

December 19,
2023



Know! to Recognize Bullying

You can recognize bullying through three characteristics: intent, repetition, and power. Bullying is a pattern of behavior in which a person uses their power over others to intentionally cause harm. Bullying can take many forms, including physical violence, threats, name-calling, spreading rumors, and using social media to extort or mock others.^{1,2}

Like forms of bullying, the signs of bullying also vary. Some common signs to look out for include:

- Unexplained physical marks or wounds
- Fear of attending school
- Anxiousness or hypervigilant behavior
- Having few friends or losing friends suddenly
- Personal belongings being lost or destroyed
- Becoming distressed after spending time on social media
- Becoming unusually secretive about school or online activities ¹



Know! How to Discuss Bullying with Youth

All young people deserve safe environments where they can learn and grow without fear of violence or harm. Unfortunately, bullying, whether in-person or online, can cause profound harm to young people and lead to emotional and mental health consequences, including depression, anxiety, and substance misuse. The more that you talk openly and honestly about bullying with the young people in your life, the more comfortable they will be sharing about witnessing or experiencing bullying.¹

Know! to Prevent Bullying Before it Starts

Check in early and often

Encourage the young people in your life to talk about their time at school and online and to express their feelings. Talk about the importance of respecting others and emphasize that you are a safe person to talk to if they are ever struggling with difficult situations. By talking often, you can help them speak up for themselves and navigate scenarios where they might struggle to be kind to others.

Be a role model

Caring adults are major influencers for the youth in their lives. Show the young people in your life how to treat others with kindness and respect through your actions. Try to demonstrate respectful behavior in your daily life and speak up when you see others being bullied or mistreated. Remember to model kindness in your online interactions, too.

Build confidence in young people

When young people are confident in themselves, they are more likely to express their feelings, leave uncomfortable situations, and stand up for themselves and others. Build up their confidence by encouraging the young people in your life to participate in the activities they enjoy and make friends with shared interests.^{1,3}

Know! What to do if you think a young person might be being bullied

Encourage Conversation

Young people may be hesitant to open up to adults about experiencing bullying. Try pointing out instances of bullying on television or in a movie and ask, "What do you think of this?" or "What would you do in this situation?" From there, you can ask about their experiences and start a conversation. You may want to share your experiences with bullying to help them feel less alone. Remember to take bullying seriously and check in regularly with your young person.

Listen Carefully

Young people who have been bullied might be feeling scared, embarrassed, or ashamed. They may be especially worried that things will get worse if they tell someone about it. If a young person in your life tells you that they have been bullied, listen carefully and supportively. Offer comfort and assure them that you are not disappointed with or angry at them. Emphasize how much you care about their well-being and remind them that it is not their fault that they are experiencing bullying.

Provide Reassurance

Remind young people that they did the right thing by telling you about experiencing bullying. Reassure them that the bully's behavior is disrespectful, not theirs, and that you will work together to find a solution. Share how much you love and value them for who they are and help them find activities that make them feel good to rebuild their self-esteem.**2,4**

Know! What to do if you think a young person might be bullying others

Communicate

Start a conversation to help you understand the "why" behind the young person's actions. Are they feeling insecure or fighting with a friend? Are they struggling to fit in with their peers? Ask them to explain a situation that frustrated them and ask questions about their feelings during that situation.**1**

Discuss healthy coping strategies

Talk through examples of difficult scenarios and appropriate responses with your young person. Acknowledge that some situations are difficult and come with big feelings. Help them come up with ways to behave like a good friend during situations that frustrate them and [ways to cope](#) when they are feeling overwhelmed. Try to frame the conversation around 'what to do' rather than 'what not to do'.**1,5**

Give opportunities to make things right

Help your young person find a way to apologize and make amends to the people that they harmed. Consider different forms of apologies -- speaking in person, writing a note, calling, texting, etc. -- as well as other forms of repairing relationships, like making a consistent effort to include a peer that they had excluded or doing something nice for their whole class. Work with your young person to find the forms of making amends that are appropriate and meaningful to them.**1,5**

[Numbered sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document](#)

For additional Know! Prevention Tips for Everyone, scan the QR code:



Resources

[How parents, teachers, and kids can take action to prevent bullying \(apa.org\)](#)

[Talk About Bullying | preventingbullying.promoteprevent.org](#)

[Helping Children Deal with Bullying & Cyberbullying | NSPCC](#)

[Bullying: Tips for Parents | Mental Health America \(mhanational.org\)](#)

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