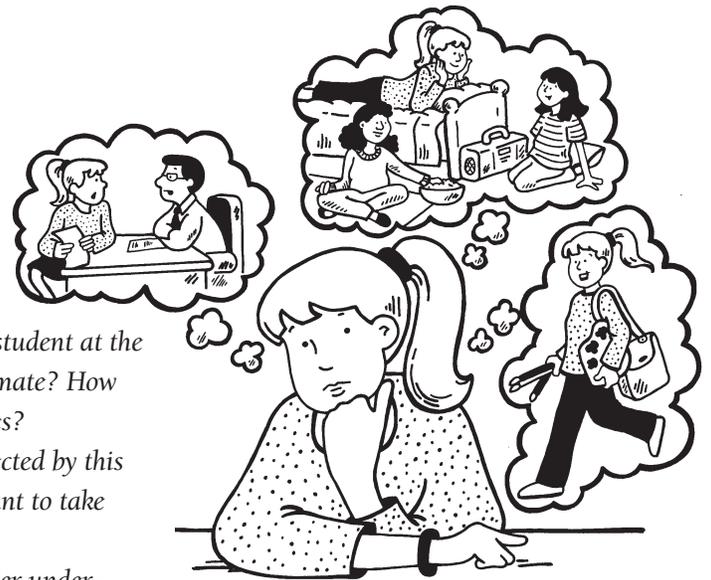


No More Bullying!

What does a bully look like? Is he the child who beats up a smaller student at the bus stop? Or is she the popular girl who spreads rumors about a classmate? How about the anonymous youngster who sends threatening online messages?

All of these children are bullying others. And many students are affected by this problem — whether they are victims, bullies, or witnesses. It is important to take the issue seriously and not chalk it up to typical kid behavior.

This question-and-answer guide can help you and your middle grader understand, and put an end to, bullying.



Q: What counts as bullying?

A: When a child uses his size, strength, or social or emotional influence to hurt another youngster, he is being a bully. He might use words (name-calling, teasing) or force (tripping, shoving). Or he may bully by leaving someone out or encouraging others not to be friends with that person.

Q: What should I do if I suspect my middle grader is being bullied?

A: Approach the subject gently by asking general questions, such as “Do you think bullying is a problem at your school?” or “Do you know anybody who is bullied or teased?” Then follow up with an invitation for him to confide in you: “If you were being bullied, I would want you to tell me so I could help.”

If your child admits to being bullied, ask questions to learn more. *Examples:* “How many times has this happened?” or “When and where does the bully bother you?” Listen to his answers, and tell him you believe him. Be sure to let him know it isn’t his fault. Then, ask him to choose an adult at school you can both talk to about the problem (a favorite teacher, his basketball coach).

Finally, help your middle grader brainstorm ways to handle the situation. You might suggest that he avoid being alone at bus stops or in the bathroom, stay calm and walk away

if he’s bothered, and learn the bully’s schedule so he can stay away from him. Role-play responses he can use if he’s taunted (“Whatever,” or “So what?”).



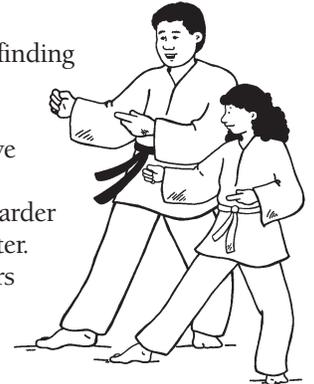
Note: Report the problem to your child’s guidance counselor so teachers and staff can watch out for other problems.

Q: How can I keep my child from becoming a target?

A: A key ingredient is confidence. Youngsters who feel good about themselves and can shake off taunts easily are no fun for a bully.

Boost your child’s confidence by finding activities she enjoys. *Examples:* team sports (soccer, baseball), individual sports (martial arts, running), creative activities (drama, art classes).

Having friends will also make it harder for bullies to single out your youngster. You can help by exposing her to peers who share her interests. For example, a budding dancer might find friends in a ballet class.



Q: I think my child may be bullying a classmate. What should I do?

A: It’s important to find out and step in right away. Not only can your youngster’s behavior get her into trouble at school, but children who bully are more likely to get in trouble in the workplace or with the law when they’re older.

Look for signs that your youngster may be prone to bullying. These include getting angry or frustrated easily, suggesting violence as a solution to problems, frequently saying mean things about others, getting into fights at school, or coming home with items that don’t belong to her.

If you see any of these red flags, or have a gut feeling, talk to your middle grader immediately. Discuss how serious bullying is, and let her know that you won’t tolerate it. Then,

continued



contact the school and request a meeting to discuss the situation. Your child may need counseling—the school guidance office can give you more information.

Q: *What are the consequences of bullying?*

A: Bullying can damage self-esteem. It may lead to lack of a social life, poor grades, and excessive school absences.

In extreme cases, being a bully or the victim of a bully can have very serious long-term consequences, such as depression, dropping out of school, criminal behavior, and even suicide.

Q: *Could my child be a victim without my knowledge?*



A: Yes. Children who are bullied often keep quiet. They may be embarrassed, be afraid the bully will get back at them for telling, or just believe there's nothing you can do. Watch for these signs, and talk to your child if she:

- doesn't want to go to school or stays home with stomachaches or

headaches that don't seem real;

- avoids activities;
- gets much lower grades;
- has unexplained injuries;
- loses money and possessions without a believable explanation; or
- withdraws from friends and family.

Q: *My child witnessed one of his classmates harassing another. What can he do about it?*

A: Since bullies want an audience, bystanders play an important role. Encourage your youngster not to stand and watch someone

being bullied. If he sees someone physically hurting someone else, he should get a teacher or staff member immediately.

Your child can help a victim who is being verbally harassed by speaking to him—and ignoring the bully at the same time. He might say, “Come on. Let’s get out of here.” Once they’re away from the bully, he can suggest that his classmate talk to a teacher or another adult about what happened.

Cyberbullying

With cell phones, instant messaging, and social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, today’s kids are more connected than ever—and more likely to encounter cyberbullies.

These technology abusers start online fights, post cruel messages, make threats, and stalk their victims just as bullies do in person. The difference is that they can do so while remaining anonymous and invisible.



Cut your child's risks:

- Remind him never to post anything that could be used to embarrass him, such as an inappropriate photo or comment.
- Insist that he keep social networking profiles private and accept e-mails and messages only from people he knows well.
- Visit sites where he posts information and be aware of what goes on there. Let him know you aren't spying on him, but that you want to know who he's spending time with and what he's doing, just as you do in “real life.”

If your middle grader is being harassed by a cyberbully, you should:

- Make sure he knows to ignore the bully (turn his cell phone off, leave the computer). Responding will only make matters worse.
- Notify your Internet service provider or the Web site manager. Most have policies against using accounts for harassment. If a bully is hiding behind a screen name, the provider or Webmaster may be able to help with identification.
- Call the police if the harassment involves threats and you believe your child is in danger.

Middle Years