

# What to do when your child is bullying others

**Late last school year, I was surprised when my son's school said he was bullying another student. He is about to start the fourth grade and I'm not sure what to say to him to make sure he doesn't do this again. Any advice?**

First, it sounds like you have already taken an important first step: Admit that your child was in the wrong. It's a difficult mindset for many parents to adopt, but it's vital to get past the stage of denial so you can begin to address the problem.

Child development professionals say that children who become bullies are often modeling behavior they see in others. Has your son himself been bullied? Has he witnessed or been the victim of acts of aggression, intimidation or violence at home or at school? Don't make the mistake of assuming you would know if your son had been exposed to such experiences. Children are often afraid or embarrassed to tell adults about their victimization, or believe it wouldn't do any good anyway.

Studies on children who bully others has found that bullies tend to:

- Have higher levels of anger.
- Believe that manipulation or intimidation works better than nonviolent strategies when dealing with others.
- Be good at hiding negative behavior from adults.
- Accept aggression as justifiable.
- Enjoy feelings of power and control.



- Be unhappy at school and lack a sense of belonging there.
- Be impulsive.
- Have feelings of depression.
- Have problems at home.
- Blame others for their actions.

It's important to try to understand where the bullying behavior is coming from, but it's even more important to address the issue directly with your son:

- Make it clear that bullying is unacceptable. Establish clear rules and consequences for breaking those rules, and be consistent in your follow-through. Be sure to use non-violent, non-physical methods of discipline.
- Be sure you're modeling appropriate behavior in your own actions with your son and with others. Be assertive, not aggressive, and treat others with kindness and respect.
- Help your son find non-aggressive ways to interact with others.
- Talk to your son about how it feels to be bullied, and help him build empathy for others.
- Keep in close contact with your son's teachers and the school counselor to seek help in changing your son's behavior.
- Spend more time with your son and praise him when he acts appropriately.
- If the bullying persists, seek professional counseling or an evaluation by a mental health professional.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



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**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Tasha Snyder, associate professor of human development and family science in the College of Education and Human Ecology and Ohio State University Extension.

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