

- Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. If the child were able to simply ignore it, they likely would not have told you about it. Often, trying to ignore bullying allows it to become more serious.

- Don't place blame and don't assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying.

- Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask them to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened.

- Learn as much as you can about what, when and where something happened. Can your child name other children or adults who may have witnessed the bullying?

- Empathize with your child. Tell them that bullying is wrong, not their fault, and that you are glad they had the courage to tell you about it. Ask your child what they think can be done to help. Assure them that you will think about what needs to be done and you will let them know what you are going to do.

- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don't criticize them.

- Do not encourage physical retaliation ("Just hit them back") as a solution. Hitting another student is not likely to end the problem, and it could get your child suspended or expelled while also escalating the situation.

- Check your emotions. A parent's protective instincts stir strong emotions. Although it is difficult, a parent is wise to step back and consider the next steps carefully.

Following is a way to help kids learn how to deal with insults.

"DO YOU BELIEVE IT?"

It goes like this:

Child: Johnny called me a x@z#\$%*!

Adult (sounding concerned): Do you believe it?

Child: No!

Adult: Good! I don't either!

And that's where it usually ends! The child has nothing more to say, and the incident is over in record time. This response accomplishes a number of things:

- This gives control of the situation to the victim, which is the person that needs to be in control. Whether or not they are upset is determined entirely by the victim, not the bully. When they say they don't believe the insult they become aware that there really is no problem.

- When you say, "Good!" you are letting them know you are proud of them for being wise enough not to believe the insult. And since you, an adult authority, is letting them know you don't believe the insult either, you are countering the power of the bully's insult.

- Since you are not punishing the bullies, the bullies do not become mad at their victims or at you, so there is less chance of escalation or retaliation.

- It shows the kids that since you don't think the name-calling is a big deal, neither should they.

What if the insult is about something true, like having freckles? Handle it like this:

Child: Johnny called me a freckle-face.

Adult (sounding concerned): Do you believe it?

Child: Yes!

Adult: So what's the problem?

At this, the child will probably have nothing to say, and will just walk away. There is a chance, though, that he may ask you to tell the bully to stop. Don't fall into the trap of doing this for him. Answer like this:

Child: Johnny called me a freckle-face!

Adult (sounding concerned): Do you believe it?

Child: Yes!

Adult: So what's the problem?

Child: Tell him not to say it!

Adult: When Johnny calls you names, do you get mad?

Child: Yes.

Adult: And when you get mad, does he have fun?

Child: Yes.

Adult: Do you want him to have fun when he calls you names?

Child: No.

Adult: If he calls you names and you don't care, will it be fun for him?

Child: No.

Adult: That's right! It's only fun for him if you get upset. That's the real reason he's doing it. So let him call you names all he wants. You'll see that after a few days he gets bored and leaves you alone.

Our moral upbringing may make it hard for us to accept the idea that we shouldn't punish the bully. Our guiding principle of justice should be that "hurting people is not permitted."

When a victim feels hurt by names, it is not really the bully who hurt him. It is the victim who hurt himself by choosing to let the name hurt him. Therefore, it is not appropriate to punish the name-caller when a victim tells on him.

If the rumor spreader says, "No," the child can say "Good."

If the rumor spreader says, "Yes," the child can say, "You can believe it if you wish."

Either way the child wins!

It is only fun to spread rumors about someone if they get upset. If a person allows others to spread rumors about them, it's no fun for the rumor spreaders and they soon stop.

Cyberbullying

How You Can Help

Listen to this page

Dealing with cyberbullying is similar to dealing with verbal attacks and rumors. A solution is to give others "Freedom of Speech."

Take the attitude: "People can say or write whatever they want about me and it's perfectly okay."

If someone tells you about the mean things they read about you, ask them, "Do you believe it?"

If they say, "No", you can answer, "Good."

If they say, "Yes," answer, "You can believe it if you want."

Generally when a child experiences bullying online they also encounter bullying behaviors off-line. It can be a good idea for the child to ask the kids who are writing the nasty stuff, "Are you mad at me?"

If they answer, "Yes," the child should ask them why. If they explain why they are mad, he should discuss the matter with them – without anger - and apologize if it seems right to do so.

If they are not mad at the child, they may realize they have no good reason to be so mean and will stop. If they continue to do it, the child might then ask them why they are doing it if they are not mad at him. If the cyberbullying still doesn't stop, the child might let them do it all they want to show them that it doesn't bother him.

Remind children that many other kids at school aren't doing anything unpleasant to them. Perhaps they should spend more time with these "good guys" rather than worrying about the few "bad guys."

Warning

If people are making serious threats against you or a child with whom you work or volunteer, and you think the people making the threats are actually planning to harm you or a child, that is a different matter. Follow your organization's policies regarding whom to notify.

The Bullies to Buddies rules work for both children and adults. As you reflect upon the content in this training, consider the many ways that you might be able to practice what you preach and live in accordance with the Golden Rule.

- Don't Let 'em Get You Mad
- Appreciate Criticism
- Do Not Be Afraid
- Don't Retaliate
- Do Not Defend Yourself
- Express Your Pain, Not Your Anger
- Don't Tell on Bullies
- Don't Be a Sore Loser

