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GETTING
TO THE
BOTTOM OF

BULLYING

You get the phone call every parent dreads — your child has been involved in a bullying incident at school. To your surprise, she was the aggressor. What do you do?

Peer interactions often go awry. Accepting that your child may have acted out of line is difficult, but necessary.

“Parents often believe being kind and respecting others is instinctual, but it’s not an automatic reaction,” said Natalie Walders Abramson, PhD, Pediatric Psychologist at Children’s Hospital Colorado. “What may be more instinctual is aggression, while kindness and respect require a conscious effort and coaching from adults.”

If you learn your child is bullying others, remind him that bullying is never acceptable, and that any unkind or aggressive behavior has consequences.

“Link the behavior with an appropriate consequence,”

Dr. Abramson said. “For example, if the bullying was online, a child should lose access to electronics or social media for an appropriate period of time. If the incident happened on the field, consult the coach and request your child be required to sit out a game or two as a consequence.”

Talk with your child about what happened and help them walk through how they could have interacted in a different manner. Suggest other, more suitable ways of behaving, and encourage her to come up with non-bullying solutions that would have been a better alternative.

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Children’s Hospital Colorado

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Dr. Abramson outlines four ways to take a proactive role in your child's life to prevent bullying:

- **Connect with the school.** "Be a known presence in your child's school. Make sure teachers and administrators are aware you want to know about any infractions, however minor, as soon as possible. Ensure that the school knows you care about your child's social interactions as much as athletic and academic progress."
- **Network with parents.** "Stay in touch with parents of children in the same peer group. Notice conflicts that are emerging among the kids, and work with other parents to intervene at an early stage if relationships start to sour."

- **Watch your child.** "Make sure your child knows you care about how they are interacting socially. There's a careful balance between autonomy and regulating peer interactions online and in person, but keep a watchful eye within reason."
- **Set an example.** "It is important for parents to model what it means to be a good friend. Nurture adult friendships, and allow children to observe you being a good friend yourself, particularly when someone else is in need of more support."

To read more expert information about bullying, visit childrenscolorado.org/bullying.

"People tend to be reactive rather than proactive. If a child is on the receiving end of maltreatment, parents are likely quick to react. But if your child is the aggressor, that's harder to face and takes strategic effort to address."

— NATALIE WALDERS ABRAMSON, PHD,
Pediatric Psychologist at
Children's Hospital Colorado



The Main Offenders

Bullying is any unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. There is a substantial range in the intensity and impact of bullying, from mild taunting to overt physical violence. The three most common types of bullying are:

- **Verbal** — teasing, name-calling, inappropriate comments or threats of violence
- **Social or relational** — excluding someone on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors or embarrassing someone in public
- **Physical** — hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping or pushing

Bullying can happen after or during school as well as online. Online bullying, called cyberbullying, can be posted anonymously and sent quickly to many people. Once these messages have been sent, deleting any comments or pictures from the Internet is incredibly difficult, so discuss these dangers with your child as he or she becomes more technologically savvy. Moreover, monitor your child's online interactions frequently and set limits on the amount of time they spend engaging in social media. Encourage more face-to-face peer interactions.