



WATCH AND LISTEN

How to recognize bullying behaviour, and what you can do to stop it.

Bullying is destructive – not just for the victims, but also for those who exhibit bullying behaviour. Recognizing bullying in children or youth is an important step in stopping and preventing the emotional, physical and social scars that can last a lifetime. Bullying is a learned behaviour, and children need help in fostering more positive relationships for their own well-being.

This fact sheet will help adults identify bullying behaviour, and suggest how to prevent or stop it.

“Bullies do not grow out of bullying. It leads to more serious problems in adult life, like sexual harassment, dating aggression and criminality.”

– Dr. Wendy Craig, Queen’s University

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined as a conscious, willful, deliberate and repeated hostile activity marked by an imbalance of power, intent to harm, and/or a threat of aggression. Severe bullying can lead to a feeling of terror on the part of the person being bullied.

Bullying comes in many forms, direct and indirect:

Verbal: taunts, name-calling, put downs, threats and intimidation

Social: exclusion from peer groups, gossip, ganging up, or group teasing

Physical: hitting/kicking victims and/or taking/damaging personal property

Cyber: using the computer or other technology to harass or threaten

The following may contribute to bullying behaviour:

- Mental or physical abuse
- Exposure to excessive violence through media or games
- Lack of supervision when interacting with peers
- Difficult temperament, attention problems, hyperactivity
- Family stress
- Lack of positive role models
- Inconsistent consequences
- Past experiences of being bullied
- Lack of attention, rejection or marginalized feelings

Need to talk to someone about bullying?
Call 1-888-456-2323 (24 hours, toll-free in Alberta).

b-free.ca

Children’s Services and Education are proud to lead Alberta’s Cross-Ministry Strategy for the Prevention of Bullying.

Alberta



Boys often bully directly (open attacks), while girls often bully indirectly (more subtle attacks, such as social isolation or rumour-spreading).

– Educational Research Service,
Recognizing and Preventing Bullying, 2003

Watch for the warning signs.

Bullying is about power, and the behaviour is generally developed over time. It's not always easy to spot bullying in action. In fact, one Canadian study found that bullying incidents were of short duration and averaged only 38 seconds (Craig and Pepler, 1997).

Here are some possible indications of bullying behaviour:

- Lack of empathy—not understanding or caring if someone is hurt
- Extra money, clothes, or boasting about taunting someone
- Passing off teasing someone as a joke
- Kids grouping together and intentionally leaving others out
- Aggressive behaviour with peers, such as yelling, hitting or throwing
- Laughing when other kids get hurt
- Name calling of siblings or friends
- Aggressive, angry behaviour towards parents, teachers or other adults

Developing empathy is a core element to changing bullying behaviour.

Empathy is the ability to recognize and understand another person's feelings, and to respond in an accepting way. Experts say it's the fastest way for a bully to understand their own feelings and behaviour, and how their actions and words hurt others. Empathy exists in a caring environment, and is fostered through positive experiences, relationships and activities.

Listen to a child. Stop the bullying. Here's how you can help build empathy, and prevent bullying behaviour:

1. **Be a positive role model.** Recognize your role in modeling positive relationships. Set a good example and reinforce positive behaviour when you see it.
2. **Communicate.** A child or youth who exhibits bullying behaviour needs to be able to talk about their own experiences. During a quiet time of day, establish an open, friendly, non-threatening line of communication.
3. **See the child inside the bully.** Often, a child or youth who exhibits bullying behaviour has been bullied in the past. In a non-judgmental way, try to find out what the child or youth is feeling, and if something has happened to make him or her feel vulnerable.
4. **Teach empathy.** Read stories about bullying, identify how each child feels in the interaction, draw pictures, and role play, with the child and adult exchanging roles, discussing how each feels. Help them to see the victim's point of view, and how hurtful and damaging bullying can be.
5. **Do something fun together.** Fun activities and positive attention build confidence, positive pathways, and encourage empathy and compassion for others.
6. **Teach leadership.** Provide activities and opportunities that channel energy into constructive leadership situations.
7. **Make amends and be friends.** Teach the child or youth ways to make amends for past behaviour (e.g., to apologize, or do something helpful or nice), and help them connect with others who have the same interests in play and learning.
8. **Set consistent consequences.** Send the message that damaging behaviour is unacceptable. Withdraw privileges and replace with instructive activities, like reading, to redirect negative energy.
9. **Work together.** Parents, caregivers, communities and schools must work together to prevent and stop bullying. If you think a child or youth is exhibiting bullying behaviour, contact the school and parents to monitor the situation. Together, we can foster a climate where every child can be cared for and safe.

For more information, visit www.bullyfreealberta.ca.

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