up.
- Children who are also bullied by an adult may believe that it is permitted to be bullied.
- They have learned that "ratting" is not cool.

Although they do not tell us outright, they do give us clues.

For instance, a child/teen could be a victim of bullying if he/she:

- Is reluctant or refuses to go to school
- Clams up when you try to discuss school
- Demands some sort of change in a long-standing routine, like riding the bus to school or going to the park on Saturdays
- Does not want to participate in after-school activities or play with old friends
- Seems hungrier than usual after school – it might be a sign that someone is stealing his lunch money or that he is unwilling to brave the lunchtime session
- Shows signs of physical distress such as headaches, stomach-aches, or nausea
- Goes to the nurse in order to avoid going to class
- Performance in school (grades, homework, attendance) suddenly declines
- Acts sullen, angry, and frequently wants to be left alone
- Uncharacteristically uses bad language
- Shows marked behavior change after computer time or a phone call
- Starts asking for more lunch or transportation money without a clear explanation of why it is needed

- Has unexplained bruises or injuries

Make sure the child/teen knows:

- It is NOT their fault. They are not to blame.
- They are NOT alone. You are here to help.
- Bullying is never okay, and they have the right to be safe.
- No one deserves to be bullied.

Support and empower the child/teen

After hearing the child/teen's story, empower them to create an action plan to help stop the bullying. Talk with the child/teen about ways you can support them as well as intervention strategies they can use, such as working with the school or the community or advocating on their own. Creating a plan that works with the child/teen's strengths and abilities can help build self-confidence and resilience. Make sure to share these agreed-upon strategies with those involved in the child/teen's life, such as teachers, coaches, the members of the community who interact with the child/teen daily.

Consider appealing to the parents of other children involved

Although this can be controversial, every situation is different. The first ground rule of having a conversation is that both of you need to be capable of staying constructive.

The second rule is that expressing yourself might not guarantee the impact you desire, so accept that sometimes just having your say is enough and actual change might have to come from a different direction. If there is bullying at school, it is likely that a child/teen is not the only one affected. You might find support by enlisting other parents whose children are affected and then appeal to the school together.

Involve the school

(e.g., the classroom teacher, the after-school teacher), but work your way up the administration if there isn't immediate action. Try to put in place a collaborative, problem-solving approach that can become a win-win strategy so as to improve the school climate for everyone.

Think through who else should be involved in the community

You should also create a strategy about how to involve others that can help the child/teen other than the school: community members, sport trainers, other health professionals for advice.... If the situation doesn't change, your plan might include steps to contact local law enforcement or legal counsel. Bear in mind that bullying touches many lives, and it might be happening to others in your child/teen's school or community. You can help by raising awareness through community events, attending workshops or trainings in your community, or sharing information with others.

Reactions to Avoid

- Telling the child/teen to stand up to the bully. This can imply that it is the child/teen's responsibility to handle the situation. While there is a ring of truth to this statement (being assertive is often a good response) sending a child/teen back into the situation without further information will probably cause more harm. A more effective response is to brainstorm options with the child/teen about what you can do as a team to respond to the situation.
- Telling the child/teen to ignore the bully. This is easier said than done. The child/teen has probably tried ignoring the situation, which is a typical response for children and teens. If that method had been effective, however, there wouldn't be a need for a

child/teen to seek your help. Remember, when children tell a parent or an adult they trust about bullying, they are looking for their guidance for a solution that makes them feel empowered. Involve them in the process of determining next steps.



Glossary

Bullying - form of aggressive behavior that occurs in an intentional and repeated manner causing another child to feel hurt.

Online bullying - bullying that is happening on Internet, often through the social media.

Bully - someone who bullies others to gain status, respect and recognition, or because of the need to be popular and liked by his/her peers.

Victim of bullying - someone who is repeatedly and continuously insulted, mocked and abused physically (beaten).

Follower (assistant) - does not initiate, but takes an active role in the bullying behavior

Supporter - someone who supports the bully and reinforces the bullying indirectly.

Defender - someone who supports the victim of bullying in different ways.

Outsiders - stay away, do not taking sides with anyone or become actively involved, but allow the bullying to continue by their 'silent approval'.

Bystander - can have a different role when it comes to bullying such as defender, outsider, supporter.

Safer Internet Centers (SICs) - NGOs across Europe supporting children, parents and educational professionals typically comprising an Awareness center, Helpline, Hotline and Youth Panel. You can find your SIC at:

<https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en/policy/insafe-inhope>

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