

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Prepare Your Child to Deal with Bullying

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10 FAQs on PREPARE YOUR CHILD TO DEAL WITH BULLYING

1. What is bullying? How common is bullying? From what age of our son/daughter should we keep an eye for bullying?
2. Where does bullying usually take place? How to know if our child is a victim of bullying?
3. Why are some kids bullied more often? What traits are usually seen in victims of bullying?
4. What are the ways in which a child may be bullied? Are boys bullied more often than girls?
5. We are seeing some changes in our child, what are the short-term and long-term consequences of being a victim of bullying?
6. Is it possible that our son/daughter could become a bully in future? How will we know that he/she is turning into a bully?
7. What are the specific skills that help in handling and prevention of bullying?
8. My 14-year-old daughter is often online. Lately, she appears distressed and fearful. What could be the reason and how can I help her?
9. In what ways can our pediatrician help the child and support us to handle bullying?
10. If bullying continues, where can we complain? How to involve the school? Do we have laws that support to stop bullying in India?

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Prepare Your Child to Deal with Bullying

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON BULLYING WITH ANSWERS

Q1

**What is bullying? How common is bullying?
From what age of our son/daughter should we
keep an eye for bullying?**

Bullying is a common form of aggression among boys and girls either in the school or playground. Bullying takes place when one or more children intentionally intimidate, harass or physically harm a child who is considered as weak and unable to defend himself or herself.

The act of bullying has three important components:

1. It is an aggressive behavior that involves unwanted negative action.
2. It happens in a repetitive manner over time.
3. It takes place in the context of asymmetric unequal power relationship where the victim is seen as defenceless and unprotected.

Victims of bullying perceive themselves as helpless and feel that they cannot give back.

Types of Bullying

Verbal: Name calling, ridiculing, taming, taunting, teasing, comments about physical features, etc.

Physical: Hitting, kicking, pinching, punching, pulling hair or dress, poking, etc.

Social: Avoidance, isolation, spreading false information, psychological taunting, taking away belongings repetitively and/or demanding objects including money.

Cyber bullying: Performing via electronic or digital means.

More than 10% of the children are victims of bullying. Boys are subjected more often to bullying than girls. Please watch out for bullying from primary school.



Q2

Where does bullying usually take place? How to know if our child is a victim of bullying?

Bullying most often takes place in school especially in the bathroom, playground, lunch room, and in the bus. It can also occur in the housing community where you live. Not all children are open about their experience related to bullying.

You should suspect bullying, if you notice bruises or injuries in your child. Also, if you find your child is having any of the following:

- Not playing with old friends
- Losing interest in doing schoolwork
- Falling in school performance
- Being moody with crying and/or emotional outbursts
- Complaining of headache, abdominal pain, physical problems without medical reason
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Fearful of going to school
- Losing appetite
- Starting bedwetting
- Expressing death wish
- Crying and withdrawing when attacked by other kids
- Being hesitant with low self-esteem

Suspect bullying as one of the many reasons of above.

Q3

Why are some kids bullied more often? What traits are usually seen in victims of bullying?

Bullying can happen to anybody. It is impossible to predict who will get bullied based on their age, gender, race, language, physical habitus, class, nationality, sexual orientation, or any other factor. However, those who frequently get bullied do exhibit some common traits. These may include:

- Personality traits such as being shy, introverted, low self-confidence, unhappy, and anxious during most part of the day.
- *Lack of emotional intelligence skills (social-emotional skills):*
 - Lack of vocabulary to express or verbalize feelings and emotions
 - Poor emotional and social skills which make them not have the capacity to foster and maintain friends and thus create a support network
 - Poor emotional regulation skills that make them face and respond to bullying situations in an ineffective manner.
- Being physically smaller, weaker or different from the average can make the child vulnerable to bullying.
- Children with some developmental disability or learning issues are also more prone for bullying.

As parents you can help your children imbibe social and emotional skills to deal with bullying situations in an appropriate manner.



