

Dealing with Bullying and Cyber-bullying

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TIPS FOR KIDS, TEENS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS

Bullying and Suicide

If bullying means you, or someone you know, feels suicidal, please **call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) in the U.S., or visit [Befrienders Worldwide](#) to find a helpline in your country.**

Why bullying and cyber-bullying hurts

Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior that can be physical, verbal, or relational. Boys frequently bully using physical threats and actions, while girls are more likely to engage in verbal or relationship bullying. The results are similar:

- You are made to feel hurt, angry, afraid, helpless, hopeless, isolated, ashamed, and even guilty that the bullying is somehow your fault. You may even feel suicidal.
- Your physical health is likely to suffer, and you are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, or adult onset PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).
- You're more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school to avoid being bullied.

The most damaging aspect of bullying is its repetition. Bullies are often relentless, bullying over and over again for long periods of time. You may live in constant fear of where and when the bully will strike next, what they'll do, and how far they'll go. cyber-bullying has made this even worse because it can be witnessed by many more people and continue around the clock.

All Bullying Hurts



Physical bullying:

- Hitting, kicking, or pushing someone...or even just threatening to do it
- Stealing, hiding, or ruining someone's things

- Making someone do things he or she doesn't want to do
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Verbal bullying:

- Name-calling
 - Teasing, taunting
 - Insulting or otherwise verbally abusing someone
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Relationship bullying:

- Refusing to talk to someone
 - Excluding someone from groups or activities
 - Spreading lies or rumors about someone
 - Making someone do things he or she doesn't want to do
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Source: PBS Kids - It's My Life

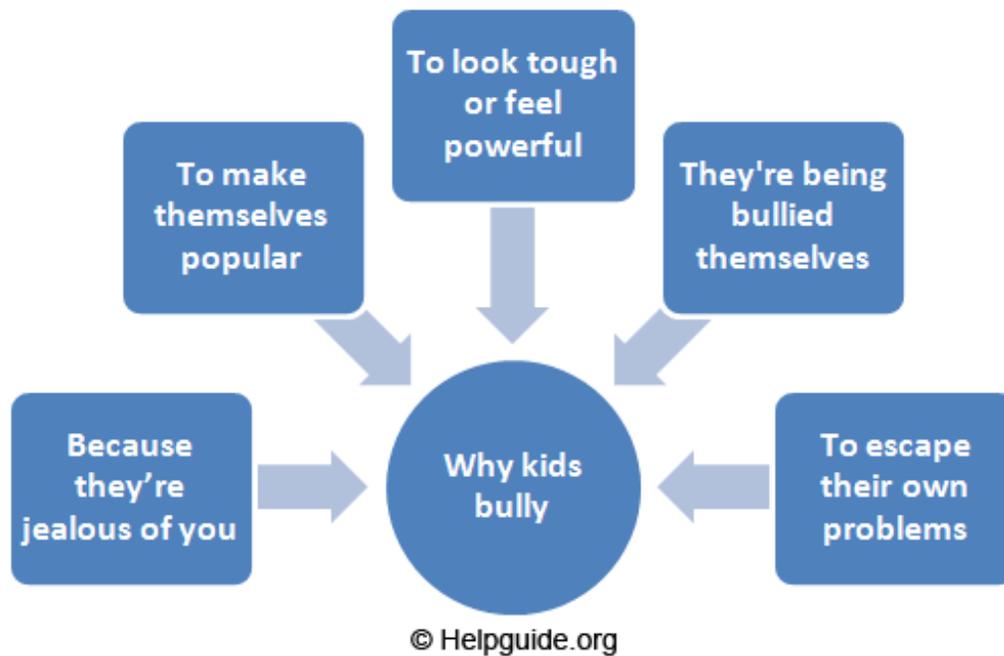
How cyber-bullying harms

A bully can harass, threaten, or humiliate you by using computers, cell phones, and social networking sites to:

- Send or forward hurtful or threatening emails or text messages.
- Post photos and other personal information online without your consent.
- Pretend to be someone else to trick or humiliate you.
- Spread lies and rumors about you.
- Create a group or social networking page to target or exclude you.
- Dupe you into revealing personal information that can then be used to hurt you.

