



Bullying

Bullying can happen to anyone and it can be a frightening experience for both you and your child. Many children with and without hearing loss experience bullying, you are not alone in your concern for your child. Children may be targeted if they have special needs, are a different race or ethnicity, are smaller or over weight, live in poverty, struggle with depression or low self-esteem, if they are less popular or don't seem to fit in well with others.

As defined by stopbullying.gov, bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems."

There are different types of bullying.

Physical bullying is the easiest to identify, and usually occurs when a child or adult is bigger, and or stronger. This can include kicking, hitting, shoving, punching or touching in any way that makes a child feel uncomfortable.

Verbal bullying includes name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation. These can start small, and kids may say they are only joking but it can quickly and easily escalate to a level that negatively affects the child that is being targeted.

Emotional or social bullying can be trickier to recognize but can be just as harmful. Emotional bullying are things done behind someone's back to exclude them or humiliate them. This can be lying or spreading rumors about a child, mean looks, jokes or pranks played on the child, mimicking, exclusion from a group or event, anything to injure someone's relationship with their friends or classmates.

Cyberbullying is one of the most prevalent forms of bullying. It can be private or public but includes hurtful texts, posts, comments, images or videos. Purposefully excluding someone online whether it is in a game or group message, and any form of requesting personal information or logging information.

To address bullying it is important for your child to develop skills in self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is when a person speaks or acts on their own behalf to improve their quality of life or to correct inequalities. This is the ability of your child to speak up, or stand up for themselves. Recognize their strengths and weaknesses, asking for help when they need it, making their own choices. You are not always going to be with your child when they are at school, with friends or other social activities- but you can empower them with the ability to advocate for themselves if or when bullying may happen. You can begin to teach your child now about bullying and self-advocacy.



It can be daunting to think about bullying and you may feel nervous. There are tools and resources that can help your child become a good self-advocate to protect themselves from bullying. You cannot control whether bullying occurs but you can help your child know how to react to it.

How children personally view themselves as a child with hearing loss will affect how they react to bullying. Your child's view about their hearing loss will be influenced by how you as their parents, as well as how their siblings view their hearing loss.

Your attitude can change over time but it begins from the day the hearing loss is diagnosed and the day that devices are fit on your child for the first time. Notice your attitude, are you self-conscious about what your child looks like with the hearing devices on, the colors, how big it is on your child's head, or what other people might think? If so, your child will pick up on this and may adopt the same fears. You may not recognize the subtle ways attitudes are expressed but it can be as simple as discouraging the child from picking the brightly colored earmold they want, or continually asking if other people have noticed the device, or looking for ways to hide the devices. Your child hears and sees how you react and talk about their hearing loss to other people, and they can internalize these perspectives.

On the flip side, if you as the parent can come to accept and embrace the hearing loss, recognize that hearing loss does not define your child, that your child is beautiful, and smart, and can do anything his peers can do if not more, your child will see your positive attitude toward hearing loss and too will adopt that attitude. This will help your child be more confident. The way you frame your child's identity in relation to their hearing loss to others and your family influences your child's sense of self confidence. Your attitude about hearing loss and level of advocacy for your child will rub off onto them.

The relationship you have with your child provides a crucial foundation for helping your child build self-advocacy skills and to be resilient in the presence of bullying. Children need their home to be a place of trust and safety, this will help them be more likely to tell you about bullying if it occurs.

Seven elements that are key to building a strong and safe relationship between you and your child include: safety, trust, appreciation, respect, validation, encouragement, and dedication. The same principles important for relationships between spouses or a close family member or friend. When elements are missing, trust can break down and the relationship can be starved. A child that has a healthy relationship with their parents and a safe place to come home to will be more likely to be open about instances of bullying if they happen.



You can form a strong relationship with your child by talking with your child on a regular basis. Explain to your child what their hearing loss is and what it means so that your child knows how to properly teach other children about it. Teach them reasons why children may bully other children. Also help them see that children of all types may be bullied, and let your child know they can stand up for other children when they are being bullied as well.

It is more difficult to victimize a child if they are in a group of friends. Good friends can help protect your child and they can stand up for them if bullying does happen. One reason other children may stare at your child or ask questions about your child's hearing devices is not because they are targeting your child or trying to be mean. They may not have seen a hearing aid or cochlear implant before. Teach your child how to recognize these instances and to be able to speak up and inform others about their devices. For example, your child can say "This is my hearing aid, and it helps me hear, like you use your glasses to help you see".

There are many ways to be involved in your child's life, but it is important to be sure that the child feels that you are present and not distracted by other things. Take time to talk to your child every day. Intentionally stay informed on what is going on in their life. Support them in things they are excited about and are involved in. Attend their science fairs, or baseball games. Help them with their math homework or ask what they are learning about in school. Above all be proactive in maintaining a strong relationship with your child. Not only will this be fundamental in your child's development, this will allow you to more readily recognize signs of when bullying may be occurring.

