

## Identify a “touchstone”

Every child needs a touchstone at school. Kids spend the majority of their days with teachers and other kids. They need to know where they can go for help. They need a trusted person, a touchstone. Help your child identify a safe person at school who can help if the bullying continues.

## Provide a safe space

Be calm. Communicate unconditional love and use an active, listening voice when talking with kids. Statements like, “I know you are feeling worried” validate their feelings so they know they have been heard.

It’s best not to talk to kids right before or after school. Give them time to process and calm down. Listen to your child without judgement. Questions like “Did you say something to upset him?” or “Did you do something to her first?” make the victim feel like she or he caused the problem. It is better to say “Tell me what happened.”

## When to seek professional help

Bullying can have long-term emotional harm for children. Whether it’s physical, verbal, emotional or cyber doesn’t make a difference. It’s all equally harmful and can lead to anxiety, loneliness, depression and suicidal ideation, so treat it seriously. Also, if your child communicates thoughts of self-harm, for any reason at any age, seek help from a mental health professional.

## Sources

Much of the material for this brochure came from the following websites: parents.com, kidshealth.org, stopbullying.gov, and stompoutbullying.org. There are many more examples and scenarios on those sites than would fit in this document. We encourage parents view them for more details, tips, examples and strategies.



# I think my child is being bullied.

# What should I do? How can I help?



## A guide for parents



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## Is it bullying or conflict?

There's a difference between selfish actions or thoughtlessness and true bullying among young people. In most incidents at school, two children aren't able to get along or sort out their issues. It may be one "mean moment" or some conflict between them that needs to be resolved. Some kids need guidance on conflict resolution into middle and high school.

Most experts agree that a child crosses the threshold into bullying if actions are intentional, one-sided and occur repeatedly. The bully targets those seen as vulnerable (shy, sensitive, small or simply different).

## Warning signs

If your child is dealing with a bully, there may be warning signs, such as:

- \* refusal to go to school or on a bus;
- \* frequent stomachaches, headaches;
- \* moodiness, agitation; anxiousness;
- \* sleep disturbances, bedwetting;
- \* change in eating habits;
- \* unexplained injuries;
- \* appearing sad, lonely, depressed;
- \* avoiding peers after school;
- \* feeling helpless or worthless;
- \* change in school performance;
- \* missing personal items;
- \* self-blame or self-harm (pulling out hair, cutting, suicide attempts).

## Reporting bullying

If you suspect something is not right, gently probe to see if your child will tell you about problems with other kids. Many victims tend to keep quiet because they fear they might be treated even worse if they tell someone. They need your love and support.

Whether you learn something from your child or not, talk to the teacher, who may know if something is going on or can watch for issues at school.

If there is an issue, ask the school to investigate it. BPS has formal bullying procedures. Staff can also help with conflict resolution strategies if the incident doesn't rise to the true level of bullying as outlined in state law. (School Board Policy ACEA at [www.bismarckschools.org](http://www.bismarckschools.org).)

If your child has been threatened or the incident is severe, do not approach the bully or her/his parents. This is a job of the school and law enforcement.

## Helping your child cope

- \* Coach him/her to seek help. No matter how your child is targeted, fighting back usually isn't the best solution.
- \* Teach kids to walk away and seek a teacher or supervising adult.

\* Kids should sit next to friends on a bus or at lunch; bullies are less likely to pick on a child who is in a group.

\* Teach your child to look bullies in the eye when talking to them. That will keep her/his head up--appearing more confident and brave.

\* Practice a script. Rehearse the right way to respond to a tough kid. Try saying "stop bothering me" or "yeah, whatever" and walking away. If your child shows he/she isn't bothered, a bully will usually move on. The key is that a comeback should not be a putdown--that will only aggravate the bully.

\* Role play "what if" scenarios. Help your child practice different responses and actions until she feels confident handling troublesome situations.

\* Encourage your child to be an "upstander" who stands up for those being bullied instead of a "bystander" who says nothing. When kids speak up, it's more powerful than anything an adult can do in that situation.

\* Follow up with your child and the school to see if the bullying has stopped. Praise your child's progress and keep communication open.

\* Be a good role model. Always say please and thank you and be friendly to all people.