

Ten Actions ALL Parents Can Take to Help Eliminate Bullying

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The latest research shows that **one in three children is directly involved in bullying as a perpetrator, victim, or both.** And many of those who are not directly involved witness others being bullied on a regular basis. No child is immune—kids of every race, gender, grade and socio-economic sector are impacted. But it doesn't have to be this way. As parents we have the power to help reduce bullying. Here are Education.com's top ten actions you can take to help address bullying:

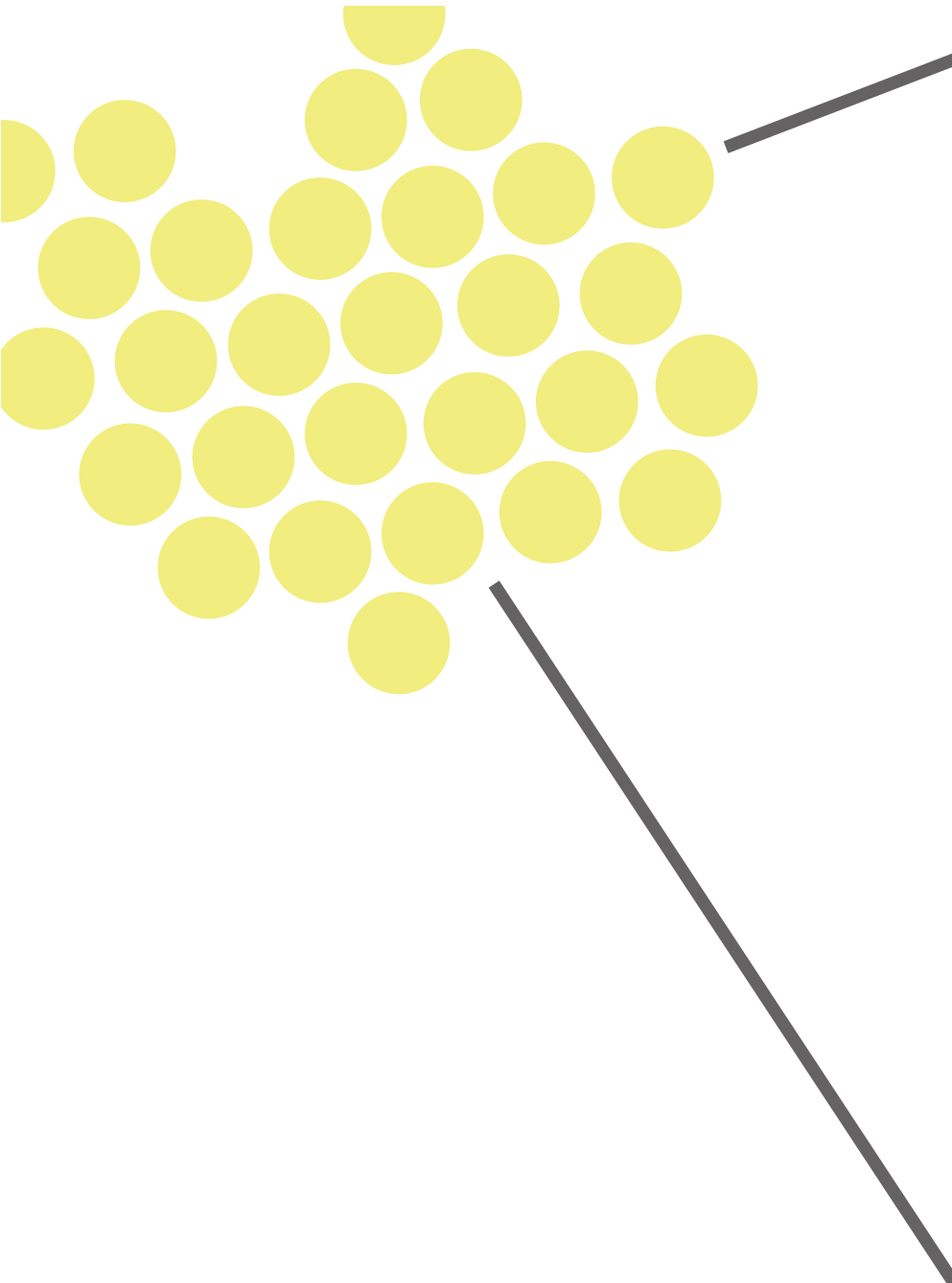
1. Talk with and listen to your kids—everyday. Research shows that adults are often the last to know when children are bullied or bully others. You can encourage your children to buck that trend by engaging in frequent conversations about their social lives. Spend a few minutes every day asking open ended questions about who they spend time with at school and in the neighborhood, what they do in between classes and at recess, who they have lunch with, or what happens on the way to and from school. If your children feel comfortable talking to you about their peers before they're involved in a bullying event, they'll be much more likely to get you involved after.

