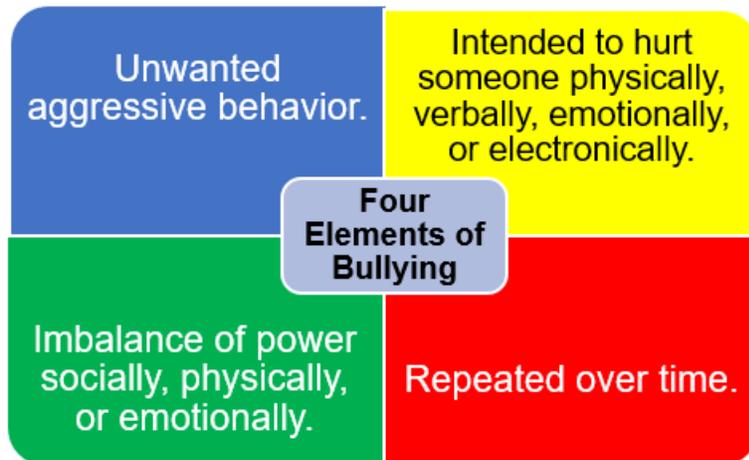


## Bullying: How Parents Can Help

It can be upsetting when your child tells you they are being bullied. As difficult as it may seem, it is important to slow down and listen to what your child is saying without making it worse by overreacting. Every child and every situation is unique and there are no universal, one-size-fits-all answers to bullying problems.



First, it is important not to take a single act out of context and label it as bullying when it is not. There are many types of aggressive behavior that do not fit the definition of bullying. This does not mean that they are any less serious or require less attention than bullying. Rather, these behaviors require different prevention and response strategies.

[Michigan anti-bullying law](#) includes the following definition of bullying:

*“Bullying” means any written, verbal, or physical act, or any electronic communication, including, but not limited to, cyberbullying, that is intended or that a reasonable person would know is likely to harm 1 or more pupils either directly or indirectly by doing any of the following:*

- (i) Substantially interfering with educational opportunities, benefits, or programs of 1 or more pupils.*
- (ii) Adversely affecting the ability of a pupil to participate in or benefit from the school district’s or public school’s educational programs or activities by placing the pupil in reasonable fear of physical harm or by causing substantial emotional distress.*
- (iii) Having an actual and substantial detrimental effect on a pupil’s physical or mental health.*
- (iv) Causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school.*

When you talk with your child about bullying, it is important to ask open-ended questions, show support and listen in a non-judgmental way. If your child tells you about a situation and you aren’t sure if it’s bullying, use this checklist:

- Does your child feel hurt, either emotionally or physically, by the other child’s behavior?
- Has your child been the target of the negative behavior more than once?
- Does your child want the behavior to stop?
- Is your child unable to make the behavior stop on their own?

BULLYING - WHEN YOUR CHILD IS THE TARGET 	
<p><b>LISTEN AND EMPATHIZE</b></p> <p>It took courage to tell me.</p> <p>I believe you and this is not your fault.</p> <p>I can't imagine how bad this must make you feel.</p>	<p><b>HELP THEM CONSIDER SOLUTIONS</b></p> <p>Some kids decide to ...</p> <p>... Act brave, walk away, and ignore the bully.</p> <p>... Act bored or use humor and a quick comeback like, "So?" * "Yup" * "And?" * "Thanks for noticing." * "You're wasting your breath trying to make me mad."</p> <p>... Partner up and hang out with others. Avoid high-risk places where bullying happens.</p> <p>... Slowly move near an adult or friend without saying anything.</p> <p>... Confront the bully and tell them to stop in a calm and clear voice.</p> <p>... Report it to a teacher or other adult.</p> <p>... Use self-affirming talk. Remind yourself: you are brave, awesome, lovable, and worthy of respect.</p> <p>... Feel empathy for the bully. Remember, the bullying says more about THEM, than about you.</p>
<p><b>HELP THEM FEEL STRONG</b></p> <p>What do you think you might try?</p> <p>If you did _____, what would happen? Would that help?</p> <p><i>Get their perspective.</i></p>	
<p><b>RESCUE or PROTECT</b></p> <p>... if the bullying continues and/or your child feels unsafe, reach out and inform the school.</p>	

Commit to your child that you will help him or her in any bullying situation.

