



Playbook 1 of 3



A Bullying Resource for Parents & Caring Adults

How to Help a Child Being Bullied



→ Who is this Playbook for?

This Playbook is the **first** in a series.

Maybe you noticed your child has lost some friends. Or maybe your child is spending more time in their room than normal and no longer wants to go to soccer practice. Maybe a teacher just called to report something that troubled you. You're probably reading this Playbook because you believe your child might be the target of bullying.

This can bring up many feelings for you: anxiety for your child, harsh reminders of bullying you might have experienced, and anger at the bully. Above all, you're probably wondering what to do next. That's why we created this Playbook: to help parents like you.

We're going to guide you step-by-step through understanding bullying, how to approach and hold a conversation with your child, and more. You're not the first parent to face this kind of situation and you won't be the last. There's a lot of research and experience available to help—and we're going to boil it down into concrete actions you can take right now to make a seemingly bad situation better.

While this Playbook is intended for **parents**, any **caring adult** (i.e., coaches, teachers, counselors, extended family members) can greatly benefit from the tools you'll find here.

In Playbooks 1 and 2, we explain bullying in a way that will help parents to address it at home and in partnership with the school. We take both parents of children who are bullying others and parents of children who are being bullied through a 4-Step Action Plan to address the problem at home and school. If you are part of one of those two groups, we hope you'll start with the Playbook most relevant to you.

In Playbook 3, we go beyond the immediate crisis and look to the bigger picture: the proactive steps caring adults can take with their kids to build a culture of kindness, empathy, and upstanding. Here, we explain what each of those words mean—and how cultivating them can help to eliminate bullying.

**If your child is being bullied,
go to Playbook 1:**
[How to Help a Child Being
Bullied](#)

**If your child is bullying other kids,
go to Playbook 2:**
[How to Help a Child to Stop
Bullying Other Kids](#)

**For caring adults wanting to build a
culture of kindness, go to Playbook 3:**
[How to Support the Development of
Kindness and Empathy in Our Youth](#)

→ How to use this Playbook

This playbook is a set of generalized recommendations and are not universal strategies or facts for every child or context.

For more specialized support, reach out to your child's teacher, school, coach, or consider contacting a licensed professional such as a child psychologist or social worker.

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Bullying 101: What Bullying Looks Like

What Is Bullying?

Bullying is **any unwanted**, intentional aggressive behavior that causes physical, emotional, educational, and/or psychological harm to others. Youth who are bullied have difficulty stopping the action and struggle to defend themselves, often resulting in the behavior that is **repeated over time**. Bullying usually involves an **“imbalance of power”** where the child exhibiting bullying behavior acts to take control or harm others.^{1,2}

The **three** major indicators of bullying are...

Behavior that is unwanted and intentionally aggressive

Behavior that involves an imbalance of power between two people who are not friends

Behavior that is repeated over time

In “The 2022 Choose Kindness Project Survey,” teens reported that the number one reason they either experienced or saw bullying was based on **appearance** and **weight**.

At the end of the day, youth can be bullied for anything that’s considered “different” by the person doing the bullying. Sometimes, that can look like able-bodied students teasing one with disabilities, or kids in a majority racial group targeting a member of a “minority.” When bullying is based on a person’s own bias, it is called [bias-based bullying](#).

What Does Bullying Look Like?

Bullying can take place anywhere, both in and out of school, and online (called [cyberbullying](#)).



More than 1/3 of teens reported they have been bullied in the past year, but that number is significantly higher for some groups. Bullying happens in different places, but respondents most frequently report incidents at school.

—“The 2022 Choose Kindness Project Survey,”
conducted by Ipsos

Kinds of Bullying:¹



Social

Spreading rumors or lies about others, leaving someone out of the group (which can happen in person and online)



Verbal

Name calling, teasing, making threats to cause damage or harm to others (both in person and online)



Physical

Exhibiting violent behavior to hurt others or their belongings/property, forcing someone to do something they don’t want to do (primarily, in person)

Bullying Across Different Age Groups

Bullying is generally experienced toward the end of elementary school and peaks in middle school, while remaining steady or declining somewhat in high school.³ Youth of all ages are capable of showing bullying behavior, but the types of behavior they exhibit can change as they get older. Below are the most common types of bullying based on age:

YOUNGER KIDS Physical and verbal bullying are most common during the end of elementary school.