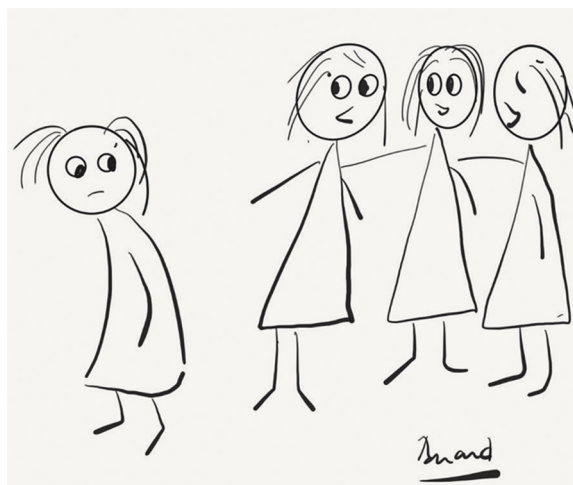
Q4

**What are the ways in which a child may be bullied?
Are boys bullied more often than girls?**

Bullying behaviors vary according to the culture, socioeconomic strata, medium of education, domestic background, parental behaviors, gender roles, adult supervision, the size and age of the “gang”, availability of gadgets, location, current situations, and many other factors. Both boys and girls may have a “group leader” with many followers who wish to maintain their positions in the group and impress the leader. The group leader also has to maintain his/her status otherwise the members will follow a new leader. **Table 1** depicts some ways unique to bullying behaviors in boys and girls.

TABLE 1: Bullying behaviors.

Boys	Girls
Power struggle with physical fights	Gossiping and verbal assaults
Tend to forget conflicts over time	Ruminate anger and keep grudges for long
Often use slang words to humiliate	Often highlight physical flaws in the victim
Older boys tend to gossip about physical or sexual incapacities of the victim, e.g., short stature, stammering, squint, etc.	Spread rumors about the victim being promiscuous and “bad”
Early bloomers dominate the late bloomers	Prettier and flamboyant girls have upper hand
Damaging the victim’s possessions is common	Defaming the victim is common
Usually target the weaker or sensitive boy	Usually target a girl who wants to be spotted
Rowdiness and physical strength is important	Linguistic tools and persuasive skills are vital
Studious boys who are teacher’s favorites are harassed often	An outgoing girl who is favorite among boys is targeted by other girls
Eve teasing and taunting to humiliate girls is common	Deliberate efforts to make the boy feel embarrassed is many times employed



Q5

We are seeing some changes in our child, what are the short-term and long-term consequences of being a victim of bullying?

Most children show changes in their behaviors when they are being bullied by others. They feel helpless, hopeless, and anxious. Some have short-term disturbances. A few may have long-term impact, especially if they are subjected to lasting bullying not limited to in person aggressions but also through cyber bullying.

Short-term Effects of Bullying

- Choosing to stay alone and isolating themselves from others
- Feeling ashamed
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating patterns
- Feeling less confident
- Avoiding school
- Looking anxious
- Developing bedwetting
- Falling sick more often
- Developing/complaining of aches and pains of various body parts
- Falling in school performance
- Looking bored, sad, fearful, dull, and depressed

Long-term Effects of Bullying

- Poor general health
- Withdrawal from most activities at school and at home
- Proneness to self-harm, suicidal thoughts, suicide plans, and suicide attempts
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Post-traumatic stress disorder, which includes recollection of the horrifying images and feelings of being bullied
- Substance use and abuse
- Difficulty establishing trusting, reciprocal friendships and relationships
- Long-term depression

Q6

Is it possible that our son/daughter could become a bully in future? How will we know that he/she is turning into a bully?

It is possible that any child could become a bully in future, especially those who have problems in handling conflicts, who get easily frustrated and not value others opinion and who have an eagerness to break rules. A bully usually have a lot of friends and have a desire to become popular.

Bullies

- Are usually aggressive toward peer group as well as adults including teachers and parents.
- Find satisfaction in causing injury and suffering to others.
- Have either average or lower-than-average anxiety and insecurity.
- Do not suffer from poor self-esteem.
- Have a strong desire for power and domination.
- Are often rewarded in some way for their behavior with material or psychological rewards.
- Are impulsive in nature.
- Have little empathy.
- Have antisocial and rule breaking behavior.
- Crave social influence.
So, if your son or daughter finds pleasure in provoking others, consider it as a sign for attention.