In many cases, cyber-bullying can be even more painful than face-to-face bullying. A lot of cyber-bullying can be done anonymously, so you may not be sure who is targeting you. This can make you feel even more threatened and can embolden bullies, as they believe online anonymity means they're less likely to get caught. Since cyberbullies can't see your reaction, they will often go much further in their harassment or ridicule than they would do face-to-face with you.

Why you're being bullied or cyber-bullied



Research shows that about 25 percent of kids experience bullying and even more are impacted by cyber-bullying, so you're not alone. While there are many reasons why bullies may be targeting you, the main reasons are usually your physical appearance or social standing within your peer group.

Bullies tend to pick on people who are "different" or don't fit in with the mainstream. It may be because of how you dress, act, or because of your race, religion, or sexual orientation. It may simply be that you're new to the school or neighborhood and haven't made friends yet.

Gay and lesbian youths are particularly at risk of bullying. If you need help, call:

- In the U.S.: **1-866-4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)**
- In Canada: **1-877-OUT-IS-OK (688-1765)**
- In the UK: **0207 837 7324**
- In Australia: **1800 184 527**
- In New Zealand: **(04) 473 7878**

If you are being bullied, remember:

- **Don't blame yourself.** It is not your fault. No matter what someone says or does, you should not be ashamed of who you are or what you feel.
- **Be proud of who you are.** Despite what a bully says, there are many wonderful things about you. Keep those in mind instead of the messages you hear from bullies.
- **Get help.** Talk to a parent, teacher, counselor, or other trusted adult. Seeing a counselor does not mean there is something wrong with you.
- **Learn to deal with stress.** Finding ways to relieve stress can make you more resilient so you won't feel overwhelmed by bullying. Exercise, meditation, positive self-talk, muscle relaxation and

breathing exercises are all good ways to manage the stress from bullying.

Tips for dealing with bullying and cyber-bullying

There is no single solution to bullying and cyber-bullying. It may take some experimenting with a variety of different responses to find the strategy that works best for your situation. To defeat a bully, you need to retain your self-control and preserve your sense of self.

Tip #1: Respond as bullying is happening

- **Walk away.** Bullies want to know they have control over your emotions so don't react with anger or retaliate with physical force. If you walk away, ignore them, or calmly and assertively tell them you're not interested in what they have to say, you're demonstrating that they don't have control over you.
- **Protect yourself.** If you can't walk away and are being physically hurt, protect yourself so you can get away. Your safety is the first priority.
- **Report the bullying to a trusted adult.** If you don't report threats and assaults, a bully will often become more and more aggressive. In many cases adults can find ways to help with the problem without letting the bully know it was you who reported them.
- **Repeat as necessary.** Like the bully, you may have to be relentless. Report each and every bullying incident until it stops. There is no reason for you to ever put up with bullying.

Tip #2: Handle a cyber-bully

- **Do not respond to cyber-bullying messages.** The bully wants to feel in control of your emotions, so the best response is no response.
- **Document cyber-bullying.** Save and print out emails, text messages, or screenshots.
- **Block the cyber-bully** on your phone, IM list, websites, or social media pages. Report inappropriate messages to an Internet service provider or website moderator; report threats to the police.

Tip #3: Reframe the problem of bullying or cyber-bullying

By changing your attitude towards bullying you can help regain a sense of control.

- **Try to view bullying from a different perspective.** The bully is an unhappy, frustrated person who wants to have control over your feelings so that you feel as badly as they do. Don't give them the satisfaction.
- **Look at the big picture.** Bullying can be extremely painful, but try asking yourself how important it will seem to you in the long run. Will it matter in a year? Is it worth getting so upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Focus on the positive.** Reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. Make a list and refer to it whenever you feel down.
- **Find the humor.** If you're relaxed enough to recognize the absurdity of a bullying situation, and

to comment on it with humor, you'll likely no longer be an interesting target for a bully.