Celebrate the things your child does well, even it seems small. Help them see what gifts and talents they have and how they can continue to develop those talents. This will help your child to build self-confidence and not focus on the fact that he has a hearing loss. This self-confidence will help them be less of a target for bullying. Self-confidence can also help a child to recognize what is truth and what is not. A bully may say something hurtful but when your child can recognize what is true, it will help your child to be more resilient when hurtful things are said. For example: A bully may say to your child, "You have to wear those things on your ears, you are stupid." A child is told they are dumb because they wearing their hearing aids. Teach the child to pause, recognize what has been said, and find the false statement. Your child can realize that he knows he is not stupid, and that hearing aids are just a tool to help him hear, therefore what the bully is saying is false. You can practice this scenario and others with your child. Give them the confidence to not believe incorrect statements said to them.

Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from opposition or difficulties. It's important to teach your child that hearing loss or no hearing loss, everyone goes through some sort of opposition in life. Teach children they have the power to become who they want to become. There will always be someone opposing them as well as someone cheering them on, they get to choose



who they want to listen to. Talk to your child about what to do in difficult situations and how they should react, you can role play scenarios for them to practice at home to prepare them for real life instances.

You are not going to be able to prevent all instances of bullying, even when you have a good relationship with your child and are checking in with them regularly, bullying may still happen. If bullying has happened, it is likely that your child will not tell you right away.

Children may not tell you that bullying has happened but you may get signs through changes in their behavior. There are several behavioral changes that can indicate the possibility that your child has been subject to bullying. They may include but are not limited to becoming closed off, and or withdrawn, abnormal or extreme mood swings, increased aggressiveness, suddenly not wanting to wear their devices, making excuses, difficulty sleeping or loss of appetite, or not wanting to go to school.

Your ability to recognize changes in behavior will increase the more involved you are in your child's life.

While you are watching for warning signs or changes in your child's behavior, you can ask your child directly about their experiences at school or away from home. Your child may openly tell you that bullying is occurring, other times your child may be embarrassed or ashamed and unwilling to talk about what has happened. If you recognize any of these indicators, find out more about your child's situation by asking questions, and listen to your child as they talk to you. You can ask things like how did it go getting to school today? Have you seen a child being mean to another child? Are people ever mean to you? You can ask them if there are instances that they have felt scared. The purpose of asking questions is to see if your child will open up about a possible bullying incident.

If you suspect that there is bullying occurring but your child is reluctant to talk about the situation, you may need to ask different questions. These questions are examples of some topics or questions you can ask to try and ease a conversation about bullying and whether it is happening to them. Conversations must be conducted in a nonjudgmental manner. If the child continues to show indicators of bullying but does not reveal any instances of it occurring, you may ask the child's teacher or parents of their close friends to see if they have noticed any bullying or changes in your child's behavior as well.

Learning that your child has been bullied can cause a variety of emotions to arise. It is important that you first validate the child's experience, recognizing that it has had a negative effect on them and then take action. There are questions you can ask to gather more information to help you know what steps to take.



If your child opens up about an incident of bullying and is willing to discuss it more, probe further to get a better idea of what happened so you can get an idea of what should be done. Sometimes children will be in denial when reporting a bullying incident. Asking questions similar to these can help you get a clearer picture of what is going on as well as help them realize that this behavior is not ok.

Take immediate action: After you have talked with your child and found out what has happened, immediately alert and involve necessary adults and children. As you talk to your child determine the appropriate course of action, to put a stop to the bullying and to protect your child and other children from being further harassed by the bully. Above all, ensure that you validate your child's feelings and experiences. The bullying may seem like an insignificant event to you or others around you but if it is negatively impacting your child that is not healthy.

Make sure your child is safe: your child could have been harmed in one or more different ways, it could be physically, emotionally, socially, and or mentally. Your child may be reluctant to talk about specific harm they have experienced. They may say something like "it's not a big deal". Help them recognize that this kind of behavior toward them is not ok. Get the help your child needs, sometimes you may need to go to a medical doctor or a professional therapist or counselor to help these wounds heal. It may take days, weeks and or months for physical, emotional and mental wounds to heal.

Minimize contact with the bully. Separate your child from the bully as much as possible. This may include situations such as requesting a seating change in class or on the bus, finding a new way to go to school or classes, change in recess activities. As you are counseling your child to avoid the bully, remind them that it is much less likely to be bullied when your child is in a group or with friends. Counsel them not to be alone. When necessary involve other adults to help.

Be calm: It is important to act immediately but quick, rash reactions fueled by strong emotions rarely solve situations in the long run. Remain calm and reassure your child that things will work out. Plan out a course of action with your child. Together take the steps to prevent the bullying from continuing.

Be an example: The way you handle a situation will be an example of how children can and should advocate for themselves. Your child will be watching how you react and interact with people that are disagreeable. Be respectful but be strong as you intervene. The way you react is a learning opportunity for your child. Teach them how to appropriately stand up for themselves and how to take action when they or someone they know is bullied.

Monitor and check back in: Make sure you monitor your child's situation after bullying intervention has occurred. Check in with your child days, weeks even months afterwards to



ensure that the bullying has not continued or that they are not still being negatively affected, emotionally by the event. Open communication and a strong relationship with your child will help you monitor your child's progress and identify instances for you to celebrate times that your child has advocated for themselves.

Bullying is a topic that many parents worry about. You cannot prevent bullying from happening but you can help your child to be strong, confident, and to self-advocate. By doing this you will give them the tools to handle challenges they may face in their lives.