OLDER KIDS

As kids reach adolescence, physical and verbal bullying are seen less often. However, relational/social bullying, particularly through cyberbullying, becomes the most prevalent type of bullying during youth's tween and teen years.⁴ **Middle school, specifically 6th grade, is when most youth experience bullying. As tweens and teens increasingly care more about fitting in and being accepted by their peer groups, some believe that making fun of those who don't "fit in" will make them more popular.**⁵ Bullying tends to decline as youth reach later adolescence (think high school and early adulthood), as they learn to control their emotions and thoughts.³

What Are the Warning Signs?

If your child is **persistently** and **intentionally** being hurt, either physically, emotionally, or psychologically, and **unable to make the situation stop**, they are likely being bullied.

The following are common warning signs of being bullied*.^{6,7}



Physical warning signs

- Unexplainable injuries (more common for elementary school children)
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, jewelry, or other personal items (more common for middle and high school youth)



Mental-Health warning signs

- Excessive worry, like fighting to avoid going to school
- Changes in school performance
- Hyperactivity
- Frequent nightmares
- Avoidance of social activities, like not wanting to go to school or be with friends
- Feeling sad or low
- Problems with concentration and learning
- Difficulty carrying out daily activities
- Extreme mood changes, such as frequent temper tantrums for younger kids
- Prolonged feelings of irritability or anger
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits, such as the overuse of alcohol or drugs
- Physical ailments without obvious causes such as headaches, stomach aches, or vague "aches and pains"
- Intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance
- Thoughts of suicide

* It's important to note that bullying can be one possible cause of these warning signs, as there are many different factors that can contribute to your child's mental health.

Among teens who have been bullied,

22%

report someone sent them threatening messages through social media, texting, or online.

—“The 2022 Choose Kindness Project Survey,”
conducted by Ipsos



Only **1 in 10** teens report telling their parents that they are being cyberbullied.⁵³

How Can You Spot Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying (bullying that happens online) can occur via social media, gaming, or any platform where people can connect digitally. It can be more difficult to spot, as adults can't monitor every single message their child sends or every video they post. To the right are a couple of common behaviors children show if they are involved (either being bullied or bullying others) in cyberbullying.^{9,10}

1. Your child significantly increases or decreases their device use, including texting
2. Your child shows apparent emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their device
 - Someone who is bullied might show anger or frustration when they receive hurtful messages from an anonymous account
3. Your child hides their screen or device when you or others are near
 - They could also avoid discussion about what they are doing on their device when you ask
4. Your child abruptly shuts down or deletes their social media account
5. Your child creates new or multiple accounts

Some Examples of Cyberbullying

Adolescent girls and fake Instagram accounts (Finsta)

One common social media tactic adolescents use, in particular adolescent girls, is creating a fake Instagram account (Finsta). Here, they post embarrassing, or even sexual, pictures/videos and share with only their close friends and classmates. While the initial intent to create a Finsta might be to avoid a parent who is constantly monitoring their digital use, it can escalate to something very serious. Youth can post inappropriate pictures of others without their consent, or anonymously bully others.

- The Jed Foundation has a [toolkit](#) that walks parents through what cyberbullying looks like and how to address it on platforms like Instagram.
- The Anti-Defamation League has a [“Grown Folks” Guide to Popular Apps in Social Media](#) that goes more in-depth about common terms youth use and how they communicate via the fast-moving world of social media.

Adolescents and online gaming

Today's games allow youth to interact with fellow players either through text or voice chat. These interactions are often unmonitored, which can expose youth to verbal harassment, offensive language, or threats. Girls who game are at higher risk to be sexually harassed online by other players. This is unfortunately often accepted as “gaming culture.”¹⁰

- [The Anti-Defamation League](#) has a parent resource toolkit on how to address hate and bias seen in online gaming.