Ask questions that might help your child come up with solutions on how to address bullying:

- *"What do you think you can say next time? What do you think might work?"*
- *"What do you think is going to happen if you do that?"*
- *"What's going to make you feel better about this situation?"*
- *"What can I do to be helpful?"*

Encourage your child to be a victor, rather than a victim:

- Identify a "trusted" adult that would act as the go-to person and serve as a safety person. This may be a teacher, a school social worker, counselor, nurse, or even a school psychologist.
- Come up with a simple statement that feels natural, *"Cut it out. That's not cool."* or *"Hey, that's over the line."* Role-play a situation so your child feels comfortable saying their assertive phrase in a confident and casual voice.
- Students who bully often thrive when those they are bullying get upset and angry. Encourage your child to practice keeping their cool including counting to ten or taking deep breaths. Explain to your child that the student who bullies true goal is to get a response.
- Use other strategies to diffuse the situation (e.g., agreeing in an offhand way with the bullying when they say offensive or negative things – *"Whatever"* or *"Thanks for noticing."*)
- Or encourage your child to say clearly, *"Stop doing this – no one deserves to be treated this way,"* or *"Stop! You're hurting him/her!"* and casually walk away.
- Encourage your child to be with friends when traveling back and forth from school, at lunch, or in the hallways. Students who bully are less likely to pick on a child in a group.

- Remember to also talk about what doesn't work with bullying:
  - Fighting back.
  - Bullying the student who is the bully.
  - Ignoring it.
- Work with your child on positive images of themselves to increase their self-esteem and give them the confidence to walk away and not let the student who bullies get to him/her.
- Help your child discover and develop their talents, through clubs, groups, and activities. Finding something they are good at provides a huge boost to their feelings of self-worth. Encourage them to express themselves creatively, through art, drama, or music.
- Finally, let your child know that bullying is not their fault, they are not alone, and that you love them.

Reach out to the teacher and let them know what is going on. Remember, the teacher may not know your child is being bullied. Depending upon the situation, you may also need to reach out to others in the school including the bus driver, a coach, a teacher's aide, or a recess monitor.

It is better not to approach the parents of the student who is bullying your child. The request for change of behavior carries more weight if it comes from the school.

Schools are mandated to have an [anti-bullying policy](#). Ask for a copy of the policy.

Review the school's policy and identify the part(s) of the policy not being followed.

Keep a detailed, accurate record of any additional incidents that occur, and the response received from the teacher. Be sure to include statements made by your child and any other potential witnesses, as well as an account of how your child felt emotionally.

Save emails, texts, and screenshots of electronic incidents.

If the bullying behavior continues, contact the school, complain in writing (email or letter), and schedule a meeting. Meet with the principal, vice-principal, and guidance counselor. Request that any teacher who may have been aware of the problem attend the meeting. Ask for help to solve the bullying problem rather than laying blame. Consider asking if the school could offer [restorative practices](#) (a practice that emphasizes repairing the harm to the victim and the school community caused by a student's misconduct) to address the bullying.

- First, discuss with the teacher, school counselor, and principal the part(s) of policy not being followed.
- Second, discuss with the superintendent the part(s) of policy not being followed.
- Third, discuss with the school board the part(s) of policy not being followed.
- Document conversations, decisions, and agreed-upon plans of action.

Contact law enforcement if you think a crime has been committed or seek legal advice.

If necessary, seek counseling if your child becomes withdrawn, depressed, tries to avoid going to school or there is a decline in school performance. Your child may benefit from speaking with a mental health professional. Children may prefer to dialogue with a third party who may be perceived as more objective.

If you fear a child is considering self-harm, parents should go to their family doctor, a hospital, or a mental health facility for guidance and support.

There is no federal law that specifically applies to bullying. If the school is not adequately addressing [harassment](#) based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion consider filing a formal grievance with the [US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights](#), or the [U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division](#).