
Bullying vs. Just “Mean”

— How to help your child navigate peer conflict. —

Today's Agenda & Overall Goal

1. Understand Peer Conflict - the difference between bullying and meanness
2. Gain more understanding as to the frequency of bullying v. meanness
3. Step-by-Step directions as to how you can talk your child through a peer conflict situation.
4. Parent scenarios

Overall Goal

Learn the difference between bullying and meanness. Learn ways parents can help empower their children to become independent, problem solvers.

Bullying vs. Meanness Statistic

AJH Observations & Running Records

- We view meanness and bullying as Peer Conflict.
- Students have an intolerance for someone being unkind and don't know what is an appropriate reaction to someone being unkind.
- 80% of the peer conflict we help solve are just meannes and not bullying.

According to Ohio State Law - What is Bullying?

As Defined by SHB 1444:

An intentional written, verbal or physical act, including but not limited to one shown to be motivated by any characteristic such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, or other distinguishing characteristics, when the intentional act:

- A. Physically harms a student or damages his/her property
- B. Substantially interferes with the students education
- C. Is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating or threatening environment or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school

According to Amherst Handbook - What is Bullying?

Bullying Is:

Any INTENTIONAL written, verbal, electronic, or physical act that a student or group of students exhibits toward another student (s) more than once, and the behavior both causes mental and physical harm to the other student (s) and is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student(s).

5 Types of Bullying

1. Verbal- Threats, Teasing, Joking, Gossip, Ignoring/Isolation, Spreading Rumors

2. Physical- Pushing, Shoving, Kicking, Hitting, Punching, Tripping, Pinching, Slapping, Physical restraint, Blocking someone's path

3. Sexual- Teasing, Touching, Grabbing, Motioning

4. Property- Hiding belongings, Theft, Arson, Destruction of property, Vandalism

5. Cyberbullying- Sending pictures through email, text message or other electronic means that are negative, mean, degrading that are unwanted or without a person's permission

Bullying is NOT an isolated incident

For a situation to be considered a bullying incident - it must have 3 components:

1. **Intentional** - Done on purpose
 2. **Power Imbalance** - Use of power (such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity) to control or harm others.
 3. **Repeated** - done or occurring again several times in the same way.
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Differentiation between Bullying vs. Just “Mean” (peer conflict)

Bullying

1. Imbalance of Power
2. Repeated/Over and Over again
3. Intentional
4. Physical/Emotional Harm
5. Unequal Emotional Reaction
6. Seeking Power
7. No Remorse or Blaming of Target
8. No Effort to Problem Solve

Normal Conflict/Mean Behavior

1. Equal Power/Are Friends
2. Happens Occasionally
3. Accidental
4. Not Serious
5. Equal Emotional Reaction
6. Not Seeking Power
7. Remorse/Feel Regret or Sorry
8. Effort to Problem Solve

How can parents help?

Empowering our kids to be their best advocate. Helping kids understand and stand up to bullying and meanness.

Parents play a key role in preventing and responding to bullying or meanness. If you know or suspect that your child is involved in bullying or peer conflict, there are several resources that may help.

Warning Signs that Your Child is Involved in Peer Conflict

- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

Warning Signs that Your Child is Involved in Peer Conflict

- Get into physical or verbal fights
- Have friends who bully others
- Are increasingly aggressive
- Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blame others for their problems
- Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity

Adults are notified in less than 40% of peer conflict situations.

Kids don't tell adults for many reasons.

- Bullying can make a child feel helpless.
- Kids may fear backlash from peers who bullied them.
- Bullying can be a humiliating experience.
- Kids who are bullied may already feel socially isolated.
- Kids may fear being
— rejected by their peers.

What to do?

**If your child comes to you with
a peer conflict or you notice
warning signs.**

KEEP IN MIND ...

- Your child is watching you handle this conflict. Be aware as to how you are responding and helping your child response.
- Feeling uncomfortable is okay. Being able to tolerate differences and disagreements is important.
- You are hearing one person's perception of events.

