



Article for Murray's Bully Free Community Education Campaign

When Your Child Bullies (Part II)

By

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This article is the second in a series that discusses what to do when your child persistently mistreats others. It is the first of three articles focusing on such strategies. Since these articles include strategies of a preventive nature, all parents should read them. Here are a few strategies to consider when you seek to stop your child from mistreating others.

- If your child is bullying others in order to be popular, tell her that kindness and integrity are more important than popularity.
- If your child regrets her actions, explain that you appreciate her feelings, but because you love her, there must also be consequences for her behavior.
- Ask your child to apologize. The apology could be verbal, but if she can write, it should be in writing. Explain that you will check to see if the apology was received. Explain that a willingness to apologize is a reflection of good character. Also explain that even if the child doesn't accept the apology, she has done the right thing.
- Apply negative consequences for bullying, such as withholding privileges, requiring restitution (make amends). The consequences should be in proportion to the severity (hurtfulness) of her behavior, as well as appropriate for her age and stage of development. Also, you and your child are not the ones to determine how hurtful someone was, the bullied child and/or her parents determine that. The consequences should be administered in a consistent and warm manner, not in the heat of anger. You should also praise your child for any improvement in behavior.
- Tell your child that a person's reputation is more valuable than gold. It is important that she have a good name. Discuss how mistreatment is often remembered for a lifetime, and discuss the disadvantages of creating memories like that in the minds of others. Stress how it could impact her future. Also discuss how kindness is often remembered for a lifetime. Discuss the advantages of creating memories like that in others. Ask her to describe her current reputation as it relates to how she treats others. Ask her, "When people hear your name, what will they remember about you?"
- If your child has been bullying others at school, tell her that you will support the school as it applies punishment and that you will not make excuses for her behavior. The school may consider suspending or expelling her from school. If you have a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy and student behavior code booklet. Read the appropriate sections to your child

and explain the information to her. Make sure she understands the consequences for inappropriate behavior. Also explain that you may apply additional consequences.

- Depending on the age of your child and the nature of the bullying behavior, tell her that she could get into legal trouble for mistreating others. If the mistreatment is very serious, some parents of bullied child may file assault charges or get a restraining order.
- Ask your child if she has any ideas about what needs to happen for the bullying to stop. Children are sometimes very perceptive and have a lot of insight into their relational problems. Write down her suggestions and review them by examining the pros and cons of each.
- Explain that hurt students sometimes retaliate. They often go after those who have mistreated them and then they attack innocent bystanders.
- Set limits and immediately stop all forms of bullying. Your child will probably appreciate limits, even though she would never tell you. Limits will give her a sense of security because they add structure to her life—creating a feeling that things are controllable. When there are no limits, life can seem out of control, and your child may feel that anything could happen to her. Your child may even mistreat others to have control over her relationships.
- Teach your child to control her anger. Teach her to get away from situations that anger her. Review with your child anger management techniques that can be found on the web. Help your child find nonaggressive ways to express her feelings.
- Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep. Lack of sleep affects self-control and the ability to make good decisions, including how she should treat others. It also affects mood and feelings.
- Make sure your child exercises regularly and eats the right foods. One of the greatest things your child can do is to stay healthy. This will help her deal with stress in a healthy way, instead of by lashing out at others.
- Be an observant parent. Because bullying can occur over cell phones and over the Internet, monitoring your child's behavior will sometimes be difficult. Therefore, when you can't observe your child's behavior, ask questions and examine her cell phone and computer for inappropriate material and patterns of possible inappropriate behavior.
- Give your child something meaningful to do at home. Assign chores and communicate your expectations of how and when chores should be done. This will help her develop a sense of responsibility and feel valued. Express your appreciation for her being helpful and dependable. This will help reinforce positive behavior in your child.

The next article in this series will finish our discussion of this topic.

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