

# ParentBrief



## When our child is the bully

Did you know your child is bullying? The text no parent wants to receive. They've got the wrong kid...our child would never do that...she didn't learn that behaviour at home...clearly he was provoked??? Until we have all the facts, it's difficult to know how to tackle bullying, especially when it's our child that is the bully. Bullying is ugly and disrespectful, it hurts other kids, it's aggressive and controlling. However, before we can confront the issue, we need to understand bullying dynamics – why they're doing it, to whom, and for how long. But first, take a deep breath and allow yourself time to process the confronting text. Then talk through strategies, beginning with how to conduct the conversation you know you have to have with your child...

### Be thankful someone has told you

Whether it's a text from a friend, phone call from another parent, or an email from the teacher, be thankful that someone has told you that bullying is happening, and your child may be the perpetrator. Thank that person for making a difficult call. Assure them you will follow through.

It's never easy to receive information that suggests our child is not behaving appropriately towards other kids in their class. A child who bullies is not necessarily a reflection on our parenting skills, nor is bullying behaviour something we need to be defensive about. We need to ensure the information we've received is credible and then ask ourselves if there may have been tell-tale signs we've missed, such as our child being in the possession of things that don't belong to her, or fewer friends, or negative talk about school.

## Talk to the school

Most schools today have policies in place to help combat aggressive and bullying behaviour. The focus of these policies is usually to involve a teacher or school representative to help the bully confront the student they've bullied. Relationships then have a chance to repair and the bully can see and hopefully understand how their aggressive behaviour has impacted another student.

Once notified of a problem, we can speak to our child's teacher about any aggressive or stand over behaviour. Getting all the facts is important, and teachers are in the best position to monitor classroom and playground behaviour. Our child might be having problems with schoolwork, or making friends, or have been bullied themselves.

## What parents can do about their child's bullying behaviour

- **Have the conversation:** ask your child if they can explain what has happened, why, and to whom.
- **Encourage empathy:** can your child understand how the victim felt?
- **Try not to be judgmental:** there can be many reasons why a child bullies. Reject the behaviour but not the child.
- **Check for any underlying bullying behaviour at home:** this includes threats and intimidation by an older sibling.
- **Support the child to accept responsibility:** don't allow the child to gloss over or justify aggressive behaviour.
- **Help to build social skills:** work on strategies for developing self esteem and confidence.
- **Community involvement:** encourage participation in sport, hobbies, or activities that mean the child has to integrate, cooperate and work as a team.
- **Identify the motivation:** try to get to the source of any anger or resentment. Talk to the teacher or sports coach, to identify poor performance, lack of confidence or comprehension, or any jealousy that seems apparent.
- **Make it clear bullying behaviour is not acceptable and must stop:** be firm and perfectly clear that bullying behaviour is not acceptable any time or place; it will not be tolerated at home and it has to stop. Ensure your child knows their behaviour will not be defended nor accepted by you if they continue to bully.
- **Emphasise confidence:** tell your child that you believe they are capable of being respectful, kind, considerate and helpful. Let them know you have full confidence in them to change their behaviour.