

Parent Resource Guide: Basic Bullying-Prevention Questions Addressed

Developed by CHILD for Byram Hills families through information from Stephanie Low, elementary school youth advocate for the Rye Youth Council, Andrea Fallick, Assistant Director for School Based Programs of Student Assistance Services Corporation, and HRSA's "Stop Bullying Now" website.

Following our November Bullying Prevention program, and in response to attendees' wish for specific advice, CHILD has created this "Parent Resource Guide." This guide provides parents with warning signs, as well as concrete suggestions about what to do if your child has been bullied and who to contact in the district.

First: What is bullying?

1. Intentionally **aggressive behavior**
2. Behavior that involves an **imbalance of power** or strength
3. Aggressive behavior that is **repeated over time** (with the exception of cyber-bullying, which can be a one-time occurrence)

Are there warning signs if I suspect my child is being bullied?

1. **Don't assume your children will tell you if they are being bullied.** Current research shows that between 15 and 20 percent of U.S. students are bullied "with some frequency," but children who are bullied often hide it. They might not tell their parents because they're embarrassed, ashamed or afraid to be called a tattler. And they tell adults at school even less frequently.
2. **Watch for changes in your child's usual behavior.** The warning signs of someone being bullied are not always obvious; parents need to watch for changes to their children's behaviors and patterns. Some warning signs and symptoms include suddenly not wanting to go to school, frequent and increased reports of stomach aches and other physical complaints, torn clothing, missing personal possessions and uncharacteristic sadness or irritability. These signs and symptoms signal distress, whether from bullying or some other situation bothering your child.
3. **Does your child seem especially sad or anxious, or has he or she been avoiding school?** Research shows that children who are bullied are more likely to be depressed, lonely or anxious, have low-self esteem, be absent from school, feel sick and think about suicide.
4. **Listen to your child.** Listen carefully, but realize kids -- like adults -- need to let off steam sometimes. Learn to recognize the difference between venting and a real problem. Parents can get a lot of information by listening to their children vent, including how they perceive the day and whether they feel victimized. After your child is through venting, pay attention: Does he or she seem relieved and move on to other activities? We all experience difficulty in some relationships, and sometimes there is real friction between individuals, but that is not always bullying. Learning how to negotiate conflict and differences is an important part of maturity.

5. **Monitor Your Emotions.** The more a parent gets upset, the less the child may share. So although it may be difficult to control how upset we may be upon hearing about a possible bullying situation, we parents need to keep our reactions under control so we can convey what is important: that we are there for our children and glad that they shared their concerns with us.

What if I confirm that my child is being bullied?

1. **Check your emotions.** Parents want to protect their children, but they need to keep their emotional responses in check and consider their actions carefully. Remember: The goal is for your child to feel safe. Everyone needs to feel safe and be part of an accepting environment, and no one should constantly have to feel on-guard. But dealing with bullies sometimes includes changing our response and helping our children develop resiliency and the ability to understand that although we can't control others' behavior, we can control how we react.
2. **Empathize with your children.** Let them know it's not their fault and assure them that you are concerned and are there to resolve the problem with them. Though it may be a concerned parent's first instinct, it is not helpful to tell your child to ignore the bully; your child has probably already tried this tactic. This is a situation that needs adult intervention and guidance.
3. **Get the information.** Ask your child to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened. Don't blame your child, but do consider if your child needs help understanding social cues. Research shows that children with disabilities or special needs may be at higher risk of being bullied. If your special needs child has a history of peer interaction problems, consider getting help in or outside of school so your child can learn more socially appropriate behavior.
4. **Collaborate with the school.** Parents need to trust that teachers and administrators will work to help their children; we all need to be playing on the same team. It also may be helpful to document the situation to assist in your communication with the school. Know the school's Code of Conduct, clarify with school officials what steps will be taken to stop the bullying, and let them know you want to remain informed of the situation.
5. **Follow up.** Find out from the school and from your child: Did the behavior stop? Speak regularly with your child and with the school staff. If the bullying reoccurs, inform the school immediately.

Who Should I Contact If I Suspect or Confirm Bullying?

1. Always look first to a **trusted adult at any of the four Byram Hills Schools.** If you don't know who your child feels connected to at school, ask! Also consider speaking to a **favorite subject teacher, coach or specials teacher** -- any school representative who knows your child personally and with whom your child has a connection.

2. In the elementary grades, parents can always **contact the homeroom teacher**, as well as the **assistant principal**, who is responsible for disciplinary action.
3. In the upper grades, in addition to **any subject teacher, coach or after-school activity advisor**, parents can contact the grade/student **guidance counselor** or the **principal**.