

# "BULLYING" Among Preschoolers

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## What is your definition of bullying?



*"using superior power to influence or intimidate..."*  
*"unwanted, aggressive behavior involving power imbalance..."*

*"repeated aggressive behavior intended to hurt..."*  
*"systematically undermines kids' self-esteem"*

*"when you keep picking on someone because you think you're cooler, smarter, stronger or better..."*

**Bullying is learned behavior and different from conflict. Its effect is to "de-humanize" the other. Do you think the aggressive behavior *has to occur over time* to be considered bullying?**

## What do you do when your child lets people grab their toys or hit them?

Let your child know that you have noticed they let other children take their toys and sometimes even hit them. Try to make it just a *statement* — no judgment, no criticism. Don't express any anger about what has happened. The idea is to let the story come out. Staying calm even when hearing something that upsets you allows your child to see examples of self-regulation, frustration tolerance, and centering in challenging situations.

Allow your child to give her own meaning to the interaction so that you can discern the thoughts or feelings she's having that might be preventing her from defending herself. For example, if she says, *"It doesn't really matter. I didn't want to play with that toy anymore anyway,"* or *"I didn't need that toy,"* it might be a sign that she prefers to avoid conflict over getting what she wants and justly deserves. If she says, *"Oh, I wanted her to have that toy,"* it may reflect a situation where your child is trying to please the other kid or get on her good side, perhaps to avoid being targeted. If she says, *"Maybe I shouldn't have taken that toy out of the toy box,"* it may suggest your child doesn't feel as worthy of valued possessions as she should feel.

Help your child label the event/interaction as "not okay" in whatever words are appropriate, and teach her how to say them out loud if it happens again. They don't even need to say them to the other child.

*That was mean.*  
*That's not nice.*  
*I don't like that.*

### **Role play such responses as**

- Standing tall and acting brave
- Ignoring the bully
- Sticking with friends
- Telling an adult

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## Is it o.k. to teach your child to fight back??

*What is meant by fighting back?* There is "eye for an eye" and there is fighting for rights and respect. This is a beautiful opportunity to discuss the difference with your child.

Teaching kids to *fight with words and ideas*. Who can you think of that would serve as a role model or hero?

## Do you see your child being mean to others?

If you do see it, stop it. Return to it later when your child is likely to be less defensive. Before any kind of lecture, *ask about it*—"it" being the event or interaction in question. For example,

"I noticed what happened over at the slide and heard what you said to Amy. I thought that was kind of mean, actually, and I saw that it hurt Amy's feelings. I know you wanted your turn on the slide and had been waiting for a long time, *but what made you feel it was okay to be mean?*"

This needs to be asked with genuine curiosity and a wish to understand things from your child's point of view, even though you are not endorsing it. Trying to "make a point" too early in the process will shut down the conversation. At the same time, your child must know immediately that their behavior is unacceptable. They can discern this from your facial expression, the quickness with which you respond, and the way you make it a priority in that moment.

Discuss, ponder, invite conversation ...

Discuss imposing consequences, including that of making restitution.

Praise efforts to change.



## How do you empower your child to be assertive but not bossy?

How do you teach them the difference? What examples can you use? What would a role play look like?

## What do you do about an older sibling who takes advantage of his younger sibling?

Avoid lecturing, which kids tune out before you've finished your first sentence. Try to engage your child in a conversation, even though you are disappointed in their behavior. Try to evoke a different sentiment on the part of the older sibling toward the younger one. How can he or she feel proud to be the older, wiser, looked-up-to one? Show them what that would look like in terms of behavior. Use stories, movies, and real life examples to model and make it compelling rather than a matter of just "being nice" or "being a good big sister."

## What is our role in teaching our children not to be innocent bystanders, but to take a strong stand when they see another person being bullied?

Raising children who are willing to be **witnesses, resisters, and defenders**.

**How do we do this "organically"?**

<http://www.niot.org/blog/bullying-and-personal-power-ideas-parents-and-teachers>