

What to do if you are a parent of a child who bullies

Michelle Roberts



Being told that your child is bullying is a worrying thing for a parent or carer. Bullying hurts both the person who is bullied and the person who is doing the bullying.

If someone tells you that your child is bullying or you observe him or her bullying, it is important to stay calm and to talk with your child about what they are doing.

Why do some children bully?

- To improve status with peer group
- To gain a strong social position
- To gain power and attention within the group
- To avoid being bullied

Children who bully are more likely to become aggressive adults

An Australian survey revealed that 8% of boys and 4% of girls reported that they repeatedly bully. 1 in 6 students reported being bullied regularly. Young people who bully over a period of time are more likely to have subsequent issues with substance abuse, have low academic achievement, show ongoing anti social behaviour and to be involved in spousal abuse.

What to do if your child is bullying

Stepping in early is more likely to stop the problem behaviour

Talk with your child about what they are doing and ask why

Listen to their reasoning and correct any faulty thinking that might lead to bullying

Tell your child that you think their behaviour is unacceptable and that you want it to stop

Make clear which behaviours are bullying and alternatives that are more acceptable

Teach your child empathy; it is important that children learn to understand emotionally how it feels to be the other person. Children who are able to imagine being the other person are less likely to bully; encourage them to think about how they would feel if it was them who was being bullied or treated that way.

Model appropriate behaviour yourself and practise good social behaviours with your child

Set limits on behaviour, be clear about what is acceptable and what is not

Monitor their behaviour including Internet and mobile phone use

Share the concern with their teacher, carer or adult friends

What to do if you are a parent of a child who bullies

Michelle Roberts

- Have a consistent plan for alerting your child to when they are using bullying behaviours and to healthier ways of behaving
- Alerting your child to bullying behaviours should be done quietly and respectfully. Look at them directly and ask them to listen carefully
- Discuss the concerning behaviour with them.
- Express concern for the wellbeing of the person being bullied and encourage your child to think about how distressing it must be for that child
- Encourage your child to think about what might be done to improve matters, help them to solve the problem of their behaviour and the issue they have had with the other person and to come up with an acceptable solution
- Ask the teacher and school to help with reminding the students that being a bystander to bullying is not acceptable and that the responsibility for getting along is a shared responsibility
- Bullying differs to normal conflict, peer mediation is not recommended

Provide positive attention for healthy behaviour and social interactions. A behaviour contract that clearly states acceptable and unacceptable behaviours with rewards for stopping bullying can help change problem behaviours

Speak with a counsellor if your child continues to bully

Resources

Raising children network

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/search.aspx?q=bullying&x=0&y=0>

National centre against bullying

<http://www.ncab.org.au>

Michelle Roberts

School Psychologist, Child, Adolescent & Schools
Trauma & Disaster consultant

Victoria

For more information visit:

Trauma and Grief Network

www.tgn.anu.edu.au