

# Help Your Kids Deal with Bullies

Written by Carey Casey

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October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month, so I thought it appropriate to spend a little time talking about how to help your kids deal with bullies.

Of course, no dad ever wants his child to be bullied, but for all of the press that bullying gets, I have to say that in most cases (but certainly not all), parents can help their children deal with teasing and bullies without stepping in directly.



Here are eight tips dads can use to help their kids resolve issues with bullies.

**Tip #1:** Look up the school's policy on bullying. Thankfully, this problem is already on the radar for many schools and administrators, and many have published recommendations for how to handle it. They may even have a no-tolerance policy and expect to be informed at the first sign of bullying. Remember, you'll want the school's cooperation if the bullying continues for your child, so make every effort to comply with policies.

**Tip #2:** Coach your child not to retaliate. This could lead to serious injuries, and it sends the message that violence is acceptable.

Instead, "teach your child to be assertive, but not aggressive," says Allan L. Beane,

PhD, a former teacher and an internationally recognized expert on bullying. “Coach your child on how to look, walk, and talk like a confident person.” Talk about non-verbal cues like eye contact, facial expressions and posture that your child can adopt to so that he or she exudes confidence. Over time, your child can learn to deflect the taunts and teasing.

**Tip #3:** Talk to your child about appropriate responses that will help your child deflect the taunts and teasing. Help your child figure out what might work, and what might not work.

In the same conversation, see if you can help your child come up with solutions to avoid situations that allow the bully to taunt your child. There’s strength in numbers. If your child has a large group of friends, he can find ways to make sure he is surrounded by these friends while in the hallway or on the bus. This might curtail the bullying.

**Tip #4:** Distinguish between regular bullying and extreme bullying. Regular bullying usually doesn’t lead to any physical harm. Extreme bullying does. Watch for warning signs that your child is a victim of an extreme bully. [Dr. Beane](#) lists the following:

1. Sudden decreased interest in school and quality of school work.
2. Wants to take a different route or use different transportation to get to school.
3. Wants to avoid certain areas of school or neighborhood.
4. Seems preoccupied or tense on Sunday nights but happy and relaxed come Friday and Saturday.
5. Suddenly prefers the company of adults.
6. Has frequent illnesses, such as headaches and stomach pains. Also has nightmares and insomnia.
7. Comes home with unexplained bruises, scratches, or torn clothing.
8. Suddenly starts bullying others.
9. Seeks the wrong friends in the wrong places.
10. Talks of suicide and feeling depressed.

**Tip #5:** Sometimes – but not often – dads may need to step in and take action to protect our children. If you believe your child is a victim of extreme bullying, or if you believe your child is responding severely to regular bullying, step in and do what is necessary to protect your child. You might need to place a friendly call to the school, or you might need to make an aggressive requirement that the bully be supervised by an adult at all times. The key is to stay in close contact with your child to make sure you have a grasp on how severe the bullying is.

That said, you should probably contact officials and not the parents. You never know

what is going on in a child's home life, or how the parents (who won't be objective) will respond.

**Tip #6:** Give your child perspective on the situation. The bully might come from a tough home life and lack self-control and discipline. Ask your child questions like, "Why might he be doing this to you."

The key, here, is to let your child know that he or she does not deserve to be bullied. At the same time, you allow your child to feel compassion for the bully.

**Tip #7:** Become a WatchDOG. One of the greatest programs we offer at the National Center for Fathering is WATCH D.O.G.S., which puts adult male role models, most of whom are fathers, in the hallways, classrooms, lunchrooms, libraries and playgrounds. Many of the schools that have WatchDOGS tells us that their discipline problems have dropped dramatically as a result of having these dads roam the halls. And many schools see a connection between having WATCH D.O.G.S. dads in the school and less bullying. The dads set a positive example for the kids, support the educators, and help provide a safe and secure learning environment.

**Get information about bringing the program to your child's school.**

**Tip #8:** And – one last angle on the bully problem – if your child isn't currently a victim for bullies, you might suggest that he take a more active role in standing up for other kids when he sees teasing going on.

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*Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization dedicated to finding 6.5 million fathers who will make the **Championship Fathering Commitment**. NCF believes that every child needs a dad they can count on, and uses its resources to inspire and equip men to be the involved fathers, grandfathers and father figures their children need. **Subscribe here to receive our weekly email tip.***

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