How Teens Talk About Bullying and Cyberbullying

While the words bullying and cyberbullying are common words for adults, youth rarely use these words. Here is how many teens and youth are describing bullying behavior that happens in person and digitally:¹¹⁻¹⁴

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"The toxicity in that comment section is unreal. Those guys are trolling you for sure, because you look amazing in those pictures."

66

"Why is she spreading so much hate about Willow getting cheer captain? Like it's one thing to be jealous but another thing to be flat-out racist."

66

"She is being such a jerk to you for no reason. I've had it with all her drama."

66

"He's being so nasty to Jordan. He's constantly harassing him about his weight just so he can feel better and it's uncalled for."

When Is It NOT Bullying?

Like adults, children experience conflict with others. Even when a child handles conflict poorly, it may not always be considered bullying. Some kids are naturally more assertive and impulsive—this doesn't necessarily mean that they are bullying. It's important that children learn healthy ways to manage their emotions and also to control their behavior when met with conflict. Escalating this behavior and calling it bullying may not always be helpful.²

It's important to remember that not all conflict is unhealthy!

Some examples of **healthy** conflict are...

- Two friends disagreeing with each other and debating a topic
- Kids who are competitive
- Kids who are assertive and advocate for their needs
- Teasing and joking between close friends

As youth learn how to interact with others, they test boundaries and begin to express their feelings in different ways. Parents should be aware of these changes and understand the difference between instances of harmful or unpleasant behavior and bullying.

Examples of Negative Behavior That May Not Be Bullying Behavior

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

- Not sharing toys or playing with another person
- Excluding someone from a birthday party or activity that involves other friends
- Being considered "bossy"

FOR OLDER KIDS

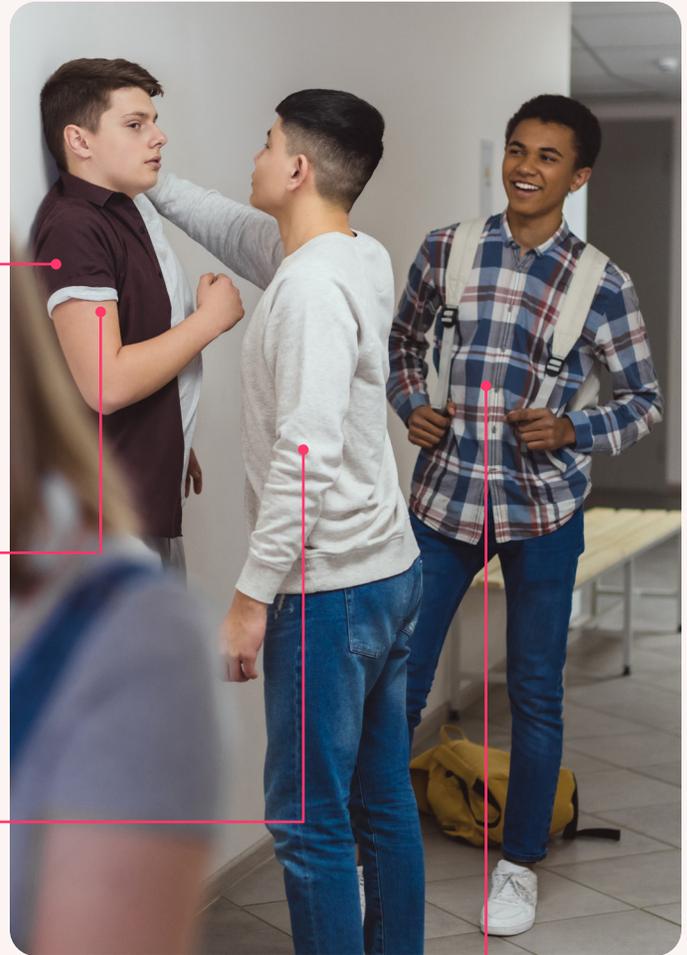
- A group of boys playfully teasing a friend about their new haircut
- Being rude or "snarky" to another classmate
- Bumping into someone in the hallway
- Lashing out or yelling at a stranger
- A heated argument between two friends

Who Is in the Bullying Ecosystem?

