

What to Do About Bullying

When a child is bullied, it affects everyone involved: the student who is targeted, the person doing the bullying, and those who witness it. Here are ways parents can help tweens stay safer by preventing or responding to bullying.



Understand bullying

Having a clear picture of what bullying is can help you recognize it and discuss it with your middle grader.

Bullying happens when a person with more power repeatedly mistreats someone physically or emotionally. The tween doing the bullying might be seen as more powerful because she's stronger or more popular, or she possesses information (including photos or videos) that could hurt someone's reputation.

The bullying itself can take many forms. These include making fun of people, name-calling, spreading rumors, sharing photos to humiliate someone, shoving and tripping, and intentionally leaving peers out to be cruel. And it may happen in person or online (cyberbullying).

Respond effectively

Whether your middle grader is a witness or is directly involved in bullying, these suggestions can make a difference.

Has your child witnessed bullying?

■ **What to do:** Your tween can offer support to the child who is being bullied. He could give the target a way out of the situation ("Want to shoot hoops with me?"), ask if he's okay, and let him know that he doesn't deserve to be bullied. Your child might offer to go with the student to tell an adult, then check up on him later to see how he's doing.



■ **What to avoid:** Your middle grader shouldn't confront a bully if she feels unsafe. Also, make sure she knows never to join in or laugh when someone is being bullied. Finally, standing by and doing nothing gives the person who is bullying an audience and sends the message that the behavior is okay.

Is your child bullying others?

■ **What to look for:** Signs your child may be participating in bullying include becoming more aggressive, hanging out with peers who bully, or getting into fights. He might come home with unexplained belongings or money, and express excessive worry about being popular.

■ **What to do:** If you find out that your tween has bullied someone, let her know you won't tolerate it. Talk about why she may be bullying, whether it's because she's jealous of someone or wants to fit in with a certain group. Then, set consequences that help her learn why bullying is wrong. Perhaps she could read books or articles about bullying, then write about what she learned and share it with you. Have her write a sincere apology to the target or replace damaged belongings.

■ **What to avoid:** It's important not to dismiss bullying as a normal part of growing up. Also, don't excuse his behavior because he's dealing with stress or going through a difficult time. The school counselor could help him with issues or emotions that are fueling the bullying.



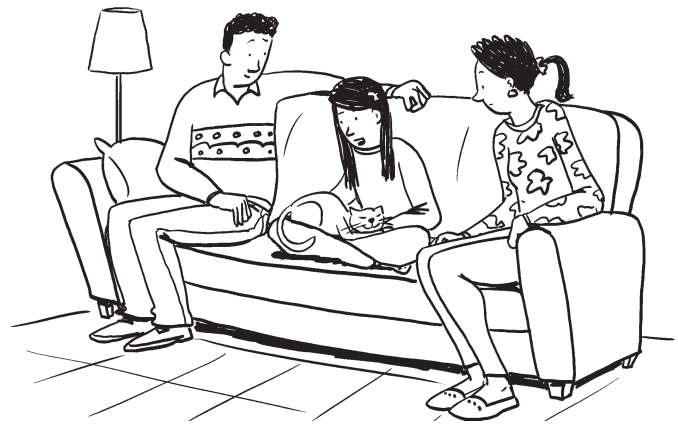


■ **What to do:** If your tween is being targeted, let her know it's not her fault and that she's not alone. Explain that she has the right to be safe and that you will support her. Write down specific details, including when and where incidents took place and who was involved. Then, share the information with the school counselor, and find out what he will do and what steps you should take. As time goes by, check in with your child and the counselor to make sure the bullying has stopped.

■ **What to avoid:** Don't encourage your middle schooler to stand up to the bully, since doing so could put him in danger or, if he fights back, lead to his being disciplined at school. Also, don't simply ignore the bullying and assume it will stop on its own. Finally, resist the urge to contact the bully or his parents directly. Instead, let the school communicate with them.

Is your middle grader being bullied?

■ **What to look for:** Stay in touch with your tween by having regular conversations with him, and keep an eye out for warning signs. A child who is bullied might want to avoid school or friends. He may have falling grades, lost or damaged belongings, unexplained injuries, stomachaches or headaches, or trouble sleeping. Bullying can also lead to anxiety, depression, or self-injury like cutting.



A bullying "antidote"

Tweens who understand others' feelings and show kindness to people are less likely to bully—and more likely to stand up for those who are bullied. Try these tips to raise a child who is empathetic and kind.

Encourage empathy

Have your middle grader pay attention to her own emotions and those of others. Being aware of feelings may make her less likely to participate in bullying. Say she mentions that a friend didn't get chosen for a team at school. You might say, "Your friend must feel disappointed." Then, suggest that she show empathy by taking action. For example, she could plan to do a special activity with her friend to make her feel better.



Foster kindness

Teaching your middle grader to care about people can help prevent bullying. As part of everyday life, look for small acts of kindness to do together. You might run an errand for a sick neighbor. Or get a card for a relative you don't see often, just to let her know you're thinking of her. Consider finding ways to volunteer, like sorting donations at a food bank or babysitting during English-language classes at the library. Also, encourage your tween to show kindness in school by reaching out to students who are often alone or who struggle in class. Perhaps he'll invite someone to run laps with him during PE or to study together after school.

Middle Years