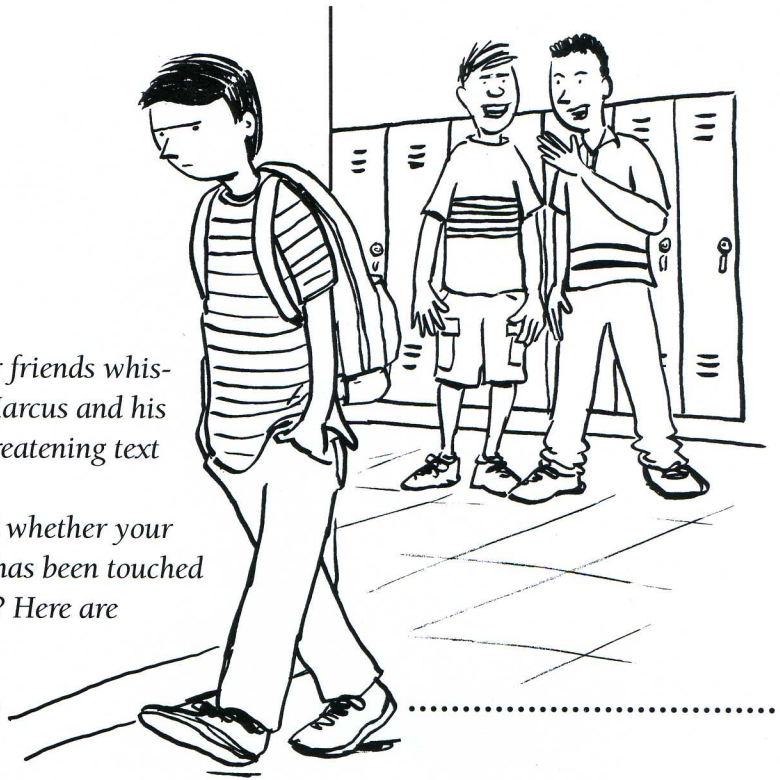


Bullying Q&A's

Lisa sits quietly at the “popular” lunch table while her friends whisper about an overweight classmate. On the school bus, Marcus and his buddies push a younger boy off his seat. Ellie receives threatening text messages from her ex-boyfriend.

These middle graders are all affected by bullying. And whether your child is a witness, a bully, or a victim, it's likely that she has been touched by the problem at some point, too. What can a parent do? Here are answers to common questions about bullying.



Q What is bullying?

A Bullying ranges from rejection (“This table isn’t for geeks”) to physical attacks like pushing and punching. It also includes spreading rumors, threats, name calling, and sexual harassment. When bullies use technology (say, by posting rumors on Facebook or sending hurtful text messages), it’s called *cyberbullying*. Usually, bullying is an ongoing problem rather than a one-time thing. Also, a bully typically has an advantage over his victim. For example, he might be more popular or physically stronger. Any form of bullying—verbal or physical—should be taken seriously.



Q I’ve been hearing a lot about bullying lately. Is it more common these days?

A Technology like text messaging and social networking has made it easier for tweens to continue harassing each other outside of school. Also, the problem is getting more attention as we learn about its serious consequences

for both bullies and victims. For instance, a child who bullies is more likely to get into trouble with the law as an adult. And being a victim can lead to increased school absences, falling grades, depression, low self-esteem, and dropping out. In some tragic cases, bullying has been tied to school violence and even suicide.

Q What motivates a bully?

A Experts used to believe that most bullies had low self-esteem and that they hurt others to feel better about themselves. While

this does happen, popular children can also be bullies. They’re motivated by social power, and they take advantage of less popular children to gain even more power. For example, a well-liked middle schooler might decide who gets invited to parties or where other kids can sit at lunch. If a classmate doesn’t do what she says, she might push or threaten the other child or call her names.

Q Now that my son is in middle school, he doesn’t confide in me very often. How will I know if he is bullied?

A It’s not unusual for children to keep bullying a secret. That’s because they’re afraid the bully will punish them for telling or because they’re ashamed of themselves for being picked on. Try bringing up the subject with your son. You might show him a newspaper or magazine article about bullying. Mention that it’s a common problem, and ask if it’s going on at his school and whether he feels safe. Also, know the risk factors—children are bullied for being overweight, having a disability, or seeming different, or because of their sexual orientation. Finally, be aware of warning signs. A victim might begin to spend more time alone, ask to stay home from school, or even experiment with dangerous behaviors (drinking alcohol, using drugs, having sex). If you suspect your youngster is being picked on, talk to the school counselor for advice.