The child being bullied: A child who is repeatedly a target of bullying behaviors. Some [factors](#) may put a child at a higher risk of being bullied but, ultimately, it comes down to them being considered “different” by the person bullying.¹⁵

The child who is playing multiple roles: In some cases, children who are being bullied will begin to bully others as a form of retaliation.

The child showing bullying behavior: A child who is intentionally and repeatedly causing harm (whether that be physically, psychologically, emotionally, or educationally) to another person. Some [factors](#) may increase a child’s likelihood of showing bullying behaviors, but not all children with these characteristics will show bullying behaviors.¹⁵ To learn more about how to work with your child who is bullying others, check out [Playbook 2](#).



Bystander: A child who sees bullying take place. They could be joining in and encouraging the bullying or ignoring it and just watching it.¹⁵



Upstander: A child who speaks or acts in support of an individual who is being harassed or bullied.¹⁶



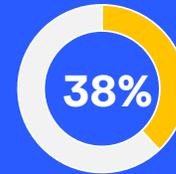
Caring adults involved in the child’s life: Children and youth require support from caring adults in their lives to help change their behavior or address any challenges when being bullied.

4-Step Action Plan



1 Prepare to Talk to Your Child

It's important that you feel equipped to have a safe and intentional conversation with your child about how bullying has affected their well-being.



of kids find it challenging to talk to their parents about their struggles and about loneliness and exclusion.

- "The 2022 Choose Kindness Project Survey," conducted by Ipsos

4 key points recommended you do when talking to your child

1. Parents may feel guilty, helpless, or even defensive when learning their child is affected by bullying in any capacity. **Before taking any actions, it's important to pause and take stock of your emotions.** Reach out to your support systems (friends, family, a healthcare professional, etc.) so you can show up for your child feeling centered, calm, and ready to support.¹⁷
 - We also recommend educating yourself on the impacts and causes of bullying. Understanding why children bully others can help you make more informed decisions on how to support your child. Reference [Playbook 2](#) to learn more about who is most at risk to bully and why.
2. Remember that this isn't a problem that you alone have to fix. **It will take collective action from you, your child, and the caring adults in your child's network** to effectively address the issue.³⁸
3. **Consider researching in advance** what supports/plans might be available for your child in case you discover your child needs immediate help. These [resources](#) could be helpful if your child needs extra help identifying bullying.

Consider using an emotional rating scale (like this one from [kindness.org](#)) to help them put their emotions into words.

Some youth might not feel comfortable talking to you about their experiences or have the language to tell you how they are feeling. Providing information can show your child you are here to support in any way they feel comfortable with.

For example, the Trevor Project offers a 24-hour helpline for LGBTQ+ and questioning teens: toll free (866) 4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)

4. Create a plan for the conversation:¹⁷

- Be intentional of where and when the conversation will take place. Avoid situations where you or your child are stressed out, distracted, or in a rush. For example, having the conversation in the car isn't a good idea. There's limited time during a car ride, you can be distracted while driving, and your child might feel blindsided or "trapped" if you choose to have this conversation unexpectedly in the car.
- Make a list of your child's behaviors you've observed that might be [warning signs](#) for bullying and/or cyberbullying.
- Think about how you might handle your child's reaction/emotions in this conversation. It's important to show neutral emotions while your child shares how they feel.
- Discuss your plan with a trusted friend or family member for any feedback.



2 Talk to Your Child

There is no “perfect time” to talk to your child. While it is recommended to take time when preparing to talk with your child, it is also important to start the conversation in a timely fashion so they can receive support when they need it most.



6 key points recommended you do when talking to your child

1. **Ask open-ended questions** that are relevant to the observations you identified when preparing for the talk.
2. **Listen and let them share their story:** This will help you understand why they are behaving differently and how you can help.^{17,18}
 - Make the deliberate choice to **listen vs. fix**.
 - Thank them for sharing how they feel and telling about their experiences.
3. **Reassure them:** Validate their feelings and avoid judgmental language that might minimize their feelings. By opening up a trusting line of communication, they will be more likely to reach out if they are experiencing harassment.²⁰

66 "What I'm hearing you say is...am I understanding that right?"

