

K12 ACADEMICS — REFERENCE SERIES

Bullying & School Safety

A calm, practical guide for families — how to spot bullying, respond effectively, work with the school, and help every child feel safe and known.



Find Your Community
2026 EDITION

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — and keep their children safe and supported.

SAFE, CALM, AND PREPARED

Bullying is common, and school safety weighs on every family — but calm, informed action helps enormously. This guide walks **ten practical steps**, from recognizing bullying to talking with kids about safety. Pair it with our **Student Wellbeing & Mental Health** handbook.

IF A CHILD IS IN CRISIS

Bullying can take a serious toll. If a child is in emotional crisis, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or text **HOME to 741741** — free, confidential, 24/7. If someone is in immediate danger, call **911**.

General guidance, not individualized advice. Bullying situations vary, and laws and school policies differ by state — for serious or ongoing situations, work closely with your school and, if needed, a counselor.

Understanding Bullying

WHAT TO KNOW

Bullying is **unwanted, aggressive behavior** that is repeated (or likely to be) and involves a real or perceived **power imbalance**. It's not the same as ordinary conflict or a one-time argument between equals.

BY THE NUMBERS

3 markers

repeated, power gap, intentional

~1 in 5

students report being bullied

Not conflict

mutual disagreement differs

HOW TO HELP

Learn the difference between **bullying and conflict** — both need attention, but bullying, with its power imbalance and repetition, calls for adult intervention.

GOOD TO KNOW

A single mean comment between equals is conflict; a **pattern** targeting someone who can't easily defend themselves is bullying.

Know the Types

WHAT TO KNOW

Bullying takes four main forms: **physical** (hitting, taking things), **verbal** (threats, name-calling), **social/relational** (exclusion, rumors, humiliation), and **cyberbullying** (online).

BY THE NUMBERS

Physical

hitting, shoving, damage

Verbal

threats, taunts, slurs

Social

exclusion, rumors, shaming

HOW TO HELP

Recognize that the most common — and most hidden — forms are **verbal and social**, not physical; exclusion and rumors cut just as deep.

GOOD TO KNOW

"Sticks and stones" is wrong — verbal and social bullying can be the most damaging and the hardest for adults to see.

Recognize the Signs

WHAT TO KNOW

A bullied child may show unexplained injuries, lost or damaged belongings, changes in eating or sleep, **avoiding school**, declining grades, withdrawal, or sudden shifts in mood.

BY THE NUMBERS

Avoiding school

a common red flag

Lost belongings

or unexplained injuries

Mood & sleep

shifts to notice

HOW TO HELP

Watch for **patterns** — especially school avoidance, withdrawal, and changes in mood or sleep — and open a calm, non-judgmental conversation.

GOOD TO KNOW

Many bullied kids don't tell — out of shame or fear it'll get worse — so watch the signs and ask gently.

Signs a Child May Be Bullying

WHAT TO KNOW

Children who bully **also need help**. Signs include increasing aggression, unexplained new belongings or money, blaming others, and a strong need for control or popularity.

BY THE NUMBERS

Also needs help

bullying signals a struggle

Watch for

aggression, blaming, new items

Address it

don't just punish

HOW TO HELP

If your child may be bullying, stay calm, set clear expectations, **build empathy**, and look for what's driving it — treat it as a teaching moment.

GOOD TO KNOW

Kids who bully are often struggling themselves — addressing the “why” works better than punishment alone.

If Your Child Is Bullied

WHAT TO KNOW

When your child is being bullied, your response matters. **Stay calm, listen fully, take it seriously, document** what's happening, and work with the school — don't say to just "toughen up."

BY THE NUMBERS

Listen first

stay calm, believe them

Document

dates, details, screen shots

Report

to the school, in writing

HOW TO HELP

Listen without overreacting, write down the incidents (who, what, when), report to the school **in writing**, and then follow up.

WATCH OUT

Telling a child to **fight back or just ignore it** usually backfires — and coaching retaliation can put them at greater risk.

