

## **Connect with your Child: Prevent Bullying and Peer Abuse**

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*How can you connect with you children so that you understand what their school days are like and whether or not they are experiencing bullying or peer abuse?*

### **Communication is essential**

Begin by asking the right questions. Rather than asking, “How was your day” which usually leads to: “fine”, consider asking questions that encourage a longer conversation. You do not need to ask specific questions about relationships or problems, as indirect questions might trigger a discussion about the things you really want to know.

Suggestions for younger children include:

- What did you do at recess today?
- What is the coolest thing you learned?
- Did anyone have anything that looked really great in his lunch?
- If your desks weren’t assigned, is there anyone you would/would not want to sit next to?

Suggestions for middle school children include:

- What was the best thing that happened today?
- If someone in one of your classes had to be the teacher tomorrow, who would you pick?
- Does anyone in your class seem to be having a hard time?
- Did anyone push your buttons today?
- What is your favorite class?

Suggestions for high school children include:

- What is your most challenging class and why?
- Did you do anything helpful for someone today?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your day? Why?
- How is the food in the cafeteria? Anything you wish they would add to the menu?
- Do you have time to catch up with friends during the day?
- Are there any new clothing trends this year?

### **Knowing the right time and location:**

For young children, after school snack or dinnertime offers a chance for meaningful communication and gives children an opportunity to share while



they are also focused on eating. As they get older, car rides offer a great opportunity for talking with your child, as teens feel less threatened having personal conversations when their parents are not looking directly at them. High school students communicate primarily via text to their friends. Connect with them by texting as well and you will gain an entry into their world. Use your texts as a starting point for future in person conversations.

### ***Learn how to listen.***

*Reflective or empathic listening* is often the best way to show your child that you were really listening. Instead of rushing to “solve the problem”, build their trust by letting them release their emotions. You can confirm you understood what they said by responding:

- “What I hear you saying is”...( and repeat back their words as best you can. Or,
- “If, I’m getting this right, you’re saying”...(again, repeat what they said.)

After you have repeated their words, ask them if you understood correctly. Next, practice empathy and *validate their feelings* by letting them know that you want to support them in whatever problems they are facing. You might say:

- “When I put myself in your shoes, I can understand how that would make you feel.” Or,
- “That must have really made you feel badly.” And, finally,
- “I see what you mean, and I will do everything I can to protect you.”

### ***Respond calmly and carefully***

- If your child discloses that they are being bullied, make sure they understand that it is NOT their fault. Reassure them that they did the right thing by telling you. Help them find ways to handle it by confirming the circumstances<sup>i</sup>:
  - Has your child experienced problems with those involved before?
  - Did those involved have power over your child either in strength, popularity or perception?
  - Did other children observe the conflict or did it happen in private

Once you understand the facts, tell the teacher or principal who can monitor the situation and prevent further incidents.

- Continue to make yourself available to listen to your children every day.

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<sup>i</sup> [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)