A few questions as yourself...

1. Are you reacting while still in an emotionally state?
2. Is this hitting too close to home for you (due to a similar situation you experiences)?
3. Do you have all the facts?
4. Who can you ask to gain more facts?

Step 1: Just Listen

This step *could* be the easy one, if it weren't for all that pesky emotional baggage we carry around as parents. When you see your child experience social pain, it brings back issues and challenges from your own past. When the emotional area of our brain gets activated we are more apt to engage in any number of unhelpful behaviors.

Unhelpful behaviors include: jumping in prematurely, interrupting, offering unsolicited advice and trying to control/fix the outcome of the situation.

- When we are mindful of your emotions you'll know when the right time to respond comes.
- Help your child OWN their feelings.

Step 2: Empathize

Not only will empathizing with your child strengthen your relationship, feeling heard and understood is the conduit of moving your child from their emotion brain (amygdala) to their more rational problem-solving brain (pre-frontal cortex).

- Put yourself in their shoes.
- Tell your child, "I hear that you are feeling..."
- Validate their emotions and thoughts about the situation.
- Tell your a relatable story to help them not feel alone.

It's also the key piece that humans need to go from *emotionally stuck* to *feeling heard and understood* which allows us to move on and work through the situation.

Step 3: Ask Questions & Get the Facts

- **Get the story from several sources, both adults and kids.**
- **Listen without blaming.**
- **Don't label the act "bullying" while you are trying to understand what happened.**

It may be difficult to get the whole story, especially if multiple students are involved. Collect all available information.

Few questions to consider asking:

1. What is the history between the kids involved? (intentional)
2. Has this happened before? (repeated)
3. Is there a victim and an aggressor where the victim finds herself/himself in an inferior status that makes it difficult to put up any defense? (power)

Remember that it may not matter "who started it."

Step 4: Brainstorm Your Next Move to Solve Conflict

Initiate a conversation on how your child wants to move forward.

1. Brainstorming potential solutions and choices together.
 2. Review all the choices your child can make.
 3. Discuss what they want in this conflict and how they can get it.
 4. Role-play a scenario to get a better idea as to how it will play out.
- For younger children, keep the options limited and simple.
 - For older children, remind them that everyone has the right to be heard and that no idea is a silly idea.

Step 5: Choose an Action Plan

- **Trust your child.** Despite any uncomfortable feelings you may have regarding your child's peer conflicts, it's essential you step back and allow your child the time and space to process as they wish with their peer relationship.
- **Talk about being flexible** and making room for compromise.
- **Aim for a win-win solution** - something is fair for everyone.
- **Support them to think of possible consequences of solution.**
- **Follow up with your child** to see how the plan worked. If it didn't get the outcome your child was looking for, try another option.

Tips to Prevent Peer Conflict & Ways to Solve Problem Sooner

- Help kids understand bullying and typical peer conflict. Talk about what bullying is and how to stand up to it safely.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Check in with kids often. Listen to them. Know their friends, ask about school, and understand their concerns.
- Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities, interests, and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends, and protect them from bullying behavior.
- Model how to treat others with kindness and respect.

Scenarios

Scenario #1

Someone is
calling my
child mean
names.

What is the:

- 1. Parent Response**
 - 2. Action Plan**
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Scenario #2

On the bus and at recess, my child has been pushed/shoved by another student.

What is the:

- 1. Parent Response**
 - 2. Action Plan**
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Scenario #3

A bunch of students are spreading rumors about my child.

What is the:
1. Parent Response
2. Action Plan

Scenario #4

My child keeps getting text messages that are degrading and/or mean.

What is the:

- 1. Parent Response**
 - 2. Action Plan**
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Scenario #5

On the bus and at the lunch table, another student is cursing/swearing at my child.

What is the:
1. Parent Response
2. Action Plan

Review Handout

Questions?!

Resources

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/what-you-can-do#parents>

<https://parentswithconfidence.com/help-child-navigate-friendship-problems/>

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/helping-kids-handle-conflict>