

# 5 Steps to End Bullying

By Constance Sommer

What's the difference between a little schoolyard teasing and full-blown bullying? This is how the experts define it:

- 1. Bullying is an aggressive behavior.**
- 2. It typically involves a pattern of repeated behavior over time.**
- 3. It involves power differentials between the people involved.**

“You know it’s going to hurt, is what it comes down to,” says Marlene Snyder, director of development for Olweus (pronounced “ol-VAY-us”), an anti-bullying program developed 40 years ago in Norway, and now used in schools throughout the U.S. “You do it repeatedly because you know you are going to win.”

If you believe your child is the victim of bullying, here are the steps to take:

**Step 1: Empower your child.** If he’s the victim of indirect bullying (e.g., taunting), he may be able to deal with it himself, with some coaching from you. “Each child will be different in what they can handle and what they can’t,” says Karyn Hall, author of *The Power of Validation: Arming Your Child Against Bullying, Peer Pressure, Addiction, Self-Harm and Out-of-Control Emotions*. Give him a suggestion for how to respond, then, “Say, ‘OK, is this something you can do?’” Hall says. (If you believe your child is in physical danger, skip this step and go directly to Step 3.)

**Step 2: Praise his efforts.** If he couldn't bring himself to face up to the bullies—or he did, and it didn't work—be sure to validate his courage. “Find something to praise that is true, like the fact that he went to school and tried, or that he was willing to try, even though he backed out at the last moment.” Then work with him to devise Plan B—another attempt on his own, or maybe an effort to involve more adults. Adds Snyder: “Let your children know you’re really sorry this is happening to them, and that you will do everything you can to help. You’re going to work to see they get relief.”

**Step 3: Talk to a teacher.** Or the camp counselor, or whoever is in charge wherever the bullying is taking place. “You go in a positive way,” says Brenda Weinstock, a retired educator with 53 years of experience as a teacher and principal in Los Angeles schools. “You say, ‘What can I as a parent do? What can we do together?’ What you don’t go and say is, ‘You need to make this stop.’” The teacher can be your best ally, if you are able to work together, Weinstock says.

**Step 4: If that doesn't work, go to the principal.** But be sure to keep the teacher on side, says former principal Weinstock. "Principals are so busy, and teachers may look on you going above their heads as a threat." Ask the teacher to come along, suggests Hall. "Stay collaborative," she says, "as long as your child isn't in danger."

**Step 5: Still no relief? Go to the school district.** And, if that doesn't work, contact your state's department of education, says Deborah Temkin, Bullying Prevention Coordinator for the U.S. Department of Education. Bullying should be on every parent and educator's radar, so if you don't get help at the school level, don't be shy about taking your case all the way.

**What NOT to do:** Don't contact the bully's parents, unless you know them well. If you don't have that relationship with them, it's easy to make a bad situation worse, says Hall. "They can blame you," she says. "They can blame your child." Or they may come down hard on their own child, which doesn't necessarily help you either. "The kid may get hit or yelled at, which can make him even more angry. And if a bully gets more angry, the bullying behavior may increase," Hall warns.