Work with the School

WHAT TO KNOW

Every school has (or is required to have) an **anti-bullying policy**. Reporting in writing, knowing the policy, and following up creates a record and holds the school accountable to act.

BY THE NUMBERS

Written policy

every school has one

Report in writing

it creates a record

Follow up

in about a week

HOW TO HELP

Request the school's bullying policy, report in writing to a teacher, counselor, or principal, ask what steps they'll take, and follow up if it continues.

WATCH OUT

If the school doesn't act, **escalate** up the chain (district, then school board) — persistent, documented advocacy is your tool.



STEP 07 OF 10

Navigate Cyberbullying

WHAT TO KNOW

Cyberbullying — over texts, social media, and games — follows kids **home, 24/7**, can spread fast, and often feels inescapable. It—s real bullying, with digital-specific challenges.

BY THE NUMBERS

24/7

it follows them home

Save evidence

screen shot first

Report & block

on the platform

HOW TO HELP

Keep evidence (**screenshot before blocking**), report to the platform and the school, and keep communication open so your child keeps telling you.

WATCH OUT

Don't respond to cyberbullies or delete the evidence — screenshot, block, report, and tell a trusted adult.

Raise an Upstander

WHAT TO KNOW

Most bullying happens with **bystanders present** — and when even one peer steps in, it often stops within seconds. Teaching kids to be “upstanders” (safely) is one of the most powerful tools there is.

BY THE NUMBERS

Bystanders

present in most incidents

One upstander

can stop it

Safe support

tell an adult, include the target

HOW TO HELP

Teach your child **safe** ways to help: refusing to join in, telling an adult, and including or checking on the person being targeted.

GOOD TO KNOW

Kids don't have to confront a bully to help — a kind word to the target or a quiet report to an adult makes a real difference.

Understand School Safety

WHAT TO KNOW

A safe school is about more than locks and drills. Research shows **school climate** — belonging, trust, strong relationships, and clear expectations — does more to keep kids safe than security hardware alone.

BY THE NUMBERS

Climate matters

belonging & trust

Relationships

the best safety measure

Speak-up culture

see something, say something

HOW TO HELP

Choose and support schools with a strong, **positive climate**; ask about anti-bullying programs, counseling, and how they build belonging.

GOOD TO KNOW

The safest schools aren't the most locked-down — they're the ones where every child feels known and has a trusted adult.

Talk to Kids About Safety

WHAT TO KNOW

Kids feel safest when adults talk **with** them — calmly, honestly, age-appropriately, and without fear-mongering. The goal is a child who feels **empowered and informed**, not anxious.

BY THE NUMBERS

Calm & honest

match their age

Empower

don't frighten

Trusted adults

name who to go to

HOW TO HELP

Answer questions honestly at their level, reassure them that adults are working to keep them safe, and make sure they know **exactly which adults** to turn to.

GOOD TO KNOW

Reassurance beats detail — young kids need to know they're safe and who to tell, not every frightening scenario.

The 5-Step Response & Resources

IF YOUR CHILD IS BULLIED

- 1 Listen** — Stay calm, believe your child, and take it seriously — without overreacting.
- 2 Document** — Write down each incident: who, what, when, where — and screenshot anything online.
- 3 Report** — Notify the school **in writing** (teacher, counselor, or principal) and keep a copy.
- 4 Follow Up** — Ask what will be done, and check back in about a week to confirm it happened.
- 5 Escalate** — If it continues, move up the chain — district, then school board — with your records.

WHERE TO TURN

StopBullying.gov — The federal hub for bullying & cyberbullying prevention, response, and state laws.

Crisis Text Line — Text **HOME to 741741** for a trained counselor, 24/7.

988 Lifeline — Call or text **988** — free, confidential crisis support, any time.

EVERY CHILD, SAFE & KNOWN

Find Your Community.

Explore schools with strong, caring climates, plus our **Student Wellbeing & Mental Health** handbook — among **1,297 free guides** at K12 Academics.

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