

STARTING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

Bullying is unwanted, repeated aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. No single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or bullying others. Bullying can happen anywhere and at any time. Let's say you notice that your child is showing some of the signs of being bullied. Would you recognize them? What do you do? How do you start the conversation?

SIGNS YOUR CHILD MIGHT BE BEING BULLIED

- Your child no longer wants to go to school or other activities that they used to like
- Complaints of stomachaches or other physical ailments without medical explanation
- Avoiding peers and other children that they used to be friendly with
- "Losing" personal items, when this is not typical behavior of them
- Unexplained injuries
- Complaining of being hungry because of not eating lunch in school despite having the means to do so. You might learn that your child is avoiding the lunch room, a place where bullying often occurs
- Appears sad, moody, angry, depressed, which is uncharacteristic of your child
- Sudden drop in grades
- Won't use the bathroom in school

You might ask your child the following if you suspect bullying:

- "Your favorite toy/cd is missing. Did someone take it from you?"
- "Are you eating your lunch at school? I notice that you come home hungry often."
- "You appear very sad/angry/sullen. What has been on your mind? I'm here for you."
- "Your jacket is ripped. How did that happen?"
- "You no longer want to attend soccer. How come?"
- "I noticed that you do not invite kids over anymore. Are they still friendly to you?"

TIPS ON STARTING THE CONVERSATION IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

1. Understand that while you may be upset about what may be happening to your child approach them with calm, care, and concern.
2. Take it seriously. Sit down with them when you have time to have a conversation without distractions. Watch your child's reactions to your questions and encourage them to talk and not hold their thoughts and feelings inside.
3. Make sure that they understand that you want to know and understand what is happening to keep them safe.
4. Hear their thoughts and listen to them express their feelings. Comfort them when they need to be comforted.
5. Understand that bullying may look much different than when you were their age. Don't compare how you were treated or how tough you had to be to their experience. Don't belittle how they feel or what they have done or not done to stop it.
6. Explain to them what bullying is, the various forms that it can come in, and that it doesn't need to be a part of their day.
7. Since bullying can happen in many different forms, understand that the response to bullying may look different depending on the situation. There is not a one size fits all solution. That's why it is so important to have open lines of communication with your child.
 - A. Understand that the best course of action may not always be to go straight to the other parent or teacher with your child confronting the situation head-on. Ask your child if they have any ideas on how together you can handle the situation. Maybe it is just removing the possibility for the situation to occur. For example, switching classroom seats, taking the bus versus walking home, finding different kids to play with on the play ground, etc.
 - B. If it is happening at school, would they like to be with you when you talk to the teacher? Or would they rather you do it alone?
 - C. If it is occurring on social media do you need to help them to understand that it may be in their best interest to shut down their accounts, take a break, or help them block certain individuals? Remember to monitor their accounts, report it if necessary, and keep checking in with them.

SUPPORT & RESOURCES

MCCS Family Advocacy Program or the Community Counseling Program. Program information is available on the MCCS websites. You can also receive guidance from Military One Source at **1-800-342-9647** or **www.militaryonesource.mil** or **www.stopbullying.gov**