Q7

What are the specific skills that help in handling and prevention of bullying?

Table 2 depicts various skills useful in dealing with and in the prevention of bullying at all ages.

TABLE 2: Various skills useful in dealing with and in the prevention of bullying at all ages.

Skill or technique	Brief description
Identify real from perceived harassment	Our own perceptions and prejudices sometimes exaggerate our feelings and reactions to an event/teasing by friends
Assertiveness	Being frank and open about how we feel and conveying this firmly and boldly (not aggressively) to the other person
Self-awareness	Knowing our pitfalls, shortcomings, limitations, etc. as well as our strengths brings down our expectations from self and others to a manageable level
Effective communication	Nonverbal tools such as smiling, eye contact, facial expressions showing interest in other person, body language, etc. are crucial part of human interaction. The spoken or texted words should be aptly chosen and tone and pitch of voice must be nonhurting and clear. Optimum use of humor may ease out tense moments
Having a special talent, e.g., sports, painting, culinary skills, music, etc.	This compensates for some of the weaknesses which we have. It also enhances self-esteem and self-confidence
Making alternate plans	Be prepared to join another group or create your own group, if expelled or separated from the previous one. Temporary pain and stress is better than permanent compromises
Handling emotions	Understanding and addressing our feelings of anguish, anger, loneliness, and being hurt is crucial. Venting out these emotions with some trustworthy listener helps us to manage the crisis
Resilience	Ability to bounce back from the adversity and being futuristic helps us to take life challenges effectively
Monitoring self-talk	It shapes the way we feel, think, and behave. What you tell yourself is more important than what others tell you?
Cyber skills and ethics	Posting revealing pictures, videos, and personal information to known or unknown person on the Internet can cause cyber bullying (see later)

You can instill the above in your kids over a period of time.



Q8

My 14-year-old daughter is often online. Lately, she appears distressed and fearful. What could be the reason and how can I help her?

It is possible that your child is suffering from cyber harassment which is quite common in children and adolescents. The possibilities are:

- *F.O.M.O. (Fear of missing out)*: It is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing. Teenager may feel neglected from the group, lose sleep, and become irritable.
- *Abusive language*: Children engaged in online games and chats are often exposed to slang words and repulsive images. Many suffer from this pain and frustration in solitude. Occasionally, a child may develop vengeance toward such person. A few may be constantly preoccupied with the idea of harming their bully. Some children may receive phone calls or irritating messages at odd hours or during examinations which make them get distracted.
- *Intimidation by "predator"*: "Predators" are the criminals who loiter and have a keen watch on the innocent victims using various apps and posting revealing pictures/videos. These people trap the teenager for sexual or financial gains. Sadly, <10% teenagers seek help from parents/police. Majority suffer from this entrapment in solitude. Revenge porn which is common among celebrities is also a similar act.

Duties of Parents

- Teach your child that whatever information (text/pictures/videos) you submit on social media leaves a "permanent digital footprint".
- Be a role model of appropriate media use for your children. Never reveal personal information (mobile number, address, bank account details, PAN number, videos, revealing photographs, etc.) on net, unless you personally know the receiver and his/her purpose.
- Be vigilant but not too inquisitive about your child's cyber-circle.
- Teach your teenager about the latest P.O.C.S.O. (Prevention of Child Sexual Offences) Act which also includes cyber crimes.
- Discover the internet together. Teach the child about net hazards and possible temptations to log in to certain "attractive" website.
- Use tracking software, e.g., MobSafety Ranger Browser, Famigo, VideoMonster, Qustodio, Content Watch Net Nanny 7, etc.
- Keep yourself updated with time and technology.
- Have the following approach:

www Approach

- W-1— "Who" teenagers meet online?
- W-2— "What" they do online?
- W-3— "Where" do they go online?

