

 An official website of the United States government
[Here's how you know](#)

stopbullying.gov

[Home](#) » Effects of Bullying

Effects of Bullying

Bullying can affect everyone—those who are bullied, those who bully, and those who witness bullying. Bullying is linked to many negative outcomes including impacts on mental health, substance use, and suicide. It is important to talk to kids to determine whether bullying—or something else—is a concern.

Kids Who are Bullied

Kids who are bullied can experience negative physical, social, emotional, academic, and mental health issues. Kids who are bullied are more likely to experience:

- Depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy. These issues may persist into adulthood.
- Health complaints
- Decreased academic achievement—GPA and standardized test scores—and school participation. They are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.

A very small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

Kids Who Bully Others

Kids who bully others can also engage in violent and other risky behaviors into adulthood. Kids who bully are more likely to:

- Abuse alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults

- Get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school
- Engage in early sexual activity
- Have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults
- Be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children as adults

Bystanders

Kids who witness bullying are more likely to:

- Have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs
- Have increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety
- Miss or skip school

The Relationship between Bullying and Suicide

Media reports often link bullying with suicide. However, most youth who are bullied do not have thoughts of suicide or engage in suicidal behaviors.

Although kids who are bullied are at risk of suicide, bullying alone is not the cause. Many issues contribute to suicide risk, including depression, problems at home, and trauma history. Additionally, specific groups have an increased risk of suicide, including American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian American, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. This risk can be increased further when these kids are not supported by parents, peers, and schools. Bullying can make an unsupportive situation worse.

Date Last Reviewed: July 21, 2020

 An official website of the United States government
[Here's how you know](#)

stopbullying.gov

[Home](#) » Warning Signs for Bullying

Warning Signs for Bullying

There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying—either being bullied or bullying others. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied or are bullying others ask for help.

It is important to talk with children who show signs of being bullied or bullying others. These warning signs can also point to other issues or problems, such as depression or substance abuse. Talking to the child can help identify the root of the problem.

Signs a Child Is Being Bullied

Look for changes in the child. However, be aware that not all children who are bullied exhibit warning signs.

Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, [feeling sick or faking illness](#)
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

If you know someone in serious distress or danger, don't ignore the problem. [Get help right away.](#)

Signs a Child is Bullying Others

Kids may be bullying others if they:

- Get into physical or verbal fights
- Have friends who bully others
- Are increasingly aggressive
- Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blame others for their problems
- Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity

Why don't kids ask for help?

Statistics from the [2018 Indicators of School Crime and Safety - PDF](#) show that only 20% of school bullying incidents were reported. Kids don't tell adults for many reasons:

- Bullying can make a child feel helpless. Kids may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.
- Kids may fear backlash from the kid who bullied them.
- Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Kids may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak.
- Kids who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or could understand.
- Kids may fear being rejected by their peers. Friends can help protect kids from bullying, and kids can fear losing this support.

Date Last Reviewed: July 21, 2020

What Adults Can Do to Help Youth Experiencing Bullying

As an adult, you are an important catalyst in guiding kids through addressing and preventing bullying. When young people experience bullying, they often feel like there's nothing that can be done to stop it. Whether you're a parent, educator, or concerned adult, there are ways you can help.

1. Listen

When a child approaches you about a bullying situation, be prepared to listen without judgment and provide a safe and supportive space in which the child can share their experience and work out their feelings. Recognize that it can be hard to talk about the experience. They may be experiencing the emotional effects of bullying—insecurity, embarrassment, fear, vulnerability, anger, or sadness—and it could take time for them to fully share their story.

Help the child recognize the signs of bullying

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

When a child begins to tell their story, listen and ask questions that encourage them to talk. Even if you know all the students involved, don't make assumptions. Bullying is frequently socially nuanced; there may be important details that are overlooked or not reported, not every bullying situation is as it seems on the surface, and there is always more than one side to the same story. Respond with empathy, concern, and care. It's important to learn as much as possible about the situation, such as how long the behavior has been happening, who has been involved, and what steps have been taken. Giving the child space to talk through their experience and emotions is an important step. Bullying can be traumatic and opening up about the experience could take time. Be patient and allow the child to confide in you on their own terms.

2. Provide support and encouragement

Reassure the young person confiding in you that you are glad they're talking about their experiences. Let them know that they are not alone, and you are there to help. Just as bullying can be an emotional issue for the child experiencing it, bullying can also be emotional for you. It's natural to experience your own feelings, like frustration, anger, confusion, or sadness, but always remember that the child is now looking to you for help.