- **When it's cyberbullying:** It's important to reassure your child that they won't be punished (like having their devices taken away) if they tell you they are being cyberbullied.

Examples of counterproductive advice

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"Just get along"

This may work for some teens, but for the ones who really need the message, it's just not that simple.

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"Ignore them, they'll stop"

If bullying persists, the negative impacts on your child's mental health can get worse.

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"It's part of growing up"

Your child is asking for help. Honor their bravery for bringing this to you.

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"They're probably doing that because they like you (or have a crush on you)"

This sends the wrong message that this kind of behavior is acceptable and even welcomed.



Examples of conversation starters, by developmental stage



FOR YOUNGER KIDS

- “It seems like you’ve been spending more time in your room. How are things going with your friends lately?”
- “You seem particularly stressed out lately. How are things going at school?”
- “I’ve noticed you haven’t wanted to play with [name] in a while. How are things going with him/her?”



FOR OLDER KIDS

- “I want to make sure I can support you in anything you need help with. Can we talk about how things are going for you?”
- “I noticed you’re doing/not doing [behavior] lately, and I wonder if that’s related to stress, anxiety, depression, or something else?”
- “I’ve noticed you seem less interested in some of your favorite activities. Why do you think that is?”

4. **Be patient:** They might not be ready to open up yet, possibly because they are feeling insecure, withdrawn, embarrassed, or ashamed. You can gently prod, but don’t get angry or frustrated that they aren’t sharing. To set up the opportunity for future discussions, you can:
- Tell your child that you can pick up this conversation once they feel more comfortable.

 “I see that this is a hard conversation for you. We can continue this conversation later when you feel like it. I am here to support you in any way that you feel comfortable.”

- Talk to an adult your child trusts about your concerns—maybe they can help with facilitating a conversation.^{17,20}

 “If you feel more comfortable talking to your teacher (or coach, family member, etc.) about what happened, we can all talk about this together. You can also talk to your teacher by yourself if you feel more comfortable doing that.”

5. **Provide [resources/supports](#) to your child** so they can make their connections on their own time.¹⁷

 “I understand you might be feeling a lot of emotions right now and you might not feel like I’m the best person to talk to about this. I did some research and found some helpful resources that you might want to read to learn more about how we can figure this out in a way that you feel comfortable.”

6. Follow Up

- Later, try the conversation again. This most likely is a process that will require many conversations.
- If you are still having trouble with your child opening up, consider talking to a healthcare provider or a child psychologist.¹⁷ For more information, check out the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) [website](#) to find accessible and affordable mental health services for your child.



Below is a list of media and resources that can help your child learn more about bullying. Whether it be through direct support from a trusted adult, online activities, or storytelling using books or other forms of media, these resources are a great starting point for your child to come to their own connections on their own time.



Books

- The Anti-Defamation League has an online booklist, [Books Matter](#), for children’s and young adult books about bias, bullying, and other similar topics.



Websites

- [PACER’s Kids Against Bullying website](#) teaches elementary-aged kids to identify and prevent bullying.
- [PACER’s Teens Against Bullying website](#) teaches middle and high school-aged youth about how to address bullying, take action, and advocate for others. This website also includes [extensive resources](#) for preventing and identifying cyberbullying on various social media platforms.
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has [teen](#) and [young adult](#) resources to learn about mental health and ways to seek help.
- [The Jed Foundation](#) has resources for how to cope with bullying for tweens and teens.



3 Work with Your Child to Develop an Action Plan

Once your child has shared their experience with you, it is then time to develop an action plan to address the bullying. This step will involve you and your child working together.



Recommendations to help you support your child in creating an action plan that is right for them and their situation

- Empower your child** to create an action plan to help address the bullying and share it with trusted adults.^{17,20} For this step, we recommend using [PACER's Student Action Plan Against Bullying](#). The plan can be filled out by anyone who is affected by bullying (the person bullied, a bystander, or the person doing the bullying). Depending on the age of your child, they can either fill this out by themselves or have an adult help them.

