

Bullies: How To Handle It

Bullying is a serious problem. It makes people feel lonely, unhappy, and afraid. It makes them feel like there must be something wrong with them. It even makes some kids not want to go to school or play outside. If extreme bullying goes on for a long time, it can lead to violent cases of revenge, like you may have seen in the news. Many people who are bullied a lot as kids grow up with low self-esteem and all sorts of other problems.

In other words, it's very important to deal with bullying and not let it ruin your life!

Okay, so there you are, and someone is bullying you. What do you do "in the moment"?

- Ignore the bully. Pretend you didn't hear him. Don't even look at him. Walk right past him if you can.
- Don't cry, get angry, or show that you're upset. That's the bully's goal. Don't give her the satisfaction. Even if you're feeling really hurt, don't let it show. You can talk about or write down your reactions later.
- Respond to the bully evenly and firmly. Example: "No." "That's what you think."
- If you can, turn a comment into a joke. Example: The bully says, "Stupid outfit!" You say: "Thanks! I'm glad you noticed."
- Turn and walk away, or run if you have to. Remove yourself from the situation. Go to a place where an adult is present.
- Remember that you are not the one with the problem. It's the bully who has the problem.
- If you're being called names or teased, try "The Fog Tank." Imagine that you're inside a huge fish tank filled with white fog. Then, imagine that the insults are swallowed up by the fog before they reach you. Nothing touches you. Practice by thinking of the worst things a bully can say to you, then letting the fog eat them up.

If you're being bullied again and again, there's one "Most Important Thing" you should do: Talk to an adult. This is so important, we'll say it again. Talk to an adult!

- Start with your parents. It's not "tattling". It's asking the people who love you to give you help when you really need it.
- If the bullying happens at school, make sure your parents discuss it with a school official, not with the parents of the bully.
- If you feel you can't tell your parents, or your parents don't give you the support you need, talk to another adult you trust: a teacher, principal, school counselor, or someone at your church or synagogue.
- If you feel you can't talk to anyone, try writing a letter about what's happening. Keep a copy for yourself and give it to an adult you trust.
- If you don't want to talk to someone alone, bring a friend, sibling, or parent. It especially helps to bring someone who has seen the bullying.
- Make it clear to the adult that you are really upset by what's going on. This is especially true if the bullying is "verbal bullying." Many adults don't take verbal bullying seriously, but the truth is, this is the kind of bullying that can hurt the most.

If the bullying is physical or violent, you can ask the adult to whom you speak NOT to reveal your name.

Do NOT keep it inside. Do NOT plan revenge against the bully or take matters into your own hands

Now that you've spoken to someone about the problem, there are lots of things you can do to prevent future bullying.

- Don't walk alone. Travel with at least one other person whenever you can.
- Avoid places where bullying happens. Take a different route to and from school. Leave a little earlier or later to avoid the bully.
- Sit near the bus driver on the school bus or walk with a teacher to classes.
- Don't bring expensive things or money to school.
- Label your belongings with permanent marker in case they get stolen.
- Avoid unsupervised areas of the school and situations where you are by yourself. Make sure you're not alone in the locker room or bathroom.
- Act confident. Hold your head up, stand up straight, and make eye contact.
- Brainstorm bully comebacks ahead of time, and practice them in the mirror. That way you'll have them ready when you need them!

Sometimes, a situation with one bully is settled, but then another bully comes along and takes his or her place. There are many things you can do to make sure that doesn't happen.

- Bullies are really good at making people think they deserve to be treated badly. That's absolutely wrong. Keep telling yourself that you're a great person who deserves respect and kindness from others.
- Learn to be proud of your differences. Why would you want to be like that bully anyway? Never be ashamed of an illness or disability. The sooner you feel okay with it, other people will too.
- Spend lots of time with your friends. If you don't have any real friends, work on making new ones by developing interests in social or physical activities.
- Keep a journal about bullying incidents and how they make you feel, as well as bullying that happens to other people. You can also fill a journal with positives: all the things you like about yourself, your plans for the future, etc.

If none of this helps and the bullying you're experiencing is making your life very difficult, talk to your parents about the possibility of changing schools. You and your family might feel like this is giving in, but in the end, it may be worth it to get on with your life and be happy.