



Resource 12

Bullying

Being bullied or bullying is not just a part of growing up! Use this information to help you better understand bullying.

Bullying among elementary school children and teenagers is a growing problem in many schools. It's happening in urban, suburban and rural schools. Children who have learning or other disabilities seem to be especially prone to bullying. While bullying isn't new, professionals today have a new level of understanding of the problem. Bullying is a learned behavior that can be prevented! Effective bullying prevention programs are being used in many school systems throughout New Mexico. It's important for parents, students, teachers and school administrators to understand and learn to manage bullying that occurs at school and elsewhere.

What is Bullying?

Bullying may involve physical aggression such as fighting, shoving or kicking; verbal aggression such as name calling; or more subtle acts such as socially isolating another child. It is important for adults and youth to understand the difference between bullying and normal conflict.

Normal Conflict	Bullying
Happens occasionally	Happens repeatedly
Accidental	Done on purpose
Not serious	Serious — threat of physical or emotional harm
Equal emotional reaction	Strong emotional reaction on part of the victim
Not seeking power or attention	Seeking power or control
Not trying to get something	Trying to gain material things or power
Remorseful — takes responsibility	No remorse — blames victim
Effort to solve the problem	No effort to solve the problem

If you're a parent concerned about bullying, it's important to recognize the signs that a child is a bully, as well as the signs of one who is being victimized. Being alert and observant is critical, since victims are often reluctant to report bullying. Many victims don't report it to their parents or teachers because they're embarrassed or humiliated by the bullying. They may assume that adults will accuse them of tattling or will tell them to deal with it themselves. If bullying behavior is reported, bullies usually deny their involvement.

What can parents of the victim do?

If you know or suspect your child is being bullied, but the school hasn't communicated with you about the situation, you should contact your child's teacher(s) right away. Keep in mind that your primary goal should be to get the school's cooperation to get the bullying to stop. Knowing your own child is being victimized can evoke strong feelings, but you'll get much more cooperation from school personnel if you can stick to the facts and not become emotional. While you may want assurance that everyone involved is punished, try to focus on putting an end to the bullying. If your child is a victim of bullying, try helping him with the following strategies:

- Listen carefully to your child's reports of being bullied. Be sympathetic and take the problem seriously. Be careful not to overreact or under-react.



- Do not blame the victim. When a child finally works up the courage to report bullying, it isn't appropriate to criticize him for causing it or not handling the situation correctly. For example, don't ask, "Well, what did you do to bring it on?"
- Realize that for a child who is being bullied, home is a refuge. Expect the child to have some difficult times in dealing with victimization. Talk to the school counselor for support, if needed.
- Encourage your child to keep talking to you. Spend extra time together. Provide constant support and encouragement.

What can the parents of the bully do?

Parents of bullies should understand that children who aggressively bully peers are at increased risk for engaging in antisocial or criminal behavior in the future. It is therefore important to try to help bullies change their negative attitudes and behavior toward others.

- Take the problem seriously. Resist a tendency to deny the problem or to discount the seriousness of it. Avoid denial thinking such as "Bullying is just a natural part of growing up."
- Listen carefully and check out the facts. Do not believe everything your child tells you. Children who bully are good at manipulating adults and can be very artful at weaving a story that makes them look innocent.
- The school or the victim's parents may be documenting reports of your child's bullying behaviors. It doesn't serve your child to deny his involvement if there is evidence to the contrary. Check out the dates and the activities and determine if there is a pattern in his bullying behavior.
- Explore the reasons for your child's negative behavior. Speak with the school counselor or get professional help, if necessary, for your child and/or your family.

What can — and should — parents expect the school to do?

Whether your child is a bully, victim or bystander, you should expect the following from the school:

- School administrators, teachers, counselors and staff should take bullying problems seriously. The school should investigate the situation and let you know what steps they're taking to help stop the bullying.
- Written school policies and rules against bullying, harassment and intimidation should be in place and be enforced.
- Teachers, counselors and administrators should speak to the bully and his or her parents. They should also tell the child what the consequences will be if he or she doesn't stop bullying others. If the bullying continues, the school should enforce the pre-determined consequences immediately.
- Teachers and administrators should increase adult supervision in the areas of the school campus where bullying incidents are most likely to occur.
- School personnel should be informed about the children who are being victimized by bullies so they can monitor and provide support to the victims as needed. They should also communicate often with the victims' parents to tell them how the situation is being handled at school.

Finally, be aware that bullying prevention programs in schools are often a very effective way to stop bullying. If you believe that your child's school would benefit from a bullying prevention program, get involved in finding out how to bring such a program into the school.