



Bullying Basics

BULLYING CAN SERIOUSLY HARM YOUR CHILD. HERE'S HOW TO HANDLE IT.
TEXT DEIDRE DONNELLY

Bullying can be obvious (physical or verbal abuse, etc) or more subtle (manipulation, rumour-spreading, etc). If your child is a victim of any abusive behaviour on an ongoing basis (their lunch is taken every day, for instance), they are being

bullied, says child psychologist Fatima Adam.

She adds that harassment via digital platforms like cell phones and social media is spiralling out of control, and since it can take place anywhere, it's particularly difficult to manage.

THE CAUSES...

Cape Town clinical psychologist Johan Van Rooyen says children who feel vulnerable or insecure are easy targets. Whether they're overweight, 'different', or are having trouble at home, 'stronger children can sense when a child feels weak'. As for the bullies, many

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DOWNLOAD...**

the documentary film
Bully (2011, PG13), then
download the free Tools
and Resources from
www.thebullyproject.com

factors play a role, like being pushed around by an older sibling, abuse at home or exposure to violent media. But, says Adam, 'Even a child from a nurturing home may try out bullying.'

... AND EFFECTS

Bullying is not just 'part of growing up'. It's serious. Children who are bullied often develop physical complaints (sore tummy, nausea etc), can't concentrate and have a lowered self-esteem. This can cause depression, anxiety and anger that leads to aggression. Because they struggle to handle their emotions, bullied kids often turn to addictive substances or self-harm. In extreme cases, kids have been literally bullied to death, when they've tragically taken their own lives.

IF YOUR CHILD IS A BULLY:

→ Make them face consequences, says Adam. Ban playdates for little ones for a time, or discuss with teens how bullying abuses human rights and can even break the law.

- Direct their energy towards healthy outlets and praise them for acceptable behaviour. Bullies need to earn social respect without hurting others.
- Encourage your child to apologise to the child they hurt.
- Look at the example you're setting. Do you belittle your child, or lose your temper?
- For persistent bullying, you will need to get professional psychological help.

IS YOUR CHILD A VICTIM?

- Watch for any changes in behaviour, anxiety before school or physical ailments.
- If your child tells you about bullying, support them and let them know it's not their fault, and it's unacceptable.
- Lay a complaint with the school. If they don't take action, go to the provincial department of education.
- Make other travel plans if bullying is happening in the taxi, bus or on the walk home.
- Use social media safety and anti-bullying procedures. MixIt has bullying prevention tips and takes up complaints. Facebook lets you block, delete or unfriend. The Trusted Friend tool can send a copy of abusive content to someone you trust, which generates a report to Facebook. ■

SADAG (the South African Depression and Anxiety Group): tel 011 234 4837 (0800 567 567 for suicidal emergencies); email zane1@hargray.com or visit www.sadag.org
The Children's Resource Centre, a collection of children's groups (for kids 7 to 14) that runs an anti-bullying programme: tel 021 686 6898; email crochild@telkomsa.net or visit www.childrensmovement.org.za

GRIP Kidz helps equip children in Grades 3 to 7 to deal with bullying: gripkidz.wordpress.com
ChildLine: 08000 55 555 (toll-free), 031 201 2059 or visit www.childlinesa.org.za

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