

Advancing Bullying Awareness Parenting Strategies for Teens Who Bully Others

► In this second of a five-part series, you will learn how to recognize and prevent bullying behaviors in youth ages 12 to 17.

Bullying is very common in children and youth. National data has indicated that approximately 30 percent of youth admit to bullying others. Bullying behaviors can range in severity from teasing and name calling to physical abuse. It is common for youth who bully others to display negative and disruptive behaviors such as hitting and yelling.

There are two major forms of bullying: traditional bullying and cyberbullying (bullying through technology). Traditional bullying includes indirect and direct bullying behaviors. Indirect bullying behaviors are often social, such as spreading rumors or excluding individuals. Direct bullying involves behaviors that are physical (fighting or hitting) and verbal (calling someone offensive names or yelling).

This article will help you, as a parent/guardian, to recognize warning signs of a teen that is engaging in bullying behaviors and to understand how to address those behaviors. You also will receive suggestions and resources for dealing with a teen who bullies others.

Warning Signs of Bullying

There are warning signs of bullying behaviors that are important for you to identify. The behaviors that youth display at home are often a reflection of how they behave with others at school. Children who bully others tend to feel a need to have control over situations, push boundaries, and are often unaware of the consequences of violent behaviors.

When youth have a high need for control, it may indicate they are exhibiting bullying behaviors toward others. Though most teens like to have some sense of control in situations, it can become a problem when they want to control *all* situations at home, school, and with their friends. To gain control over situations and others, youth may use aggression and manipulation with their peers. These youth are often disliked because of their need for control. As a result, they may display anger and violence to gain attention from others.



Youth who bully others often challenge boundaries given by parents, teachers, coaches, and other authority figures. These youth continue to interact with others in unacceptable ways, even when they know certain behaviors are wrong or after being corrected.

Youth who bully may also be unaware of the problems associated with their bullying behaviors. They therefore do not consider how their behaviors affect others or themselves. Studies show that youth who are aggressive are often unaffected by violent behaviors. They may even encourage violence among others and provoke conflict with family members and

friends. Unfortunately for these youth, consequences from authority figures alone may not stop their bullying behaviors.

These are just a few of the warning signs for you to consider if you suspect that your teen is bullying others. Though every situation is different, it is extremely important to watch for any of these behaviors.

Confirming Possible Bullying

If you notice warning signs of bullying behaviors, you can confirm these behaviors with adults that interact with your teen. Speak with other parents/guardians, school personnel (teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators), or coaches/instructors from after-school activities. Having multiple sources of information can provide useful insights about the behaviors of your teen outside of the home.

Because teens spend most of their time in school, regular communication with school staff can keep you informed of your child's behavior when away from home. Teachers and other school staff interact with youth regularly and often observe their interactions with other students. Parent-teacher conferences are useful not only for staying informed of your teen's schoolwork but also of his or her behavior with peers. Checking in regularly with teachers by phone or email can be beneficial, as well.

Communicating with other adults that interact with your teen can be a great way to find out if bullying behaviors are happening outside of school and with friends. Bullying often takes place in environments where there are few adults. Therefore, a coach or mentor may have more insight into negative behaviors with peers because they regularly attend youth-focused events. You can also ask the parents/guardians of your teen's friends about behaviors they have witnessed. Using reliable sources to confirm that there is a problem is the best way to know if teens are bullying others when they are away from home.

Addressing Bullying

When addressing bullying behaviors, it is important for you to understand how your relationship can affect your teen's behavior in and outside of school. Research shows that children benefit from parents/guardians who are warm and open to communication, and who set appropriate boundaries for their child's behaviors.

You can show your teen that you take bullying behaviors seriously by creating rules and consequences for



bullying behaviors. A consistent set of rules, behavioral expectations, and discipline are effective in correcting problem behaviors. Parents/guardians who are consistent with their consequences are more likely to have teens who perceive their discipline as fair when they do not follow set rules. You can also allow children of an appropriate age to help decide the consequences for bad behavior before the behavior is exhibited.

Studies show that youth tend to have less behavioral problems when their parents/guardians are involved in the school system. Therefore, you should strive to have positive relationships with school personnel. Attend "meet the teacher" nights and parent-teacher conferences to get to know your teen's teachers and administrators. This helps to build a relationship that will benefit you if your teen is displaying behavior issues. If you have a good relationship with school personnel, addressing the bullying behaviors may be less difficult.

Parents and guardians should ask about school resources that support positive behaviors and activities. In particular, ask about after-school activities or sports programs that can help youth improve how they relate to other teens and adults. Students who participate in extracurricular activities tend to be less involved in bullying behaviors.

You may feel that it is difficult to address bullying behaviors, but there are strategies that can help you to address teen issues. Here are some points to remember:

- Traumatic events sometimes increase aggression in teens. If your teen has experienced a traumatic event and is displaying aggressive or bullying behaviors, consider taking him/her to a licensed counselor or therapist to help learn how to cope with the experience.
- If your teen becomes aggressive or behaves inappropriately, think about why your teen may be behaving that way and have a conversation to see if he/she will share the issue before you punish them. Teens act out for various reasons, so it is important for you to consider your teen's experiences. Talking to your teen about why he/she is behaving that way could lead to a teachable moment resulting in better behavior.
- Youth often learn through observing others. They can imitate negative behaviors from friends, family, and even parents/guardians, so it is important to be aware of the behaviors you display in the presence of your teen. Be sure to model positive behaviors and be cautious of aggressive language and behaviors.
- Strive to be involved in your teen's school. This is particularly important during the middle school and junior high school years. Meeting teachers and participating in PTA/PTO and other school activities can help to improve your teen's behaviors at school. Youth tend to have less behavioral problems when their parents are involved in the school system.



Resources

Schools often have great resources for parents/guardians of children who are involved in bullying. In addition to school resources, parents/guardians can use these books, movies, therapy, and online classes to help address these behaviors.

Resources for Parents/Guardians

- *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* by Barbara Coloroso. This nonfiction book focuses on the issue of school bullying and the roles of everyone involved.
- *Parent's Guide to Preventing and Responding to Bullying* by Dr. Jason Thomas. This manual for parents or teachers describes the most effective ways to handle bullying behaviors.
- Parents Place Bullying Prevention Program at <https://parentsplace.jfcs.org/topics/bullying-prevention-media-safety/>. This website offers valuable tools and parent education classes on how to intervene in all forms of bullying.
- *Bully* by Lee Hirsch. This documentary follows five different cases of youth being bullied.
- Alabama Cooperative Extension System at www.aces.edu. Find bullying materials specifically for parents/guardians.

Resources for Youth

- *The Bully Book* by Eric Kahn Gale. This novel touches on both sides of bullying and the author's past experiences.
- *Dear Bully: Seventy Authors Tell Their Stories* by Dawn Metcalf. This book covers different roles in bullying as experienced by seventy authors. It also offers resources for teens and suggestions for future reading.
- *Bullies Are a Pain in the Brain* by Trevor Romain. This book provides suggestions and ideas both for children who bully and their victims. This book will help children who bully find better ways to get along with others.



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