2. Spend time at school and recess. Research shows that 67% of bullying happens when adults are not present. Schools don't have the resources to do it all and need the help of parents to reduce bullying. Whether you can volunteer once a week or once a month, you can make a real difference just by being present and helping to organize games and activities that encourage kids to play with new friends. Be sure to coordinate your on-campus volunteer time with your child's teacher and/or principal.

3. Be a good example of kindness and leadership. Your kids learn a lot about power relationships from watching you. When you get angry at a waiter, a sales clerk, another driver on the road, or even your child, you have a great opportunity to model effective communication techniques. Don't blow it by blowing your top! Any time you speak to another person in a mean or abusive way, you're teaching your child that bullying is OK.

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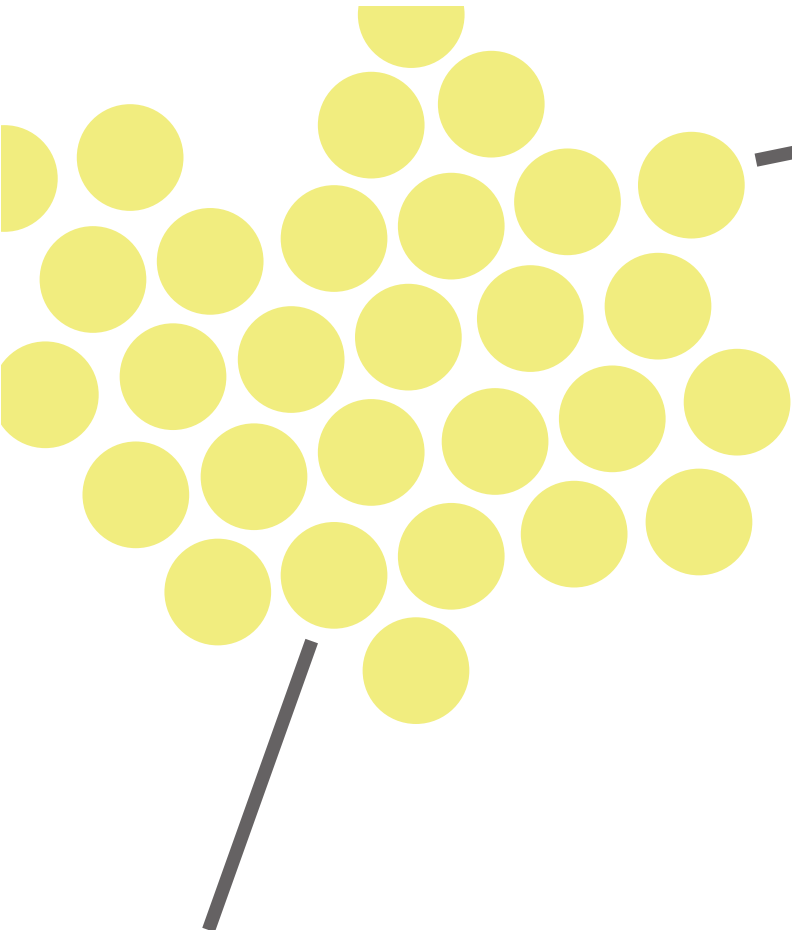




4. Learn the signs. Most children don't tell anyone (especially adults) that they've been bullied. It is therefore important for parents and teachers to learn to recognize possible signs of being victimized, such as frequent loss of personal belongings, complaints of headaches or stomachaches, avoiding recess or school activities, and getting to school very late or very early. If you suspect that a child might be being bullied, talk with the child's teacher or find ways to observe his peer interactions to determine whether or not your suspicions might be correct. Talk directly to your child about what is going on at school.

5. Create healthy anti-bullying habits early. Help develop anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits early in your children—as early as preschool and kindergarten. Coach your children on what not to do—hitting, pushing, teasing, “saying na-na-na-na-na,” or being mean to others. Help your child to focus on how such actions might feel to the child on the receiving end (e.g., “How do you think you would feel if that happened to you?”). Such strategies can enhance empathy for others. Equally if not more important, teach your children what to do—kindness, empathy, fair play, and turn-taking are critical skills for good peer relations. Children also need to learn how to say “no” firmly if they experience or witness bullying behavior. Coach your child about what to do if other kids are mean—get an adult right away, tell the child who is teasing or bullying to “stop,” walk away, ignore the bully and find someone else to play with. It may help to role play what to do with your child. And repetition helps: go over these techniques periodically with your kindergarten and early elementary school aged children.

