

React, but don't overreact.

Bullying and cyberbullying are such emotionally laden words today; there are few other problems that strike such dread into the hearts of parents.

Sometimes, though, it's important to remember that bullying and cyberbullying don't always indicate an extremely serious problem. Children do make mistakes, and making social errors while still a child is one of the best and safest ways to learn.

Your job is to make sure that they DO learn from this episode – and that is true regardless of their role. We want bullies to learn how destructive and self-destructive their behaviors are; and we want targets to learn how to cope successfully and emerge even stronger.



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Common Mistakes to Avoid When Your Child Is The Bully or The Target



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Common Mistakes You Can Avoid



Precisely because bullying and cyberbullying are such emotional issues for parents, there are several very common mistakes that are made when coping with a situation where your child has been bullying someone, or has been bullied by someone.

Some of these tips are for parents of bullies, while others are for parents of targets. One tip for all parents: if your child's behavior or psychological state concerns you, discuss it with your pediatrician!



Mistake to Avoid #1:

If your child has admitted to treating another child rudely or cruelly, don't begin by asking them WHY they picked on that child. Later on in the conversation, it may be relevant to talk about why this child irritated them; but when you ask your child, "Why did you pick on him?" you are, in fact, implying that *there may be a good reason or rationale*. The primary message needs to be that there is NEVER an adequate reason to be socially cruel to someone else – period. If your child insists that the other child "started it," it's a good idea to ask how it started, specifically; but be sure to emphasize that unless an action is self-defense, there is really never an excuse.

Mistake to Avoid #2:

Don't demand to know what the school is going to do to the other child (the Bully or the Target who accused your child). Federal law (and some state laws as well) prevents schools from telling you *anything* about another child. Educators have no choice in this matter: they cannot tell you, so don't waste your energy asking.

Mistake to Avoid #3:

If your child is the target, focus on him or her – not on the bully. Research shows that the most helpful actions for targets are support, affection, and friendship. Help your child cope and feel stronger by encouraging friendships and fun activities with the family. Focus on supporting him or her. Focusing on the bully may increase that bully's importance in the eyes of your child.

Mistake to Avoid #4:

Until all the facts are in, don't simply assume your child is blameless. It is

normal for children to fudge the truth with their parents to avoid getting into trouble.

Mistake to Avoid #5:

Don't engage in a child's fight, either online or in person. It is very tempting to want to defend your child, but it's also important to model socially civilized and appropriate behaviors. Posting mean comments about other people, or phoning them to abuse them, doesn't teach your child to be strong – it just teaches them to be rude.

Mistake to Avoid #6:

Don't just punish; try to teach. Many children "try out" bullying (especially online) because they want to be more popular and they're not sure how seriously their parents feel about this. Make sure your child knows that there is no excuse and you are absolutely against abusive behaviors. Ultimately, it's your values that your children will emulate.

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