

## How can parents prevent bullying at School?

When parents show interest towards their child's world, have conversations and ask questions, it gives space for the child to share their thoughts and things that feel difficult and uncomfortable. It is common for children to have differences in opinion, little conflicts and jokes with one another. Navigating friendships is not always seamless. Sometimes children feel hurt or cause hurt, apologize and forgive and continue with their friendships. These situations also provide good opportunities for discussions with children on how others' behavior affects me and how does my behavior affect others.

How children are treated and treat others in school has a tremendous effect on their self-image. Children are constantly absorbing feedback from peers that contributes to the development of their identity an school bullying can have major effects on one's self-image. How a child is treated at school has great effects on their self-development.

Below are important ways for parents to prevent bullying:

- Discuss bullying with your child, even though your family isn't affected presently. Make sure your child knows that bullying is always wrong
- Help build your child's empathy by imagining together how lonely, bad and sad bullying makes someone feel
- Ask your child how have they or how would they act, if they would notice someone being bullied. Do they participate, step aside or take part in the bullying? What are reasons to take part in the bullying, is it to avoid being bullied for example? Explain that it is brave to defend any classmate who is being bullied and defending someone is harder than playing along in the bullying. A way of defending someone is also immediately telling an adult about what has happened.
- Getting to know other parents in the class, communicating openly about the class' wellbeing and supporting your child's friendships in the class are all important preventative actions
- Be observant on your child's moods. Loneliness or bullying usually show in changes in their mood and they might build a silent wall around them thinking that it is their own fault they are bullied. Sleeping might also be more restless. Asking your child on why your mood has changed, refraining from judgements and actively listening and encouraging them to share their experiences is an important start. A child might not share their experience at first and deny it if they feel embarrassed, shame or are worried they are disappointing parents or making them feel concerned.

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- Always take bullying seriously and listen to your child in a calm manner. Try not to be upset in front of your child and ask what has happened, how did the situation start, who took part in it, what did children say or do and what did your child do and feel. Ask if the teacher has found out about the incident and tell your child that you will help and the bullying will stop. State clearly that bullying is always wrong.
- Remember that these suggestions also apply when your child is the one bullying or someone witnessing bullying and not knowing what to do.

## Let's work together!

Contact the teacher and ask how the situation shows in the classroom. Ask how the school is preventing and sorting out bullying situations. As a parent dealing with concerns on your child's wellbeing can be emotional and stressful. This is why it is especially important to work closely together with the school and co-operate. Parents are responsible for supporting their child and the school is responsible for intervening with all forms of bullying within a class, group or individuals.

The school might also contact you if your child has bullied someone else. Co-operating and trying to remain calm is important, so that we can understand the situation together and think of positive solutions together. Having conversation with the teacher and your child and understanding the situation comes before finding the reasons behind the bullying. Refrain from judging your child and stay close to them, but make it clear that bullying is unacceptable. Making sure your child knows that they are accepted and loved simultaneously is important, even when emphasizing that the choices and actions made are unacceptable and always wrong. Besides getting support for feeling bad, children need practice for social situations. **None of us are born with social skills. They are learned in interaction with our environment. We model our behavior from our family, friends, entertainment, the surrounding world. Even for us grown-ups, it is a constant process of development.** The school social worker, nurse and psychologist are also important adults at school who can support in practicing how to navigate emotions and social situations together with a child.

Preventing bullying is the responsibility of all us adults even though dealing with uncomfortable situations is not usually easy or pleasant. Both parents and educators are needed in ending bullying, addressing problems and holding children accountable to change informal norms in the class that feed into bullying. Providing support and keeping track of how situations develop after addressing difficulties is also important.

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Let's continue working together and we urge you the parents to contact teachers or/and us from the School Wellbeing Group if you have any thoughts, concerns or ideas regarding preventing and addressing bullying and also other phenomena that have effect on your child's health and wellbeing. ☺ We encourage you to also send us your suggestions for more topics(eg. gaming, loneliness, leisure time, parental resources and wellbeing)that relate to wellbeing and development that we could address with tips and suggestions in our letters to parents. You can do this by sending us a Wilma message, e-mailing us or calling us.

Best regards,

School social worker, Ona Needelman

[ona.needelman@hel.fi](mailto:ona.needelman@hel.fi)

040 660 8696

School psychologist, Kira Vikman

[Kira.vikman@hel.fi](mailto:Kira.vikman@hel.fi)

050 401 3350