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Helping your child cope

- Support your child by telling him or her that this is not his fault, and that he or she did nothing wrong.
- Gently emphasize that above all, your child should not retaliate or attempt to fight or hit the bully.
- Role-play ignoring the bully or walking away.
- With your child, make a list of the adults in school that he or she can go to for help, such as counselors or administrators.
- Give your child some relief. Arrange for him or her to see friends on the weekends, and plan fun activities with the family.

The more your child knows about bullying, the less he or she will be blindsided by this event. Go online, and explore sites with your child. Discuss them and become experts yourselves.

Suggested Web sites

www.MARCcenter.org
www.safeyouth.org
www.kidshealth.org
www.stopbullynow.hrsa.gov
www.familyinternet.about.com
www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org

1109/3500/HDG

When your child is being bullied

Massachusetts MARC Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State College

A guide for parents

Practical strategies

Helping your child cope

Working effectively with your child's school

MORTON HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL CENTER

www.MARCcenter.org

What you can do to help your child

Many parents want to be better prepared to respond when their child comes home and reports that they were bullied at school. So what can a parent do to help resolve the situation?

Be prepared to work with your child's school.

Before jumping to the conclusion that the staff and faculty at your child's school are indifferent, uncaring or hostile, give them a chance to help you resolve the situation.

NOT

"Josh is being bullied, and why aren't you appropriately supervising those children?"

BUT

"There's a problem with Josh being bullied that you may not be aware of. Let me tell you the details, and let's see if we can come up with a plan to address this."

Practical strategies:

GET THE FACTS.

In a gentle manner, ask your child for details. Ask when the bullying happened, where it happened, if he or she remembers exactly what was said and done, and in exactly what order, and if anyone else (adult or child) was present.

It's important not to interrogate your child as if you don't believe him/her; rather, ask your child gently for these details. If your child wants to know why you are asking ("Don't you believe me?"), explain that you can help him or her best by knowing exactly what happened.

Where did this happen?
Has it happened before?
Is it always the same?
When did this happen?
What happened first, then next, then after that?
Was anyone else there?
Did any kids or adults see this?
How did they react?

Take the specific data you get to your child's teacher and the assistant principal or principal of your school. It's very important that you have, and give, specific details. The more specific you can be about exactly what happened, where, when, any witnesses, any previous occurrences, the better the school will be able to keep the incident from recurring.

Although you can't insist on knowing a bully's punishment, you can insist that your child's school offers your child comfort measures – no matter what the status of the incident. Schools can comfort children by offering them the support of administration or counselors, and letting the child know that they are there to talk or support them anytime they need help or assurance.

Ask for a timeline ("When will a decision be made?"), and ask what will be done immediately ("What can you do to make sure Ashley isn't threatened at her locker again tomorrow morning?").

Finally, ask to be kept informed ("I realize you need to discuss this situation with other personnel, but please let me know what the outcome is so I can reassure Billy that something is being done.").

Important note: Administrators cannot, by federal law, tell you about disciplinary actions taken against another child – even when your child is a victim. So don't expect to know what disciplinary actions a bully is subject to. Instead, focus on what adults will do to keep your child reassured and safe.

Ask the school to reassure your child that he or she will be protected. ("Please call Sarah out of class today, and let her know that you're aware of the situation and that you won't let it occur again.")

Consider carefully before demanding that the offending child apologize to your child. Most targets of bullying do not want an adult-enforced apology from the bully, since it underlines the fact that they have now told on him or her. Such an apology can be frightening for a victim.

Keep in mind that your primary goal should be to get the school's cooperation to get the bullying to stop. Knowing your own child is being victimized can evoke strong feelings, but you'll get much more cooperation from school personnel if you can stick to the facts without becoming overly emotional. While you may want assurance that everyone involved is punished severely, try to focus on putting an end to the bullying!