6. Help your child's school address bullying effectively. Whether your children have been bullied or not, you should know what their school is doing to address bullying. Research shows that “zero-tolerance” policies aren't effective. What works better are ongoing educational programs that help create a healthy social climate in the school. This means teaching kids at every grade level how to be inclusive leaders and how to be empathic towards others and teaching victims effective resistance techniques. If your school does not have effective bullying strategies and policies in place, talk to the principal and advocate for change.



7. Establish household rules about bullying. Your children need to hear from you explicitly that it's not normal, okay, or tolerable for them to bully, to be bullied, or to stand by and just watch other kids be bullied. Make sure they know that if they are bullied physically, verbally, or socially (at school, by a sibling, in your neighborhood, or online) it's safe and important for them to tell you about it—and that you will help. They also need to know just what bullying is (many children do not know that they are bullying others), and that such behavior is harmful to others and not acceptable. You can help your children find positive ways to exert their personal power, status, and leadership at school. Work with your child, their teachers, and their principal to implement a kindness plan at school.

8. Teach your child how to be a good witness or positive bystander. Research shows that kids who witness bullying feel powerless and seldom intervene. However, kids who take action can have a powerful and positive effect on the situation. Although it's never a child's responsibility to put him or herself in danger, kids can often effectively diffuse a bullying situation by yelling "Stop! You're bullying" or "Hey, that's not cool." Kids can also help each other by providing support to the victim, not giving extra attention to the bully, and/or reporting what they witnessed to an adult.

9. Teach your child about cyberbullying. Children often do not realize what cyberbullying is. Cyberbullying includes sending mean, rude, vulgar, or threatening messages or images; posting sensitive, private information about another person; pretending to be someone else in order to make that person look bad; and intentionally excluding someone from an online group. These acts are as harmful as physical violence and must not be tolerated. We know from research that the more time a teen spends online, the more likely they are to be cyberbullied—so limit online time. There's a simple litmus test you can teach your children about online posting: if you wouldn't say it to someone's face or you would not feel comfortable having your parents see it—don't post it (or take it down now).

10. Spread the word that bullying should not be a normal part of childhood. Some adults hesitate to act when they observe or hear about bullying because they think of bullying as a typical phase of childhood that must be endured or that it can help children "toughen up." It is important for all adults to understand that bullying does not have to be a normal part of childhood. All forms of bullying are harmful to the perpetrator, the victim, and to witnesses and the effects last well into adulthood (and can include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, family violence and criminal behavior). Efforts to effectively address bullying require the collaboration of school, home, and community. Forward this list and articles you've read to all the parents, teachers, administrators, after-school care programs, camp counselors, and spiritual leaders you know. Bullying is a serious problem, but if we all work together, it's one we can impact.

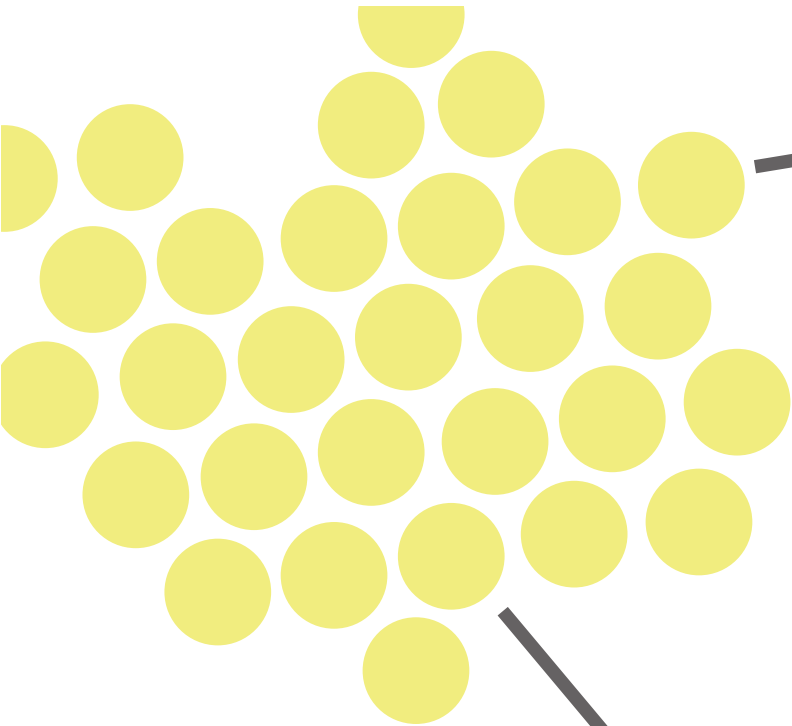
Ten Actions Parents Can Take if Your Child is Bullying Others

Learning that your child is involved in bullying behavior can be a tough blow to any parent. Before you get angry or upset, take a breath. Social skills develop gradually over the school years, and for many children, this includes learning and experimenting with power and relationships. It's important that you work steadily and compassionately to get your child back on track. There's a lot you, as a parent, can do to help your child learn from the situation and become a more productive and supportive part of her peer group. Here are 10 actions you can take today to help create better outcomes for both your child and the kids who were bullied.

