

Talk with Your Child about Bullying



BH-2

Parents can prepare themselves to talk with their children by considering how they are going to handle their child's questions and emotions. They can also decide what information they would like to give their child about bullying.

Parents should be ready to:

- *Listen.* It is the child's story; let him or her tell it. They may be in emotional pain about the way they are being treated.
- *Believe.* The knowledge that a child is being bullied can be shocking. To be an effective advocate parents need to react in a way that encourages the child to trust.
- *Be supportive.* Tell the child it is not his fault and that he does not deserve to be bullied. Parents need to empower their child by telling him how terrific he is. Parents need to avoid judgmental comments about their child or the child who bullies. Their child may already be feeling isolated and hearing negative statements from parents may only further isolate him.
- *Be patient.* Children may not be ready to open up right away. Talking about the bullying may be difficult as they may fear retaliation from the bully or think that even if they tell an adult that nothing will change. The child might be feeling insecure, withdrawn, frightened, or ashamed.
- *Provide information.* Parents should educate their child about bullying by providing information at a level that the child can understand.
- *Explore options for intervention strategies.* Parents can discuss with their child options they may have in dealing with bullying behavior.

Questions to Ask Your Child about Bullying

Parents can help their child recognize bullying behavior by asking them questions about their situation. The following questions may be helpful:

- Did the child hurt you on purpose?
- Was it done more than once?
- Did it make you feel bad or angry? *or* How do you feel about the behavior?
- Did the child know you were being hurt?
- Is the other child more powerful (i.e. bigger, scarier) than you in some way?

(Adapted from "Your Child: Bully or Victim," Peter Sheras, Ph.D., 2002)

Variations of these questions for the child who is reluctant to talk about the situation may include:

- How was the bus ride today?
- Who did you sit by at lunch?
- I notice that you seem to be feeling sick a lot and wanting to stay home: please tell me about that.
- Are kids making fun of you?
- Are there a lot of cliques at school?
What do you think about them?
- Has anyone touched you in a way that did not feel right?

Other options for helping your child discuss bullying include:

- reading stories with the child about bullying situations
- talking about recent events in the news
- discussing bullying incidents on TV or in a movie