PACER also has an complementary [parent and educator guide](#) to use with the student action plan. Review this guide for helpful discussion questions to assist with the creation of the action plan.

The plan involves three main steps:

1.

Describe your experience:

What happened and where? Who was involved? How did it make you feel?

2.

Reflect on your ideas:

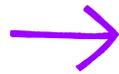
How could the situation be different? What would you like to have happened to feel more in control of the situation?

3.

Develop potential solutions:

What steps would need to happen to solve the problem? Who will need to be involved for this to be solved?

- Provide information:** Educate your child about bullying and provide them with age-appropriate information on strategies to improve the situation and ways to cope:
 - [Stopbullying.gov](#) has a guide for elementary and middle school-aged kids.
 - [The Jed Foundation](#) has a set of resources for teens and adolescents in early adulthood.



Recommended additional steps when your child is being cyberbullied

Be proactive and set up supports for your child before issues of bullying even happen!

By setting clear rules for digital media use and being involved in your child's online activities, parents can help reduce the risk of their child being involved in cyberbullying.

- Reassure them that they will not be punished or have their devices taken away if they bring up that they've been cyberbullied.
- Help your child set up privacy and security settings to media platforms.
- Tell your child to not respond to or forward any cyberbullying messages.

If the situation gets worse even after taking the previous steps, it is recommended to:

- Block the person who is cyberbullying.
- Save and print screenshots, emails, and/or messages with the dates and times the bullying occurred.



When do you report cyberbullying and to whom?

If the above recommendations still don't make the cyberbullying stop, it is recommended to report it. However, who to report it to differs depending on who is doing the cyberbullying. We recommend you consider the following next steps when reporting.^{20,21}

- **If the person cyberbullying is someone your child knows:** Often, people doing the cyberbullying can go to the same school or attend the same after-school activities as your child. If this is the case, report the cyberbullying to your child's school or youth organization.
- **If the person cyberbullying is anonymous, or your child doesn't know them personally:** Cyberbullying strangers is also common, as it's pretty easy to do anonymously. If your child doesn't know the person who is cyberbullying them, report the issue to the social media or gaming company where the bullying happened. If the issue still continues or the person doing the cyberbullying exhibits one of the following behaviors, you should report these situations to your local law enforcement for further legal action:
 - Threats of violence
 - Child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos
 - Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where they would expect privacy (for example, nude pictures of someone in a locker room or bathroom)
 - Stalking and hate crimes



4 Work with the School to Take Action

When reporting bullying to your child’s school, oftentimes, you will have to talk to many staff members (your child’s teacher, the principal, the school counselor, to name a few). It’s important to show up to these meetings prepared and with a set action plan on how you can collaboratively work together.



6 general recommendations to prepare for these meetings

- Get information ready:** This includes any documentation and/or evidence of bullying that you can share with the school.
- Research:** Familiarize yourself with your school’s or state’s policies and procedures for bullying.^{20,23}
 - Prepare any questions you might have on the policies and procedures to ask school staff.
- Meet with your child’s classroom teacher:** If your child doesn’t have a “homeroom” or primary classroom teacher, ask them what caring adult, like a coach or their English teacher, they would feel comfortable talking to about the bullying situation.^{18,22}
 - Ask their teacher what they’ve been observing.**
 - “How is my child getting along in class? Has their behavior changed lately?”*
 - “Have you suspected or observed any forms of bullying?”*
 - Share the experiences your child identified in their [action plan](#).**
 - This will also be the time to share any evidence of bullying/cyberbullying you have.
- Review the action plan as a group:** Make any appropriate changes to the action plan and identify where your child’s teacher should be involved.²³
 - “Are there any other recommendations you think we should add to our action plan to make sure my child feels safe and supported in your classroom?”*
 - “What else do you and the school intend to do to investigate and stop the bullying behaviors?”*

Planning out questions and points in advance can facilitate productive discussions. Helpful examples of sample questions can be found at Making Caring Common’s [Questions to Ask Schools](#).