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control—including the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to bullies.

Tip #4: Avoid isolation

Having trusted people you can turn to for encouragement and support will boost your resilience when being bullied. Reach out to connect with family and real friends (those who don't participate in bullying) or explore ways of making new friends. There are plenty of people who will love and appreciate you for who you are.

- **Find others who share your same values and interests.** You may be able to make friends at a youth group, book club, or religious organization. Learn a new sport, join a team, or take up a new hobby such as chess, art, or music.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk to a parent, counselor, coach, religious leader, or trusted friend. Expressing what you're going through can make a huge difference to the way you feel, even if it doesn't change the situation.
- **Boost your confidence.** Exercise is a great way to help you feel good about yourself, as well as reduce stress. Punch a mattress or take a kick boxing class to work off your anger.
- **Don't beat yourself up.** Don't make a bullying incident worse by dwelling on it or replaying it over and over in your head. Instead, focus on positive experiences you've had.

Tips to help parents and teachers stop bullying and cyber-bullying

Teachers and parents of both the bullied and the bullies can play a crucial role in preventing, identifying, and stopping bullying. Creating safe, stress-free environments at home and at school can help prevent the tension and anxiety that can lead to bullying.

Tip #1: Understand the truth about bullying and cyber-bullying

Despite how widespread the problem has become, many parents and teachers still have some misconceptions about bullying and cyberbullying.

Myths about Bullying and Cyber-bullying

Myth	Reality
It's only bullying if the child is physically hurt. Words can't hurt.	Children have killed each other and committed suicide after being involved in verbal, relationship, or cyber-bullying. Words do hurt and they can have a devastating effect on the emotional wellbeing of a child or teen.

My child would never be a bully.

All kids make mistakes; it's part of growing up. Parents who deny the possibility that their child is capable of being hurtful make it harder for bullies to get the help they need.

Bullies are simply bad people and should be expelled from school.

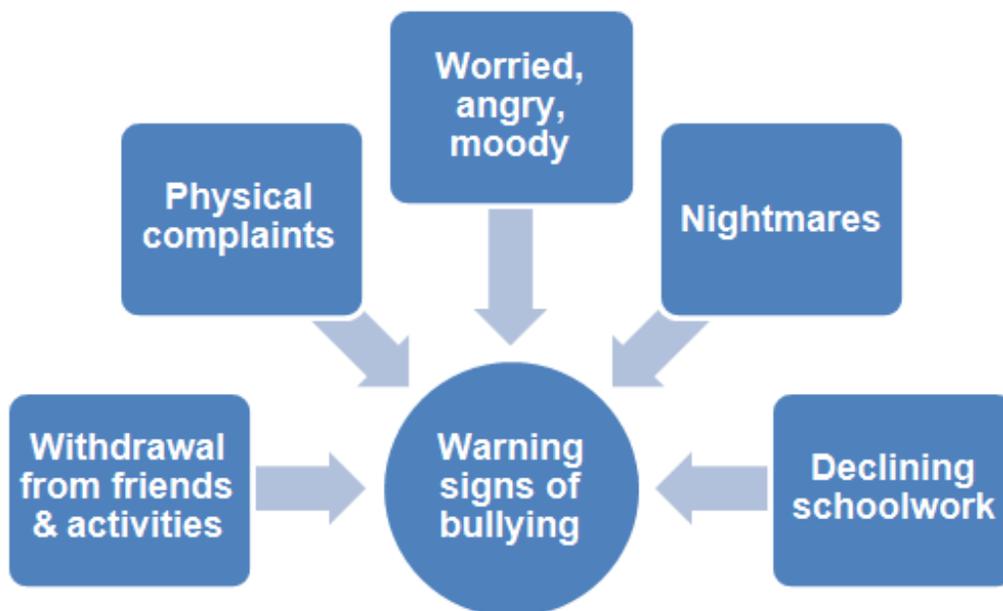
There are a lot of reasons why children bully. Some are bullied themselves, at home or elsewhere, others bully only when they feel stressed or overwhelmed.