It's important to recognize that some typical adult responses to bullying are not helpful for children. Adults sometimes have the impulse to tell the child to stand up to the person who is bullying, to advise them to ignore the bullying, or to take matters into their own hands. While these reactions express genuine concern and good intentions, they are likely to be ineffective.

The best way to help the child is by taking measures that focus on their emotional and physical health, such as keeping their self-esteem intact and making sure they feel safe at school.

How to show your support:

- Tell the child that it is NOT their fault and bullying is never justified
- Remind them they are NOT alone
- Explain that it is your responsibility as an adult to help them and ensure they feel safe and protected
- Let them know that they deserve respect just like everyone else
- Assure them that they have a right to feel safe at school and at home
- Help them create an action plan by thinking through the possible ways of responding and moving forward

3. Empower

After learning the child's story, it's time to think in terms of "self-advocacy" for the child. This process means first letting the child *communicate what they need* and then *helping the child get what they need*. One idea to encourage self-advocacy is to work together to create an action plan outlining a strategy and response to the bullying. When developing the plan, talk with the child about how they would like the situation to be different and how to make that happen.

Involving the child in defining a solution to the bullying can be powerful. So often, those who are bullied feel helpless and think nothing will ever change. Working together creates solutions that are inspired by the child's strengths and abilities and can help build confidence and resilience.

Student Action Plan

**A document designed to help develop a customized strategy to address bullying.
Incorporates a 3-step process designed to think through solutions fit for the individual.**

<https://pacerteensagainstbullying.org/advocacy-for-self/student-action-plan>

4. Think who else should be involved

As part of developing a plan, it is also helpful to identify others who can help the child. Think about those who influence their life. When a child is being bullied it can impact their education, emotional well-being, and even physical health. It's important to think through not only what can be done to address the bullying, but also how to build the child's confidence, increase resiliency, and develop self-advocacy skills.

When dealing with a bullying situation, it's important to involve a parent or guardian and adults at school such as teachers and faculty members to ensure the child feels supported at home and at school. A trusted physician or counselor can be included to help with issues like anxiety, depression, and self-image. You may also want to talk with a coach or the leader of a club activity to determine if there are any bullying issues among the participants, or if being part of the team or club could provide the child with stronger social connections. Work with the child to identify whom you want to contact, what you want to ask them, and how you will be involved moving forward. The next step is to share this action plan with the other adults involved in the child's life.

5. Understand local and federal laws and policies

In cases of bullying, it's important to have a working knowledge of student rights. Follow these steps to ensure that you understand all the help and support available.

- **Document all events and communication.** This is important because written records provide a history. Keep your writing factual, not emotional, and include background on any steps you plan to take or have already implemented. Save all written correspondences, like emails, texts, and posts on social media.
- **Check your state's legislation on bullying.** Each state has different laws and policies pertaining to bullying, along with requirements for how schools should respond.
- **Contact your school** and request a copy of the district's bullying policy.
- **See if there is a Safe Schools bullying prevention office for your state's Department of Education;** it can be a local resource to learn more about your state's legislation.
- **Determine if the bullying is based on race, national origin, sex, age, disability, or religion.** Bullying of this nature can qualify as discriminatory harassment. Schools are required to respond to these situations under federal civil rights laws.

Did you know?

Through legislation, education codes, and model policies, state and local lawmakers and educators have taken legal and administrative action to prevent bullying and keep all students safe. Ask your school for their policy. Access detailed information on a specific state's protections at [StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov).

Why is it important for adults to get involved?

- If students could stop bullying on their own, they would
- Bullying can make kids feel powerless; they need to know someone is there for them
- Kids see adults as role models and kids will follow their example
- Adults set the rules, so adults need to be the ones who enforce them

 An official website of the United States government
[Here's how you know](#)

stopbullying.gov

[Home](#) » What Is Bullying

What Is Bullying

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have [serious, lasting problems](#).

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- **An Imbalance of Power:** Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

- [Types of Bullying](#)
- [Where and When Bullying Happens](#)
- [Frequency of Bullying](#)

Types of Bullying

There are three types of bullying:

- **Verbal bullying** is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes:
 - Teasing
 - Name-calling

- Inappropriate sexual comments
- Taunting
- Threatening to cause harm
- **Social bullying**, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:
 - Leaving someone out on purpose
 - Telling other children not to be friends with someone
 - Spreading rumors about someone
 - Embarrassing someone in public
- **Physical bullying** involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes:
 - Hitting/kicking/pinching
 - Spitting
 - Tripping/pushing
 - Taking or breaking someone's things
 - Making mean or rude hand gestures

Where and When Bullying Happens

Bullying can occur during or after school hours. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen travelling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or [on the Internet](#).