- 1. Have an honest and firm conversation with your child.** Many children don't fully understand that what they are doing is bullying and this it is not okay. They may have seen similar behavior in adults, their peers, or on television. Your child needs to hear from you explicitly that it's not normal, okay, or tolerable to bully, to be bullied, or to watch other kids be bullied. Kids need to understand that when they bully their peers, they are doing harm not only to those victims, but also to kids who witness their actions—and even to themselves. Children who repeatedly bully others tend to end up as adults having increased depression, anger, and conflict with other adults—and are more likely to be convicted of a crime. Your child needs your love and care to get back on track.
- 2. Make a commitment to help your child find healthy ways to resolve conflict and to stop bullying others.** Start by determining why your child is bullying. Is it the draw of social power or status? Or perhaps, a natural temperament that needs more adult regulation, or a case of copying peers? Is it possible your kid is being bullied by others, and is lashing out with pro-active behavior to try to keep from getting bullied? A teacher, counselor or mental health professional may be able to help with this process. Once you get a handle on why the bullying is occurring, you can then help your child come up with alternate behaviors or ideas to gain leadership and “social status” that don't involve excluding others or physical and verbal bullying. Provide specific examples from your own experience or from carefully screened books and media. Support your child's efforts to communicate the plan and ideas to teachers and administrators and to implement the plan at school.

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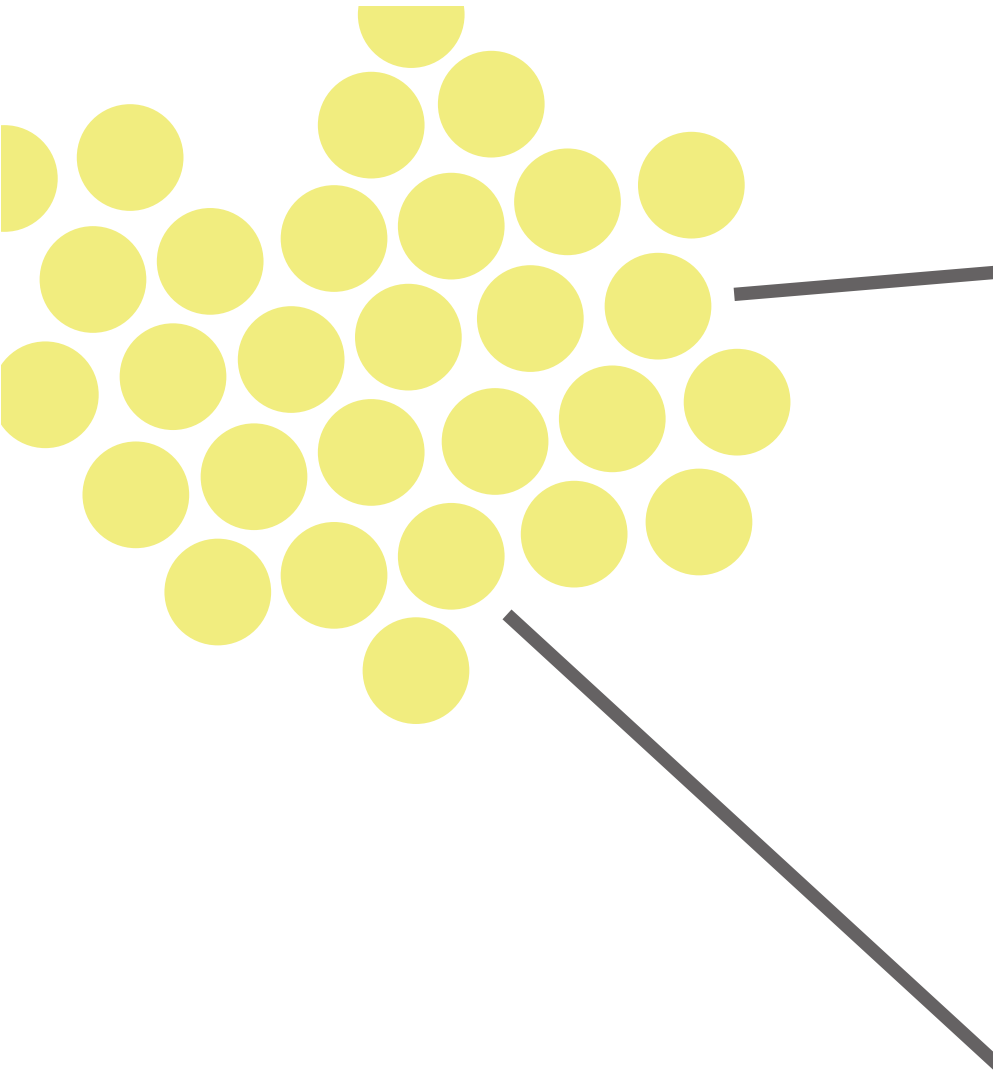