5. Come to an agreement: As a group (you, your child, and your child’s teacher), agree on who will complete what actions steps and how.^{18,22}

- Document, save, and share this plan with your child’s teacher (as a general tip, document all conversations with the school and follow through with the action plan).
- Set up a follow-up meeting with your child’s teacher to discuss progress and keep accountability.



Frequently asked questions when involving the school

What do I do if the bullying continues?

- Continue reaching out to the school if the bullying continues. Consider involving other faculty and staff members in the school district (such as the principal, school counselor, or superintendent) to keep pushing for change.^{18,20,22}

What else can I do as a parent to ensure the safety of my child at school?

- **Be proactive:** You don’t need to wait for your child to be bullied to bring concerns up to the school.^{18,20,22}
 - If this is a concern at the beginning of the year, bring this up to the school and follow up throughout the year with any questions and concerns.
 - Check out the Digital Wellness Lab’s [Family Digital Wellness Guide](#) to learn how to create healthy digital habits for any age.
- **Get involved in the community:** It helps to raise awareness in your community and share information with others.

Should I contact the parents/caregivers of the child who is bullying my child?

- No, if you and your child’s teacher/school agree it is appropriate to bring in the other child’s parents, have the school or teacher act as a mediator for all contact between the two families.

Extended Information: Risk Factors and Different Types of Bullying

Who is **Most at Risk** to Be Bullied?

No single factor puts a child or youth at a higher risk of being bullied or exhibiting bullying behavior. Contrary to popular belief, those who are bullied aren't necessarily your movie-scene kid who doesn't have many friends and maybe dresses "weird." Anyone can be bullied, even youth who are athletic, popular, or high-achieving. Sometimes, a child is just in the wrong place at the wrong time. That being said, there are certain factors or characteristics that can increase the risk of a child being bullied:²⁴

- **Illness or Disability:** Special needs children are more likely to be bullied. This can include youth with autism, dyslexia, ADHD, food allergies, asthma, or any other physical or intellectual condition that sets them apart. Students with disabilities are 2 to 3 times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers. [Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools®](#) has more information on bullying prevention and supporting youth with intellectual disabilities.⁵⁴
- **Different Race:** Sometimes kids will bully others because they are of a different racial/ethnic identity. This can happen to any race in any direction—no race/ethnicity is immune to being bullied. [Act to Change](#) has multiple resources on how to support children who are bullied based on their race. **LGBTQ+ Youth:** Some of the most brutal bullying involves kids who identify as LGBTQ+. [Making Caring Common](#) and [Welcoming Schools](#) provide helpful resources on bullying prevention and supporting children who identify as LGBTQ+.
- **Isolated:** Kids who have fewer friends are more likely to be bullied because they don't have someone helping them or coming to their aid if they are bullied. [Allyship](#) and [intentional inclusion](#) are ways to address youth isolation and bullying.
- **Vulnerable or Introverted:** Youth who are more anxious and submissive (e.g., youth who are people-pleasers) are more likely to be bullied than youth who are assertive

and extroverted. Youth suffering from depression or stress-related conditions are also more likely to be bullied, which can make matters worse. Oftentimes, these kids are seen as "easy targets" who are less likely to fight back.

- **Physical Appearance:** Any type of physical characteristic that is considered "different" can be a cause of being bullied.
- **Popular:** Well-liked children can be bullied because they potentially pose a threat to someone else's social standing or popularity. This is especially true for adolescent girls, and is done [particularly online](#).
- **Successful or Determined:** Youth who are good at what they do or go the extra mile at school get a lot of positive attention from adults, which can make others envious.

Students can be singled out for no reason other than the fact that they're perceived as different to the person who is bullying. To learn more about how identities intersect with bullying, check out our section on [Othering and Bias-Based Bullying](#).

Across Different Gender Identities



Boys who are bullied are more likely to bully others, thus taking part in both roles. Boys are also more likely to say they have been bullied physically (being hit, slapped, or pushed).²⁵



Girls are more likely than boys to be involved in cyberbullying (either being bullied or bullying others). 15% of girls report being targets of abusive online behaviors, in comparison to only 6% of boys reporting being targets.⁷



While transgender and nonbinary youth (those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth) also experience relational/social bullying, they report greater instances of physical bullying and abuse compared to cisgendered youth.^{26, 27}

According to a 2019 report from the [Human Rights Campaign](#), transgender youth are **22%** more likely to report being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property than cisgender youth (those who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth).

