

# PARENT Talk

## Coping with Bullies

Violence occurs in elementary school just as it does elsewhere. Students bring their own methods of dealing with conflict with them, so as violence escalates in the community, it also increases in the classroom.

### From name-calling to hitting...

It can begin early, with emotional or physical bullying on the playground. Bullies are often emotionally needy themselves and search for someone to control – often someone younger, smaller or more vulnerable. Sometimes they use “hard looks” or gestures to scare other children. They may take cuts, lunch money or the best bus seat. Or they may ridicule.

As children grow older, bullying becomes more dangerous. Some may carry a weapon.

All of this takes a toll on children, making them less emotionally secure, less confident and more fearful. Parents can help their children by teaching them to stand up for themselves and showing them how to solve problems without hitting.

### Start early to help your children

Parents can help to keep their children safe by following these steps.

- **Start early to show your child how to solve a problem without hitting.** Start when your child is a toddler. For instance, what if another toddler pushes your daughter? Your daughter may push back, cry, hit, kick or bite. When you see an incident, tell your toddler, “If someone does something you don’t like, tell them you don’t like it.” This teaches a child that he or she can use words to stop unwanted behavior.

If there’s still a problem, tell your toddler, “If talking doesn’t work, then tell me (or ‘teacher’ or ‘grandmother’ or ‘baby-sitter’). While you don’t want your child to become a tattletale, you do want him or her to know when to go to adults for help. In the long-term, this makes your children less vulnerable and more confident. They learn to stand up for themselves. As your children mature, you can help them build on these skills.

- **Help children solve their own problems, even if it’s quicker for you to do it for them.** Think long-term. For example, what if your first grader and his friend are playing, and they both grab for the only car at the same time? They start to argue, call each other names and hit each other.

The quick, short-term solution would be for you to take the car away or to make them take turns or to put them both into “time-out” for fighting.

A better way to handle it is to ask, “What’s the problem?” They may say, “He hit me,” or, “He called me stupid.” Help them define the real problem by saying, “It looks like there’s only one car and you both want it.”

Then ask them for solutions: “What can we do to make you both happy and make sure you don’t get hurt?” They may say, “Take turns” or “Share.” If they can’t think of an answer, help by naming three or four solutions.

After they choose a solution, ask them how to put it in place. Then ask them to tell you later how it works out.

This teaches them important life skills. They learn to define the real problem, to see a “shared” problem, and to see things from more than one point of view.

It also teaches them to brainstorm solutions and to develop win-win negotiation skills. It develops their logical thinking and helps them see cause and effect. By asking them to tell you about it later, you’re helping them evaluate their solution. These skills can make your child less vulnerable and more able to cope with problems.

- **Become involved in your child’s activities.** Encourage your child to try new things: a sport, musical instrument, or hobby. Try a new activity with him or her. This can increase self-worth, which can prevent bullying.
- **Supervise your child diligently, even when your child grows older.** This can deter bullies, vandalism and involvement in drugs or alcohol. Remember that even adolescents need supervision.
- **Treat threats as if they are acts of violence.** A threat to “beat-up” someone is almost as emotionally damaging to children as actually beating them up. Handle a threat the same way you would handle actual violence. Ask for other violence prevention publications.

### Where to get help

Call GHS Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. ©