3. Schedule an appointment to talk with school staff including your child's teacher(s) and the school counselor. Share your concerns. Work together to send clear messages to your child that bullying won't be accepted at home or at school and must stop. Set up a hierarchy of clear consequences that do not involve punishment, but rather actions of apology and new respect towards kids who were bullied. Let your child know that acting with respect and kindness towards others is the true form of power. Always have these conversations modeling calm, gentle and loving ways of speaking.

4. Develop clear and consistent family rules for behavior and follow through on your child's compliance to those rules. Your child needs to know the specific behaviors you expect. Praise and reward the kids who follow rules. Establish appropriate consequences that are not physical or hostile if your child's actions or behavior fails to meet expectations. Remember, saying nothing sends the message that what your child's doing is okay.

5. Monitor your child's behavior at home closely. Immediately and calmly stop any acts of aggression you see against siblings or other children in your home, and talk about other ways your child can deal with sticky situations. Guide your child toward respectful and kind actions within your home environment on a consistent basis.

6. Your behavior teaches your children how to behave. Take an honest look at your interactions with other adults inside and outside your home. Work to make changes if your children aren't learning to treat each other with respect by watching you. Do your best to model respectful, kind and empathetic communication and avoid aggressive, intimidating and abusive behaviors—even during disagreements.



7. Spend time getting to know your child. Talk about how your kid prefers to spend free time—who does he or she spend time with? What activities are they involved in? If the circle of friends concerns you, work together to help direct your child to a better environment—one that builds on healthy interests and talents. School clubs, music lessons and sports can be great outlets.

8. Be realistic and patient. Don't expect any behavior to change overnight. Support your child's efforts to improve, and be there every step of the journey. Keep lines of communication open so your kid has a sounding board, and someone to trust and confide in. Practice role-playing, where you take on the role of children being bullied, and have your child practice talking it out. You can make suggestions for both word choice and tone of voice.

9. Continue to work and communicate with school staff for as long as it takes. They should be your allies. If you're not receiving the support and attention your situation requires, escalate the issue through the school and district administration channels.

10. Don't be afraid to ask for help. While there's unfortunately not a shot or pill to end bullying behavior in kids, your child's pediatrician can support you in a lot of ways—including making a referral to a mental health professional and other resources available in your community.

