

BULLYING PREVENTION



Bullying is a pervasive problem that continues to affect children of all ages. According to the initiative StopBullying.gov, about 20 percent of students between the ages of 12 and 18 experience bullying. Bullying happens most often during the middle school years and frequently will not be reported by the targeted children.

Kids often feel embarrassed, fearful or hopeless about speaking up about bullying. That can compromise parents' ability to identify when a child is being bullied. Kids also can be bullied when they would traditionally have been safe, as the rise of digital connectivity means bullying no longer is confined to the schoolyard; cyberbullying allows harassment to follow kids into their homes. Caregivers and parents can look for these subtle indicators that bullying is taking place.

- Physical symptoms: StopBullying.gov notes that unexplained physical indicators often are the most direct red flags that a child is being bullied. Bullied children frequently experience cuts, bruises, or scratches that are unexplained. Complaints of frequent headaches, stomach aches, or feeling sick, especially on school mornings, also can indicate children are being bullied.

- Missing or damaged items: Bullied children may return home from school with damaged or lost belongings, or missing school supplies. If a child is especially hungry when returning home from school, that could indicate that lunch money or the lunch itself was stolen.

- Emotional changes: Drastic changes in mood and daily routines may signal bullying distress. Many children who were once outgoing will become withdrawn or clingy if a bully is affecting them. Outbursts or defensive behavior also can occur.

- Loss of interest: Self-esteem wanes when a child is being bullied, so the child may step back from sports or other activities.

- Avoidance of technology: A child who is being cyberbullied may begin to eschew using a phone, tablet, or computer.

There is no single sign that a child is being bullied, but a pattern of subtle changes often means something is awry. A non-judgmental and supportive conversation can help kids feel supported and safe. A dip in academic performance: Cyberbullying can affect kids in every aspect of their lives, including their performance in the classroom. A

nationwide study of tween cyberbullying conducted in 2020 found that 6.5 percent of tweens who were cyberbullied indicated the bullying influenced their schoolwork.

A decline in physical health, changes in sleep patterns, avoidance of social settings like extracurricular activities, and behaviors that suggest children are lonely are additional warning signs that kids are being cyberbullied. Parents are urged to take any of the signs noted here seriously. More information about cyberbullying can be found at cyberbullying.org. conducted in 2020 found that 6.5 percent of tweens who were cyberbullied indicated the bullying influenced their schoolwork.

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