Kids can be either bullies or victims, not both.

Kids can often change roles, going from victim to bully and back again. For example, a bully in fifth grade may be a victim when he moves to middle school, or a victim in the playground can take revenge and become the bully online.

Tip #2: Spot the warning signs that a child or teen is being bullied

If a child is being bullied it may not be obvious to a parent or teacher. Most bullying occurs away from adults, when kids are alone in hallways or on the way home from school, for example. Bullies tend to be adept at hiding their behavior from adults and bullying victims will often cover up evidence because of a sense of shame at being victimized. Kids are also reluctant to tell their parents about being cyberbullied out of fear they'll lose their computer or cell phone privileges.



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Tip #3: Take steps to stop bullying and cyber-bullying

- **Talk to kids about bullying and cyber-bullying.** Just talking about the problem can be a huge stress reliever for someone who's being bullied. Be supportive and listen to a child's feelings without judgment, criticism, or blame.
- **Monitor your child's technology use.** Regardless of how much your child resents it, you can only protect him or her by monitoring what they do online. Set up filters on your child's computer

and keep it in a busy area of your house so you can easily monitor its use. Insist on knowing their passwords and learn the common acronyms kids use online and in text messages. Document threats and report them to the police.

- **Find help for a child who's afraid.** Make sure other teachers, coaches, and counselors know the child is being bullied. No child should have to handle bullying alone.
- **Help the child avoid isolation.** Kids with friends are better equipped to handle bullying. Find ways to increase their social circle, via youth or religious groups or clubs, for example.

Tips to Prevent Cyber-bullying

To stay safe with technology, teach your kids to:

- Refuse to pass along cyber-bullying messages.
- Tell their friends to stop cyber-bullying.
- Block communication with cyberbullies; delete messages without reading them
- Never post or share their personal information online (including full name, address, telephone number, school name, parents' names, credit card number, or Social Security number) or their friends' personal information.
- Never share their Internet passwords with anyone, except you.
- Talk to you about their life online.
- Not put anything online that they wouldn't want their classmates to see, even in email.
- Not send messages when they're angry.
- Always be as polite online as they are in person.

Source: National Crime Prevention Council

If your child is a bully or cyber-bully

It can be difficult for any parent to learn that their child is bullying others. The sooner you address the problem, though, the better chance you have of avoiding the long-term effects this behavior can have on a child. People who bully others:

- Have a higher risk of abusing alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults.
- Are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school.
- Are twice as likely as their peers to have criminal convictions as adults and four times more likely to be multiple offenders.
- Are more likely as adults to be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children.

Warning signs your child may be a bully

Your child:

- Frequently becomes violent with others
- Gets into physical or verbal fights with others
- Gets sent to the principal's office or detention a lot
- Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained
- Is quick to blame others
- Will not accept responsibility for his or her actions
- Has friends who bully others
- Needs to win or be best at everything

Source: StopBullying.gov

Bullying is often a learned behavior

Bullies can learn aggressive behavior from their experiences at home. Research suggests that some kids and teens may become more aggressive by playing violent video games. While it's a controversial subject, parents should monitor the amount of violent content their children are exposed to via TV, movies, or video games.

As a parent, you may be setting a bad example for your kids by spanking or otherwise striking them, verbally or physically abusing your spouse, or by displaying bullying behavior such as:

- Abusing your child's sports coach, umpires and referees, or members of the opposing team.
- Swearing at other drivers on the road.
- Humiliating a waitress, shop assistant, or cab driver who makes a mistake.
- Talking negatively about other students, parents, or teachers so that your child thinks it's acceptable to use verbal abuse to intimidate others.

