



Self-Worth - Children and Bullying

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Bullying is a problem that many children experience outside the home, especially at school.

Contrary to the old-fashioned belief that bullying is a normal part of childhood, it's important for parents and teachers to get involved in their children's lives and make sure they are not being bullied. Bullying can have serious effects on self-worth and physical health—effects that could last way beyond childhood.

Bullying and low self-worth

A child who is regularly bullied can develop low self-worth. Self-worth is usually defined as an individual's perception of themselves. It can be measured by how much a person appreciates and loves who they are as a person.

A person's childhood years are extremely important. This is a crucial time that affects the formation of their self-worth. If a child is constantly being harassed at school—whether physically or verbally—they will gradually come to lose confidence in themselves. They may even begin to dislike themselves for their so-called 'weaknesses' or 'flaws'. For instance, if a child is getting bullied because he or she is overweight, they will start seeing themselves as overweight whether they are or not. If they are getting teased by other children regarding their glasses, they might want to stop wearing them. Bullying can cause a child to act outside of their better judgement and parental guidance.

It is crucial to talk to the child and protect them against the effects of bullying.

Bullying: Isolation and depression

If a child is a victim of bullying and has developed low self-worth, they may experience feelings of isolation and depression as well. For fear of being bullied, the child may choose to stay away from social gatherings. They may prefer to stay home instead to watch TV or surf the web. It's also probable they will start showing a dislike towards going to school.

If a child used to be positive and active, but seems to be unhappy and withdrawn of late, they could be experiencing bullying behaviour. Be aware of sudden behavioural changes.

Bullying: Overeating and weight gain

Overeating and weight gain are two common side effects of bullying in children. Since bullying can cause stress and depression, a child might choose to cope with these negative emotions by regularly



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consuming comfort foods. Since a child will want to spend more time indoors doing sedentary activities like playing videogames or watching TV, they will experience difficulty burning off excess calories and fats. Be aware of changes in diet and try to keep the kitchen stocked with healthy snacks.

Strategies for children dealing with bullying

The first step in managing the bully is to recognise that bullying is occurring. All too often the target (many experts on bullying prefer the word 'target' to 'victim'), will not recognise that he or she is being bullied, or will believe that somehow he or she is the cause of the bullying behaviour.

1. **Report the Bully.** If bullying is occurring at school, report the bullying behaviour. Document the bullying for others (school/parents).
2. **Stand Up to the Bully.** Show your child how to assert themselves and show that they won't accept the behaviour. This is often hard to do, particularly if your child has been bullied for a long time, lack confidence or if the bully persists despite being assertive. Always remind your child to put their safety first. If your child is confronted by a bully who uses physical violence, then immediately report it to the appropriate authorities.
3. **Don't Show the Hurt.** The bully gets enjoyment from seeing the target's pain, suffering and humiliation. Your child not showing he hurt to the bully can frustrate the bully into relenting, as they aren't getting the desired reaction. However, don't encourage them to hide their pain from you. Encourage them to talk to you about their hurt.
4. **Get Some Support.** Although other parents, friends and relatives may not be able to intervene, they can provide support to help your child deal with the stress of being bullied. Remind your child that they matter to you more than anything.
5. **Offering comfort.** Bullying in schools is rampant. Your child is not alone in experiencing bullies. While sourcing help and support, offer comfort and reassurance where you can.

It is important to not let the bully get to a child where possible. A bully can attack because of their insecurities and inadequacies, and their attacks have no bearing on who your child is as a person. If you witness other children being bullied, intervene or provide support to the target.

According to The MindShift Foundation Clinical Psychologist [Dr Lars Madsen](#), there is no doubt that bullying is toxic to a child's self-worth, especially in circumstances where it is prolonged, intrusive and cannot be easily prevented or even recognised (by such methods as over the internet, via text messaging and in school playgrounds). Bullying is particularly corrosive to someone's self-worth



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during childhood because it occurs at a crucial time when the child is learning about themselves and forming an identity through relationships with their peers. Being the target of ridicule and exclusion at this time can lead children to form negative beliefs about themselves and their general value and worth. These inaccurate beliefs can carry into a person's adult life causing unhappiness, disappointment and unsatisfying relationships. Whilst it is true to say that 'sticks and stones might break bones', the unfortunate reality is that words can do so much more damage.

There is no easy solution to bullying, however, there are things that can be helpful to deal with this problem. At a preventative level as a parent or teacher, having a '**zero tolerance**' approach for bullying behaviour is important. This sets the culture for the environment and models appropriate responses to inappropriate behaviours. This 'zero tolerance' must extend to even so-called humorous name-calling or mocking behaviours. What feels like fun and light-hearted banter can quickly turn out of control. Remember, the culture of a group matters, and bullying thrives in an environment that either tolerates or accepts the behaviour as somehow inevitable. The 'kids being kids', 'they don't mean it', and 'it doesn't hurt them' lines are all unacceptable responses.

When challenging bullies or holding them to account, it is important to focus on the bullying behaviour, and not the dispute they believe they have with the other person. It is important to state clearly what it is you require of the bully in the future, such as no name-calling and no violence. Remember, the goal of any intervention with young bullies is to stop the anti-social and negative behaviour first and foremost, and then replace it with more appropriate pro-social behaviour.

Being the victim of bullying causes us a child to feel alone, ashamed and sometimes even responsible for the ill-harmony, but remember bullies thrive in circumstances where others do not hold them to account. Encouraging your child to talk to a teacher, parent or someone they can trust is important.

Where to get help

Always remember you are not alone. Your doctor or registered health professionals are there to help you.

Our online resource page also has a full list of organisations where you can get further information. <http://mindshift.org.au/suggested-links/>.

Things to remember

Dr Lars Madsen reminds us that words matter and bullying behaviour during childhood can cause long-standing difficulties for individuals. Bullies thrive in environments that accept and tolerate



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bullying type of behaviours. Creating zero-tolerance environments is important and something that everyone can be a part of creating.

In summary

Bullying can lead to physical injury, social adjustment problems, emotional problems and even death. Children and adolescents who are bullied are at increased risk for mental health problems including depression, anxiety, headaches, and problems adjusting to school. Bullying also can cause long-term damage to self-worth. Children and adolescents who are bullied are at increased risk for illicit substance use, academic problems and violence toward others later in life.

The key to maintaining self-worth in the face of bullying is to define a personal strategy that recognises that bullying is occurring, that holds the bully to account and that provides support to the child. A child must always have the ability to speak up and receive protection from bullying behaviour.

Updates and Further information

For the latest updates and further information please visit www.mindshift.org.au.

Our Mission

It is our mission to ensure that every person has access to the resources available to build healthy self-worth, to have a positive sense of self and to find meaning in life.

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