The W1 risks are:
 1. Stranger talk
 2. Bullying
 3. Bad advice
 4. Revenge porn

The W2 risks are:
 1. Cyber crimes
 2. Money loss
 3. Stress
 4. Bullying

The W3 risks are:
 1. Porn addiction
 2. Gaming
 3. Bullying
 4. Wrong advice

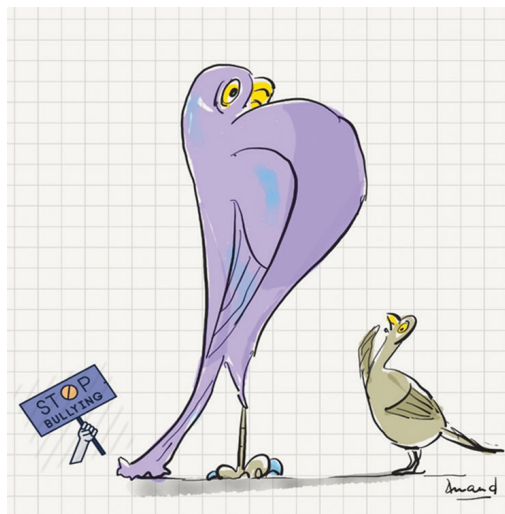
Every major city has a cyber crime branch.
 Dial 1098 if you are in trouble.

Q9

In what ways can our pediatrician help the child and support us to handle bullying?

Pediatricians are your immediate source of help in discussing your concern about your child being a victim of bullying. They can be of help in following ways:

- Interact with your child to understand the people with whom your child spends most part of the day and thus assess the situation.
- Identify traits in your child that could make them vulnerable to bullying.
- Assess the extent of physical and/or emotional injuries due to bullying and help in healing the same.
- Screen your child for short-term or long-term consequences of bullying.
- Help your children with strategies to handle bullying.
- Give information to your child on how to involve adults when bullying takes place.
- Reassure your child that it is not his/her fault and he/she has nothing to be ashamed of.
- Help you with strategies to empathize and deal with the emotional challenges faced by your child.
- Empower you with skills to create an enabling family environment that would:
 - Help the child in sharing his/her bad experiences with you.
 - Support the child to inculcate aptitude to identify bullying.
 - Enable the child to deal with bullying in an effective manner.
- Notify schools and other organizations about the magnitude of bullying and suggest interventions.
- Keep track of the extent of bullying and report to law enforcing authorities with documents to support the complaint.
- Play a major role in creating awareness on bullying and steps to reduce the same in schools.



Q10

If bullying continues, where can we complain? How to involve the school? Do we have laws that support to stop bullying in India?

If you come to know that your child is being bullied at school, to begin with, you can contact the authorized people at school such as the class-teacher, parent-teacher representative, and/or the school counselor. If bullying continues, in spite of informing the school, you can take help from the local police of the district.

Schools play a major role in identifying and helping both the victim and the bully. They can also create awareness among students about bullying activities in school and the probable effects.

In 2015, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has issued guidelines for the prevention of bullying. This includes the mandatory setting up of anti-bullying committee in schools.

Role of School

- Acknowledging the existence of bullying in the school and taking the words of students and parents with attention to details.
- Being vigilant and observing signs of bullying and responding quickly and sensitively.
- Developing and periodic reviewing of "School Bullying Prevention Plan".
- Developing and implementing bullying prevention programs, which mainly focus on development of important social-emotional skills.
- Enabling the presence of counselors in school and hostel premises.
- Displaying the names and contact numbers of members of the committee everywhere in the school premises so that it is easy for children to reach.
- Ensuring strict code of conduct with penalties and punishment in place.

Laws Against Bullying

We do have anti-bullying laws in India. With the direction from the Honorable Supreme Court of India, Ministry of Human Resources and Development constituted the Raghavan Committee that submitted its report in 2007. According to which:

- If a child is found engaging in bullying, a written warning will be handed out to him; following enquiry he/she can be rusticated from the institution.
- Every school should have a notice board on which the penalties and repercussions of bullying are clearly laid out.