Frequency of Bullying

There are two sources of federally collected data on youth bullying:

- The 2017 [School Crime Supplement](#) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice) indicates that, nationwide, about 20% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying.
- The 2019 [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that, nationwide, 19.5% of students in grades 9–12 report being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.

What Youth Can Do If They Are Experiencing Bullying

No matter what form it takes, negative behavior directed at you hurts. If you're pushed, hit, or your things are ripped off or trashed, it hurts. If you're ignored by friends, humiliated by the actions of a classmate, or cruel things are posted about you online, it hurts. If it happens to you, you've probably asked yourself, "Why me?" You know how painful it is to be treated this way.

So seriously, if you think you are being bullied what can you do? A lot! It's not always easy to know what you should do, but it's important to know that you have options. These steps will help you with ideas.

1. Know how bullying is defined

If you ever wonder if you are being bullied, start by thinking about the dynamics of bullying and how it applies to your situation. Hallmarks typically include:

- The person is being hurt, harmed, or humiliated with words or behavior
- The behavior is repeated or there is a concern that it will be repeated
- The behavior is being done intentionally
- The person being hurt has a hard time stopping or preventing the behavior
- The hurtful behavior is carried out by those who have more power, such as being older, being physically bigger or stronger, having more social status, or when a group of students single out an individual

Are You Being Bullied?

Click here to access the interactive checklist!

<https://www.pacerteensagainstbullying.org/advocacy-for-self/are-you-being-bullied>

It's important to know that bullying can happen to anyone—and it's not always so easy to recognize. If you are still trying to determine if you're experiencing bullying, take a look at the checklist below. Read each of the following questions and check any boxes you think might apply to your situation.

- Do other students make mean comments about you?
- Have you ever been called hurtful names?
- Are you teased for how you look or act?
- Do you feel alone or isolated at school?
- Has anyone ever spread mean or untrue rumors about you?

- Are you ever purposely excluded from a group?
- Have you ever felt that someone you thought of as a friend is trying to control you?
- Has someone ever touched you in a way that felt inappropriate, demeaning, or threatening?
- Has anyone ever mocked or mimicked the way you talk or act?
- Has anyone ever damaged your belongings?
- Do other students physically hurt you on purpose?
- Are you ever afraid to go to school?
- Do you get anxious about how you are treated by other kids at school?
- Have photos of you ever been posted online without your permission?
- Has anyone ever pretended to be you on social media?
- Have people posted mean things about you online or commented in a mean way on your posts?

The more boxes you check, the more likely it is you are being bullied.

2. Embrace these important points

- No one ever deserves to be bullied
- You have the right to ask for help to stop the behavior
- Your opinion about what to do is important
- You don't have to go through the bullying experience alone

Remember the bullying is not your fault and know that it's natural to feel emotions such as sadness, fear, loneliness, anger, or confusion as a result of it. Sometimes, we have the tendency to minimize how bullying makes us feel, but it's so important to pay attention to and recognize your feelings and how the actions of others affect how you feel. The next step is to start thinking through what you can do.

3. Recognize the issue, think about ways to take action

If you are experiencing bullying, think through some of the issues you may encounter, as well as how you can take action:

The issue: I don't want to tell anyone.

How to take action: Tell someone you trust.

Those who bully depend on their targets being silent, as it allows their behavior to continue without consequences. Your natural reaction to bullying might be to isolate yourself from peers and family; it may be too painful, hurtful, or embarrassing to even talk about. And yes, it can be really hard to talk about what's happening. As difficult as it might be, it's important to connect with someone and share what you are going through. Ideally, you'll talk about it with a parent or an adult whom you trust. If you don't feel comfortable telling an adult, start by confiding in a friend and asking them to help you sort through your situation with a goal of talking to an adult about it.

The issue: I don't want to be called a snitch

How to take action: Recognize that the goal of using that label is to silence you.

Reporting is sharing legitimate information to protect yourself or another person. Tattling is more commonly done with ulterior motives, such as to intentionally get another person into trouble. When you are being bullied, the person bullying you may try to keep you silent by trying to shame you into thinking you are doing something wrong by telling. They want you to be silent so that there are no consequences for their behavior.

The issue: I was told this was just the way it is.

How to take action: Know there are laws designed to address bullying.