Tips for parents dealing with a bullying child

- **Educate your child about bullying.** Your child may have difficulty reading social signs or may not understand how hurtful and damaging their behavior can be. Foster empathy and awareness by encouraging your child to look at their actions from the victim's perspective. Remind your child that bullying can have legal consequences.
- **Manage stress.** Teach your child positive ways to [manage stress](#). Your child's bullying may be an attempt at relieving stress. Or your own stress, anxiety, or worry may be creating an unstable home environment. Exercise, spending time in nature, or playing with a pet are great ways for both kids and adults to let off steam and relieve stress.
- **Set limits with technology.** Let your child know you'll be monitoring his or her use of computers, email, and text messaging. Limit the amount of time they spend playing video games and watching TV. Numerous studies reveal that many popular TV shows and violent video games celebrate negative values, reduce empathy, and encourage aggression in kids.
- **Establish consistent rules of behavior.** Make sure your child understands your rules and the punishment for breaking them. Children may not think they need discipline, but a lack of

boundaries sends a signal that the child is unworthy of the parents' time, care, and attention.

Related articles for dealing with bullying

Teen Depression A guide for parents and teachers for helping a depressed teenager.



Dealing with Teen Depression A guide for teenagers with tips and tools for helping yourself or a friend.

Feeling Suicidal? – Read this first if you're thinking about suicide or in so much pain that you don't know how you'll be able to go on.



Suicide Prevention – A suicidal person may not ask for help, but that doesn't mean that help isn't wanted. Learn to spot the signs and how you can best help.



People who know how to quickly reduce stress and manage overwhelming emotions are less at risk for being abused or abusing others. Helpguide's free **Bring Your Life Into Balance** toolkit is designed to teach you these skills. With these emotional skills in your arsenal, you'll be more in touch with your own needs, more sensitive to others, and able to make better choices for yourself.



Helpguide's Yellow Pages

Resources for public assistance, social services, and other health and human services.



General bullying links

Stop Bullying Now! – Information about bullying and strategies to make it stop. (StopBullyingNow)

Stop Bullying – Provides information from various US government agencies on how kids, teens, young adults, parents, educators, and others in the community can prevent or stop bullying. (StopBullying.gov)

Common Myths About Bullying – Article outlining the nine most common myths about bullying and bullies. (Newsweek)

It's My Life – How bullying works and what kids can do about. (PBS Kids)

Dealing With Bullying – Help for teenagers in dealing with bullies and bullying. (Teens Health)

Bullying at School and Online – How to spot bullies and victims, and how to protect yourself or your child. (Education.com)

Cyber-bullying

Stop Cyber-bullying – Information about how cyber-bullying works and what you can do to prevent it. (Wired Safety)

Stop Cyber-bullying Before It Starts (PDF) – Provides information on ways to prevent cyber-bullying and keep children safe online. (National Crime Prevention Council)

Help for parents and teachers in dealing with bullying and cyber-bullying

[Raising Children to Resist Violence](#) – How parents, family members, and others who care for children can help them learn to deal with emotions without using violence. (APA)

[Take Action to Prevent Bullying](#) – Help for parents, teachers, and kids in preventing and stopping bullying. (APA)

[Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers](#) – Information on building resilience in children to shield them against emotional hurt from experiences such as bullying. (APA)

Sexual orientation and bullying

[It Gets Better](#) – Collection of videos for LGBT kids and teens who have to hide their sexuality for fear of bullying. (It Gets Better Project)

[The Trevor Project](#) – Organization helping LGBT teens and young adults who feel suicidal by providing resources and a nationwide, 24-hour hotline at 866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386). (The Trevor Project)

Getting help for a bully

[Teaching Kids Not to Bully](#) – Understanding bullying behavior in children and how to help kids stop bullying. (KidsHealth)

[Has Someone Called You a Bully?](#) – How bullying affects the bully and how a bully can stop. (StopBullying.gov)

[How Not to Raise a Bully](#) – Article that discusses how teaching empathy in kids from an early age may prevent bullying. (Time Magazine)

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