Ten Actions Parents Can Take If Their Child Has Been Bullied

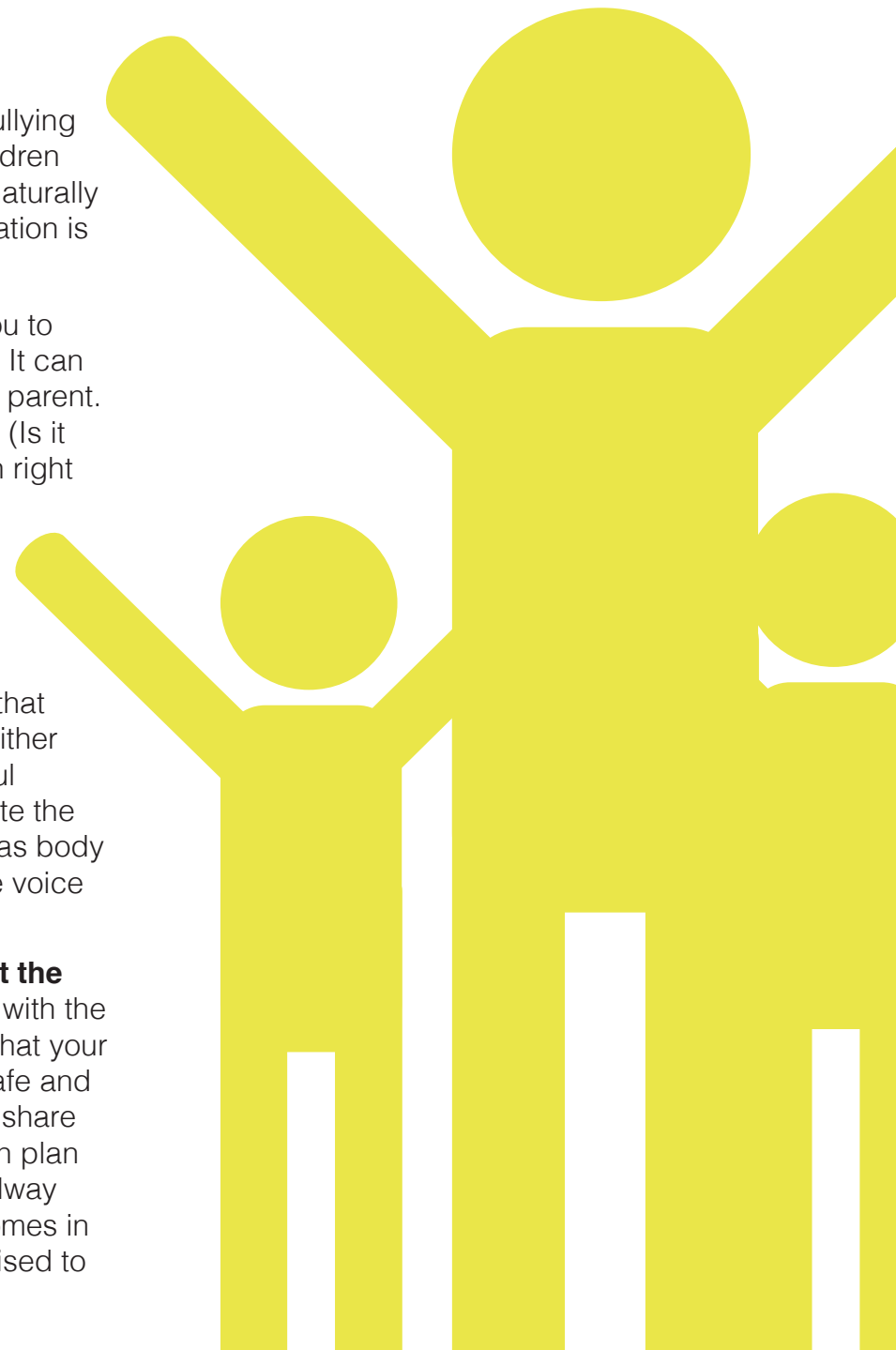
If you think your child is being bullied, it's time to take action...now. Bullying is not something that just goes away on its own, it is not something that children can just “work out” without mediation, and it is not something kids will just naturally outgrow. If you know (or think) that your child is being bullied, your participation is critical to a successful outcome. Some suggested actions include:

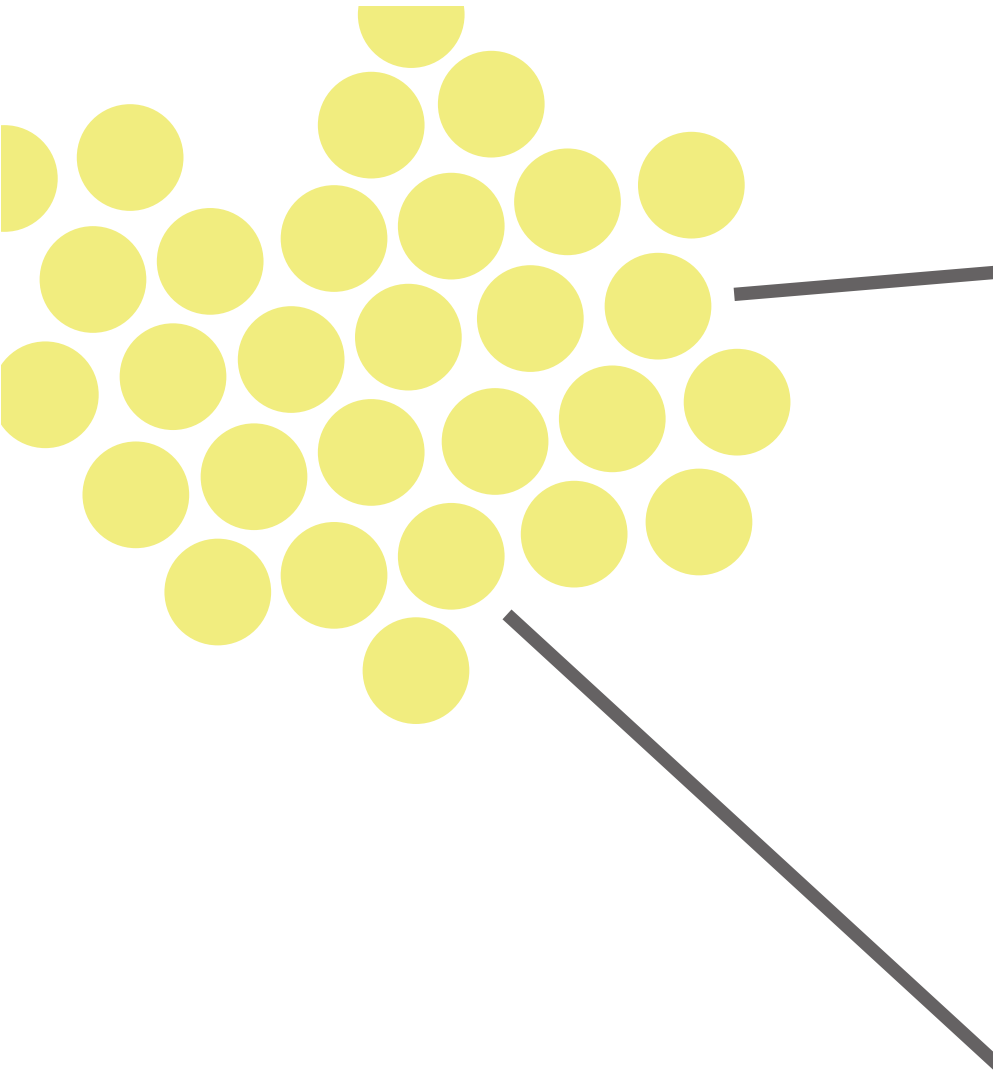
1. Make it safe for your child to talk to you. When your child comes to you to talk about a bullying experience, try to avoid having an emotional reaction. It can be scary for a child to hear that a parent is planning to lash out at a peer or parent. Calmly ask questions until you feel you completely understand the situation (Is it bullying, a peer conflict, or a misunderstanding?). Try not to leap into action right away, but instead focus on making sure your child feels taken care of and supported. Without blaming the bully, remind your child that everyone has a right to feel safe and happy at school, and applaud the courage it took to take a stand and talk to you. Make a commitment to work with both your child and the school administration to resolve the issue.

2. Teach your child to say “Stop!” or go find an adult. Research shows that most bullies stop aggressive behavior within 10 seconds when someone (either a victim or a bystander) tells the perpetrator to stop in a strong and powerful voice. You, as the parent, can role-play an assertive response. Demonstrate the differences between aggressive and assertive and passive voices, as well as body language, tone of voice, and words used. If staying “stop” with an assertive voice does not work, teach your child to find an adult right away.

3. Talk with your child's principal and classroom teacher about the situation. Make it clear that you are committed to partner with the school in being part of the solution. Also emphasize that your expected outcome is that your child's ability to feel safe and happy at school is fully restored. Ask the principal to share the school's bullying policy, and make sure any action plan begins with notifying other teachers, recess aids, hallway monitors, and cafeteria staff so that everyone who comes in contact with your child can be on the lookout and poised to intervene should the bullying be repeated.