There are state and federal laws that provide protections against bullying and harassment. In general, schools will have a bullying prevention policy, which addresses the right to be safe at school. Research your school's policy about bullying prevention, state laws that apply to bullying, and how to report inappropriate behavior to social media. Learn, on your own or with the help of others, how each of these can be used to assert your rights.

You may have additional protections under federal law when the bullying is about:

- Race, color, or national origin
- Sex or gender
- Religion
- Disability

State and local laws may provide additional protections on other bases, including sexual orientation.



The issue: I already told someone and nothing changed.

How to take action: Don't give up; tell another person.

If you told an adult about a bullying situation and it wasn't helpful, continue to be a self-advocate. Know that you have the right to speak up for yourself and let another adult know what you need to feel safe. As a next step, think through who else you can tell, such as a parent, a school administrator, a favorite teacher, a counselor, or another adult in the community whom you trust. Then share important information with them, either in person or in writing. Make sure to include:

- A description of the bullying
- Where and when it happened
- Who is involved
- Steps that you have taken

Sometimes it's helpful to remind the adults you speak with about the laws or school's bullying prevention policy that outline their responsibility in handling bullying situations. Then, ask for advice and their help to address the situation.

The issue: This is only happening online.

How to take action: Document, block, and report.

There are three main action steps when bullied on social media, texting, or other electronic means.

1. **Document:** Your initial impulse might be to delete a harmful post, but once you do that it could be lost. Instead, think through if you want to keep evidence of the bullying, so that the information can be shared with an adult. Take a screen shot and save it to your files or capture the content in a manner comfortable to you.
2. **Block:** Remove the opportunity for the person to contact you.
3. **Report:** Tell someone what's happened. Just as you deserve to be safe at school, you deserve to feel safe online, too. Let someone know, a parent or a trusted adult, and show them the evidence of the bullying. You can also report the individual to the social media or service provider.

The issue: I'm told that I don't fit in.

How to take action: Find others with similar interests. Learn to embrace and nurture what sets you apart. There's so much pressure to try to fit in when you're a teen. Yet, the irony is that no two people are the same. Think through what you like to do, and then seek opportunities to connect with those that share your interests. It might be hard to recognize right now, but the very attributes, talents, or interests that you are being teased about are often the traits that eventually become your strengths. Think about the person interested in technology who could go on to pursue that computer science degree, or the child who spends all their time reading and grows up to write best-selling novels.

The issue: I'm being bullied by my teacher, coach, or another adult.

How to take action: Talk with your parent or guardian.

Bullying is about power and the power dynamic between an adult and a student usually favors the adult. It is generally not helpful, and often not safe, to confront an adult about their behavior. It's important that you share what's happening with a parent or a trusted adult, as their advice and action is critical in this type of situation.

The issue: I'm being bullied outside of school.

How to take action: Do your best to remove yourself from the situation and report it.

Bullying can happen in the neighborhood where you live, at your favorite store, or on a city street. It's important to know that most laws address bullying that happens at school. If you are being bullied, for example, during the summer or on weekends at your local park or grocery store, report it to the adults who are in charge. This might be the store owner, the park patrol, or even a police officer. Most bullying happens outside the view of adults, which makes it very important that you report it, so adults can keep you safe and hold those who are bullying accountable.

4. Address the bullying and be your own (self) advocate

Now that you have a better understanding of the issues, it's time to think about how to be your own (self) advocate and trust that change can happen when action is taken. The very definition of change is that something different happens; trying another approach creates the opportunity for new outcomes. Positive change is much more likely to occur when you practice self-advocacy skills, which means thinking through what you need, sharing that information, and asking for help.

First, being a self-advocate does not mean you have to fix the situation on your own. It means that your ideas and perspective are important. Self-advocacy means learning to speak up for yourself, telling people what you need, and taking action. Start by creating your own plan—either on your own or with a trusted adult—that works for you and your situation. This is an opportunity to develop a strategy to change what's happening to you. In your plan, include:

- What is happening to you, when and where it takes place, and who is involved.
- What you would like to change, how things could be different, and what would help you gain control over the situation.
- Your role in this action plan, who else should be involved, and what they could do.

Once you've created a plan, share it with an adult so they can support you in a way that makes you feel comfortable. Express your ideas and learn to respectfully disagree if you don't feel confident with other options presented. Your voice is important and your opinions on what to do matter.

Next Step

Be a self-advocate, learn how to create your own Student Action Plan.

<https://pacerteensagainstbullying.org/advocacy-for-self/student-action-plan>