



Tender Hearts Child Therapy Center

Parent Newsletter

October 2012

Bullying: Tips for Parents

We see it in the news all the time, children who take drastic measures because they have been bullied. So what can parents do if they suspect their child is being bullied? The following are practical tips and strategies for parents.

If you suspect your child is being bullied. . .

Signs to look for:

- * The child has a sudden loss of interest in school or school work, a fear to go to school, or their school performance has taken a dramatic downturn.
- * The child complains of headaches, stomach aches or other physical ailments
- * The child has trouble sleeping or wakes frequently from unexplained nightmares
- * The child has scratches, bruises, or cuts that can't be explained
- * The child has torn or damaged clothing or missing belongings
- * The child has few or no friends

Of course any one of these things by itself is not necessarily a sign of bullying. If you suspect your child might be bullied, the best thing to do is talk to your child. Ask your child questions about what goes on at school or wherever the bullying might be taking place. Questions like, "Who do you sit with at lunch?" or "Do you have a friend you play with at recess?" are good starters. If your child still isn't opening up, you could try more direct questions like, "I'm worried about you. Is someone picking on you at school?" If your child doesn't open up and you still suspect he or she may be bullied, talk to your child's teacher. Explain your concerns and see if they might know more about what is going on.

Most importantly, keep the lines of communication open between you and your child. Your child might not tell you he or she is being bullied the first time you ask, but if you've established yourself as a caring parent, then your child is more likely to tell you what is going on.

I know my child is being bullied. Now what?

If you find out your child is being bullied, you need to take some additional steps. First, don't blame your child. If your child tells you that he is being bullied, don't ask him what he did to aggravate the bully. Doing so will only close the doors of communication between you and your child as well as make him feel like he is the one in the wrong.

Second, talk to your child about the bullying. Gather as much information from your child as you can. Listen to them as they tell you what happened. Try to find out who is doing the bullying, what they are doing, where it is occurring, and who else might have witnessed the event(s). This information will be useful in dealing with the bullying.

In our office, I don't recommend parents encourage physical retaliation. Saying something like, "Well just hit him back" won't likely solve the situation and may cause your child to get in trouble as well.

Another common mistake parents make is calling the bully's parents. This idea is unlikely to solve the situation and may only make matters worse for your child.

If the bullying is occurring at school, contact your child's teacher and principal and let them know what is going on. Be sure to tell your child's teacher and principal the facts that your child reported to you. School officials must be involved in order for anything significant to change. If the bullying does not stop after your first contact, call your child's school again. Express to them that the bullying situation has not stopped and find out what steps they have taken so far to stop the bullying.

It is important to get your child's school involved. Remember that teachers have many students to keep up with and simply cannot monitor every interaction that occurs on school grounds. Furthermore, most bullying occurs when school personnel are not readily available to intervene, such as in the bathroom, at the bus stop, etc. If you make an effort to work collaboratively with your child's teacher and principal, the problem can generally be resolved in a reasonable amount of time.

What can I do so that my child doesn't become a target for continued bullying?

Here are some steps parents can take to help prevent their child from becoming, or remaining, a target for bullying. One of the best ways to help arm your child against bullies is to build his or her confidence. Suggest and facilitate extracurricular activities that your child may be interested in. Build his or her self-confidence by playing on his or her talents. If your child is athletic, enter him in a new sport. If your child likes to read, find a book club he can participate in. New extracurricular activities are also a good way for your child to meet new friends outside of the bullying environment. Sometimes this fresh start is just what your child might need to feel better about him or herself.

You also may need to step back from the situation and evaluate it as objectively as you can. Consider to yourself what qualities your child might have that may be making him a target for bullies. Again, never blame your child, but look critically for a possible explanation. If your child has poor social skills, this might be a cause of the bullying. If your child is hyperactive, overly talkative, or doesn't play well with others, then it might be a good idea to take your child to a counselor in order to better develop his or her social skills and, therefore, reduce the chances that he or she becomes a target for bullies in the future.

Finally, remember to always keep the doors of communication open. Reassure your child that telling you about the bullying was the right thing to do and that you are there to support him or her at all times.