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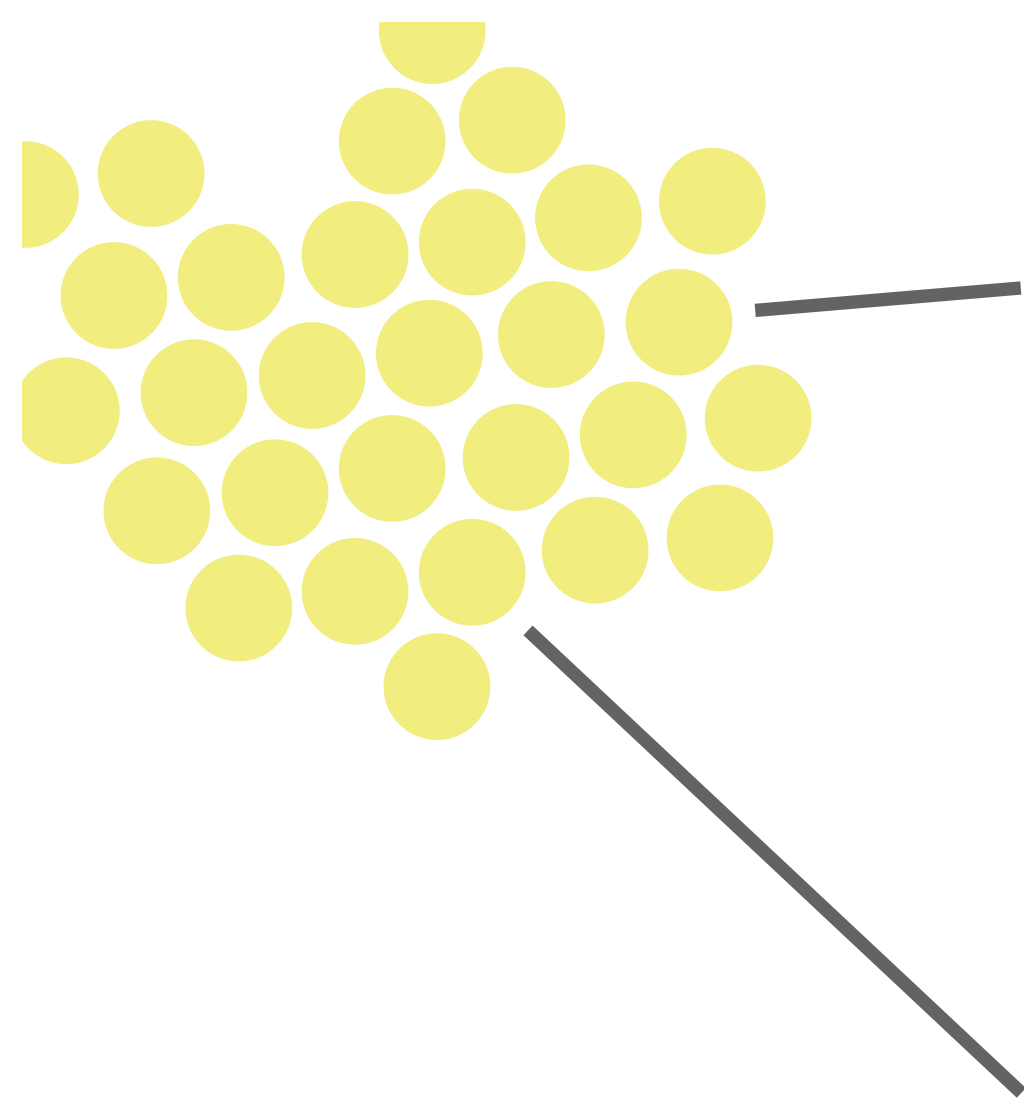


4. Arrange opportunities for your child to socialize with friends outside of school to help build and maintain a strong support system. Try reaching out to neighborhood parents, local community centers with afterschool activities, and your spiritual community. The more time your child can practice social skills in a safe environment, the better. Children who have friends are less likely to be bullying victims—and, if your child is bullied, friends can help ease the negative effects.

5. Don't go it alone. When supporting a child through a bullying situation, parents often discover previously unnoticed issues that may contribute to the child's vulnerability. In addition to working with the school to help resolve the immediate issue, parents should also consider reaching out to physical and mental healthcare providers to discuss concerns about diagnosed or undiagnosed learning issues, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, etc.

6. Encourage your child to stick with a friend (or find someone that can act as a buddy) at recess, lunch, in the hallways, on the bus, or walking home. Kids are more likely to be targeted when they are alone. If your child doesn't have a friend to connect with, work with the school to help find someone to act as a safety partner.

7. If cyberbullying is an issue, teach your child to bring it to the attention of an adult, rather than responding to the message. Many children fail to realize that saying mean things about someone on the Internet or through text messaging is a form of bullying. Make sure your child knows that you take cyberbullying seriously, and that you'll be supportive through the process of handling the situation.



8. Help your child become more resilient to bullying. There's a lot parents can do to help "bully proof" their kids. Here are two biggies: first, provide a safe and loving home environment where compassionate and respectful behavior is modeled consistently. Second, acknowledge and help your child to develop strengths, skills, talents or other positive characteristics. Doing so may help your kid be more confident among peers at school.

9. Provide daily and ongoing support to your child by listening and maintaining ongoing lines of communication. When your child expresses negative emotions about peers, it's helpful if you acknowledge these feelings and emphasize that it's normal to feel this way. After actively listening to the recounted bullying incident, discuss the practical strategies in this article together, especially the ones your child thinks will be most helpful.

10. Follow Up. Even after your child's bullying situation has been resolved, be sure to stay in touch with your child and the school to avoid a relapse of the issues. Keep the lines of communication open with your child, and learn the signs of bullying so that if another issue arises, you'll be prepared to get involved early and effectively. Although a last resort, consider moving your child out of the current school or social environment. This may be a necessary action, and it sends the message that your child truly does not have to tolerate such treatment. Once established, social reputations among peers can be very difficult to eliminate. A fresh start in a new school environment may be a viable solution.

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