

Tip Sheets

Bullying in Preschool

Signs of Bullying

Physical

Bruises
Scratches
Bed Wetting
Nightmares
Loss of appetite

Social

Complains about not having friends
Reluctant to go to child care or school

Emotional

Abnormally unhappy
Fearful
Upset
Anxious
Mood swings

Cognitive

Unable to concentrate
Regression in learning

Being bullied means to be exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students. It may also include an imbalance of power.

Children as young as three begin to form social hierarchies. Some children may be more popular among their classmates than others who tend to take a less assertive role. By age four, bullying behavior may emerge that includes children intentionally excluding others from play or targeting peers for teasing.

Children with Special Needs

Research indicates that a child with a disability is more likely to be physically or verbally bullied than his typically developing peers. This may be because of “hidden” disabilities that impact social skills or behavior differences.

Children with developmental disabilities may also be more trusting and friendly and therefore more easily bullied.

- Teach children about body language so they can know if someone is using teasing words or actions.
- Practice social language so a child can have phrases to use if bullying begins. This is helpful for a child with communication delays.
- Use stories/role play to help children know when to leave a situation or ask for help.

Bullying Behavior is Not Acceptable at Any Age or in Any Form

Help young children understand what bullying looks like, what they might see, and how they may feel when bullying occurs. This includes:

- Excluding others in play.
- Aggression.
- Telling one child to say something mean to another child.

Affirming the child’s feelings when they share about what is happening to them. Make it clear that you believe them.

Strategies for Extinguishing Bullying

If bullying behavior is not addressed in early childhood, a child is likely to keep using bullying behaviors. Here are some ways to extinguish bullying:

- State rules clearly for how to treat others.
- Role play.
- Model perspective taking.
- Stay close and observe. Be aware of interactions between children.
- Intercede if bullying occurs.
- Teach proactive strategies that create a sense of empowerment.
- Communicate with families of those who are bullied or who are bullying.
- Read books to prompt a discussion. Adapt stories to reflect the familiar situations that are occurring. Discuss the way the characters in the book treat each other.

Clear communication between early care and education professionals and families is key when working to decrease bullying.

Working together to provide a positive modeling for behavior and a supportive environment where all can learn and play together and feel safe is the most important step in preventing bullying behavior.

Additional Resources

Stopbullying.gov

<https://www.stopbullying.gov>

U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/programs.html>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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