

# Working With Your Child's School to Stop Bullying

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Parents regularly ask me for advice on how to work with their child's school to stop a bullying problem. Home and school collaboration is an important alliance to build – adults at school are as important as adults at home to provide a safe, bully-free environment. Here's our 10-step approach to help parents work with the school to stop their child from being bullied.



1. **Intervene Early.** This is the single most important action. It's MUCH easier to nip a problem in the bud than to correct months of escalating bullying. However, kids often wait until there's a big problem to tell us, so make sure you are talking to your child frequently. Even if your child doesn't want to talk, you've opened a communications window, so they can feel more comfortable approaching you with their problems.
2. **Get The Facts.** As your child's advocate, gather the evidence. Go slow and stay calm. Talk to your child to gather as much information and understanding as possible before you approach the school. Start a journal (more on this in Step 4). Describe the problem and how you and your child have tried to resolve it so far. What are the 5 Ws of the situation?
  - **Who:** One bully or several?
  - **What:** Verbal, relational, physical, or cyberbullying? A combination? Describe the incidents. Support your case with physical evidence such as text messages, social media photos, emails, or damaged personal property.
  - **When:** One time only or repeated? Is it happening during class, breaks, or after school?
  - **Where:** Is it mainly at school (playground, cafeteria, hallways, stairwells), on the way home, or after school, by text and computer?
  - **Why:** This is tough, but you and your child may have some insights that could be helpful in resolving the problem.
3. **Call and Meet With The Teacher** as soon as possible, within 1 week, or if you feel the situation is imminently dangerous to your child, within 1 to 3 days. Be curious and friendly. Approach as an equal, in peace. Bring a tired teacher an after-school coffee or snack.

DO NOT lose your cool. This is stressful, but parental meltdowns or bullying should not be an "add-on" to the problem. Discuss the problem. Lay out the physical evidence. Is the teacher aware of the problem? If so, how long has the problem been recognized? What's been done so far? What are the next steps?

Ask about the school's anti-bullying policy. Any thoughts on why it hasn't worked in this case? This is a whole-school problem and requires a whole-school solution. The teacher can't do it alone. Make an action items list – yours and the teacher's (1-2 items each). Agree to follow up in 10 days (set the date and time). Make clear that you'd like to know about any further problems that arise with your child or this group of kids.



Send an email, so it's on the record. *"Just to summarize, here's what we're going to try for the next 2 weeks. I'll do ..., Mrs. Akela will do ..., Principal Savan will do ..., and we'll have a touch-base phone call (or meeting) on Nov 27."* Keep it short and simple.

4. **Keep A Journal Or Computer Log.** Track your child's experience over time. Are things getting better and *staying* better? Check in with your child weekly. Monitor and record progress with the school. Record dates of all conversations, the people you talked to, and what you discussed. Include an "action items" line. Describe any efforts your child has made to improve the situation or seek protection.
5. **Follow Up With The Teacher.** Call or show up as agreed upon (builds credibility). What has been done since you last spoke? Any progress? Have the principal and other staff been alerted to monitor and address the bully's (bullies') behaviour? It's not enough to console the target or deflect the target from the bully's path. The adults at school must deal head-on with the bullying. Beyond that, what has been done to change the school climate that's allowing and encouraging bullying? Hint: It's never just the bully's fault. Discuss what else can be done. End every meeting with the short action list and date of next check-in.
6. **Students Must Be Part Of The Solution.** Ask how the staff is involving students, keeping kids safe both on- and off-campus. Build a culture of upstanders. Adults must teach and model respect for all, even and *especially* during conflict. There are many good school-based programs on respect, including our own [Girls' Respect Groups](#) program, to help the school press the reset button. Echo these teachings at home.
7. **Follow Up Weekly With Your Child.** Are things improving? Update your journal. If after 2-3 weeks the problem is not noticeably better, it's time to escalate. Next stop: The principal.
8. **Meet With The Principal.** Once again, approach with calmness and curiosity, not yelling. Ultimately, you want cooperation and action. Ask the same questions you asked the teacher: What's your view of the problem? What has been done? What else can be done? What can I do at home to support your efforts? By this point, the entire school should be on notice to help solve this problem. Make an action list and set next check in date.
9. **Don't Bully The Teachers Or Principal.** I cannot stress this enough. Be quietly assertive and polite. Smile. And stand your ground. Keep being a persistent presence requiring attention until this problem is showing noticeable improvement.
10. **Review Progress Frequently, Every 2 Weeks.** The school needs to know that you will keep showing up and checking in until the problem is solved. When things do improve, be sure to tell the teacher(s) and principal that their efforts are working. Believe me, the teacher and principal will be happy the problem is improving. Continue working with the school on bullying prevention.

**What you can expect.** You should see immediate improvement within 7-10 days and significant resolution within 3 months. Expect a recurrence or two, less severe, but the trend line should be positive. It should look like adults are paying attention.

**If it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes an entire community to protect one.** Parents, teachers and students need to work together to stop bullying. By addressing your child's problems, you are making the community safer, telling your child and the world that bullying is unacceptable, and demonstrating our responsibility, as adults, to work together to protect children.



**Done all this and still having problems?** Check the [BullyingEpidemic.com](http://BullyingEpidemic.com) blog and [\*Bullying Epidemic: Not Just Child's Play\*](#) book for additional tips, including how to know when your best choice is to leave the school.

**Safety Note: If Your Child Is In a Dangerous Situation (severe or longstanding bullying):** Reading a blog article (or even a book) is not enough to prepare you to skillfully and safely navigate your child through what could be a life-threatening or mental health-threatening experience. The info on the BullyingEpidemic blog and the *Bullying Epidemic* book are good places to start, but are not a replacement for enlisting skilled professional help and individual coaching. If your child is in an emergency situation, move quickly. Long term, the solution to bullying is to (mostly) PREVENT bullying in our kid's schools and **move quickly to intervene at the early stages of bullying**, before it becomes dangerous and complex!



**Lorna Blumen** is a bullying prevention specialist, speaker, consultant, and author of five books on bullying and respect issues, including [\*Bullying Epidemic: Not Just Child's Play\*](#). She works with workplaces, schools, parents, teachers, coaches, and health professionals working to reduce bullying. Lorna is also the lead program developer and lead author of [\*Girls' Respect Groups: An Innovative Program To Empower Young Women & Build Self-Esteem!\*](#) GRG is an after-school program for middle and high school girls used in Canada, the US, and 130 countries worldwide. More info:

[BullyingEpidemic.com](http://BullyingEpidemic.com) and [GirlsRespectGroups.com](http://GirlsRespectGroups.com)

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