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My child is a bully

No parent wants to hear that their child is a bully. It's awful to think that your child maybe inflicting harm on someone.

If you hear that your child is being a bully, resist the temptation to panic or be defensive. Stay composed and begin to gather the facts. These tips will help:

Communicate

Let your child know that you have heard that they are bullying and that you are concerned about this. Let them know that you are worried about them and want to help. This may take many attempts as your child may feel embarrassed, or unhappy that they've been caught. Remain calm and direct and ensure your child that you want to hear their side of the story. Talking through with your child about their situation can help you understand why the aggression is occurring and help you work out what to do about it.

Some children due to their age or mental health may not be able to articulate their thoughts. Consider a visit to as health professional for further assistance.

Look ahead

Once you've gained an understanding of the causes of the bullying look ahead and work through with your child how they may act in future situations. Help them understand how their behaviour may have impacted on the other child, and what it would be like if they received that behaviour.

Reflect

Children often copy the behaviours they experience so take the time to reflect on the relationship skills that your child may be witnessing at home. If family members yell, hit or put each other down then look for ways to foster a positive family culture based on kindness, respect and empathy.

Use consequences

Consequences for bullying can be useful if they are related to the behaviour and reasonable in nature. For instance, it's reasonable for a teenager involved in cyber-bullying behaviour to lose their Internet access and phone use privileges as they've failed to stick to the expectations laid down about responsible use. The length of time for loss of privileges depends on the severity of the issue and your child's attitude. As a rule of thumb lengthy loss of privileges can be ineffective as kids cease to care when they're too long.

Restore relationships

'How will you fix this?' is something a child who bullies needs to hear. Discuss with your child how they will make some restitution to the child or young person they've hurt, whether it's through a written apology, playing a game with a child who they've excluded or apologising to a child whom they humiliated in front of their peers.

Monitor the situation

Your child's bullying may be a one-off event, however stay mindful of your child's behaviour, their state of mind and the way they continue to relate to others. Let your child know that you want to help them be happy, to enjoy positive friendships and relate well to others.

Bullying is an emotive term that leaves most of us shaken when we hear it. It helps to think of bullying as a being a behaviour resulting from poor decision-making or poor communication skills rather than as a reflection on your child. The latter is hard to change, however the former is always up for change and improvement.



AUTHOR

Michael Grose

Michael Grose is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World* and *Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.