Who is Most at Risk of Both Roles?

Youth who are bullied can often feel helpless and they try to seek relief. As a defense mechanism, they can start bullying others. They might think that if they can bully others, maybe they can be immune to being bullied themselves. However, taking on both of these roles can cause a vicious cycle of negative behaviors and greater mental health issues.

Students who are both targets of bullying and engage in bullying behavior are at greater risk for both mental health and behavior problems than students who only bully or are only bullied.⁴



Othering and Bias-Based Bullying

Othering is the act of excluding or treating someone as an “outsider” because they are considered different from yourself or your group. This can lead to violent, exclusionary, or even aggressive bullying behaviors toward “outsiders.” This is called **bias-based bullying**, also known as stigma- or identity-based bullying.^{16,28} Bias-based bullying can take many forms. It could look like offensive jokes and insensitive comments to someone you consider to be an “outsider.” It can also escalate into even more destructive behaviors, like hate crimes.²⁹

The most frequently reported bullying in elementary schools is **gender-based**, targeting children who don't fit into gender norms.³⁰

Important Definitions

- [Allyship](#) - Showing compassion and support for someone or communities that might be a target of bias and/or bullying³¹
- [Bias](#) - A belief that some people are better than others, often based on race, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, appearance, actual or perceived sexual orientation, or gender identity³⁰
- [Bias-Based Bullying](#) - Bullying that is motivated by a person's bias toward another (oftentimes called stigma- or identity-based bullying)¹⁶
- [*Cyberbullying](#) - Bullying, such as threats, harassment, or humiliation, that occurs digitally²¹
- [Upstander](#) - A child who speaks or acts in support of an individual who is being harassed or bullied¹⁶
- [Intentional Inclusion](#) - When you accept, value, and include someone who is different from you³²
- [Othering](#) - The act of excluding or treating someone as an ‘outsider’ of a group because they are considered different from yourself³³
- [Social-Emotional Development](#) - Learning how to understand, experience, express, and manage emotions and to develop meaningful relationships with others³⁴

In “The 2022 Choose Kindness Project Survey,” teens reported the top reasons for bias-based bullying they experienced or have seen at school:

- Weight
- Appearance (not including weight or race)
- Sexual orientation
- Race or skin color
- Gender identity
- Political beliefs
- Disability
- Accent or country of origin
- Religion or spiritual beliefs

This guide is designed to support all parents but if your child is dealing with bias-based or identity-based bullying, the following organizations may be able to provide you with additional resources:

- **LBGTQ+ Youth:** [GLAAD](#), [GLSEN](#), [The Jed Foundation](#), [Welcoming Schools](#)
- **Youth with Intellectual Disabilities:** [Special Olympics](#)
- **Race & Religion:** [AAKOMA](#), [Act to Change](#), [Anti-Defamation League](#), [Asian American Psychology Association](#), [Hispanic Federation](#), [NAACP](#)

*While the word cyberbullying is common for adults, youth rarely use it. Teens often use [other language](#) to express that cyberbullying is happening.



The Choose Kindness Project is an Alliance of the nation’s leading nonprofit organizations that champion three major issue areas involving children and teens: bullying prevention, intentional inclusion, and youth mental wellness.

Guided by the 20+ members of the Alliance, The Choose Kindness Project is dedicated to inspiring a more inclusive world where all young people feel empowered to be themselves and feel safe to create the futures they imagine.

The project is activated through investments in research, collaborations, and innovations with the Alliance in order to help them expand their reach and impact. The Choose Kindness website aggregates resources for parents, teachers, and coaches to help navigate through these three major intersectional issues affecting children and teens.

TheChooseKindnessProject.org



→ Visit Playbook 2, [What to Do If Your Child Is Bullying Other Kids](#)

→ Visit Playbook 3, [How to Support the Development of Kindness and Empathy in Our Youth](#)



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