

Resource Guide

# Back-to-School FAQs



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# How can I help my child with test-taking?

Taking tests is an important part of a child's education, from elementary school through university. Tests are an objective tool for teachers to evaluate how students are progressing. However, some students have great difficulty taking tests and need assistance from parents and teachers to do well.

## Explain Testing

Parents can be of great help to their child when it is test time.

Talk to the child about testing. It is helpful for children to understand why schools give tests and to know the different kinds of tests they will take.

Explain that tests are ways teachers, schools, school districts and states measure what and how they teach and how well students are learning what is taught.

Most tests are designed and given by teachers to measure students' progress in a course. These tests are associated with the grades on report cards. The results tell the teacher and students whether they are keeping up with the class, need extra help or are ahead of other students.

The results of some tests tell schools they need to strengthen courses or change teaching methods. Still, other tests compare students by schools, school districts or cities.

All tests determine how well a child is doing in the areas measured by the tests. Sometimes it is necessary for students to take standardized tests. Explain that these tests use the same standards to measure student performance across the state or across the country. Every student takes the same test according to the same rules. This makes it possible to measure each student's performance against that of others.

## Provide Encouragement

Encourage the child and praise him or her for the things that are done well. If a child feels good about themselves, they tend to do better on a test.

Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and are more likely to make mistakes.

Do not get upset because of a single test score. Many things can influence how a child scores on a test. They might not have felt well on test day or might have been too nervous to concentrate. Remember, one test is simply one test. Provide encouragement to work harder on studying for the next test.

Parents should not place so much emphasis on a child's test scores that they lose sight of the child's well-being. Too much pressure can affect a student's test performance. In addition, the child may come to think he or she will only be loved if test scores are good.

## Keep Tabs on Student Progress

It is important for parents to make sure their children attend school regularly because tests reflect children's overall achievement. The more effort and energy a child puts into learning, the more likely he or she will do well on tests.

Make appointments and meet with a child's teacher or teachers as often as possible to discuss overall progress. You can also ask for suggested activities for the student to do with parents at home to help prepare for tests and to improve the child's understanding of schoolwork.

Ask the child's teacher for lists of books for outside reading or get suggestions from the local library.

When the child is home to study, make sure they do so in a quiet, comfortable place. Being rested on school days and especially on test days is also important. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.

## After a Test

Students can learn a great deal from reviewing a graded exam paper. Reviewing provides information about where they had difficulty and perhaps why.

This is especially important for classes in which the material builds from one section to the next, such as math. Students who have not mastered the basics of math are not likely to be able to work with fractions, square roots, beginning algebra and so on.

Discuss the wrong answers and find out why the student chose the answers. Sometimes wrong answers are simply due to a child not understanding or misreading a question or they may have known the correct answer but failed to make the answer clear.

If any part of the test is not clear, have the child ask the teacher to explain it. Ask for additional help, if necessary, to get to the point of mastering the questions. This will help lay the groundwork for doing well on future tests.

# How can I check on my child's academic progress?

The more you know about your children's academic, social and emotional development, the more you will understand their needs. Specifically, having information about how well they are progressing can help you to plan activities tailored to their learning. You want your children to feel successful and confident, but you also want to offer challenging experiences that will help them advance. By regularly monitoring their progress, you can identify if your children need special help or assistance with specific challenges.

## Informal Monitoring

There are several basic ways you can informally monitor the educational progress of your children:

- Observe them daily. Watch as they play with other children, respond to your directions, participate in activities and use language to communicate.
- Collect samples of their drawings, paintings, and writing.
- Keep notes about what they say and do.
- Encourage children to talk about what they are doing and what they are learning. Be sure to focus on their strengths – what they can do and the progress they have made. This will help them build confidence and motivation for learning.
- Talk with teachers, daycare providers, and babysitters to see what they have observed.

## Communication with Teachers

Good communication between teachers and caregivers can support and strengthen educational work happening in and out of the classroom.

Here are some ways that you can communicate with teachers and daycare providers:

- Talk with them when you drop off or pick up your children.
- Read the newsletters, notes, and emails the teacher sends home to inform you about what the children are learning in the classroom or daycare center.
- Attend regularly scheduled conferences and meetings with the instructors. The teacher will let you know how your children are progressing. They will identify areas of strength and areas that could use more support at home.

## Monitor Your Children's Growth

Parents and caregivers should be observant of changes, growth, and problems they observe with their children:

- Talk with children during daily routines, such as when riding in the car, during meals, and at bedtime.
- Be on the lookout for things your children do that are out of the ordinary or that they have never done before.
- Encourage children to read and reread stories.
- Have them recount experiences and describe ideas that are important to them.
- Take children on trips to places like the library, zoo, and different museums.
- Provide opportunities for children to draw and practice their printing. Provide them easy access to markers, crayons, pencils, and paper.
- Ask your children's teachers if there are activities you can do at home to build on what they are learning in the classroom.
- Visit your children's classrooms, and observe their behavior, interaction and skill development.

# Does my child need a tutor?

If your child is having difficulty with schoolwork, they may benefit from a private tutor. A tutor can provide individualized instruction in one or more important subjects, as well as help to boost your child's classroom confidence and self-esteem. Enlisting a tutor's help could prove to be a great investment in your child's education.

## Diagnosing a Problem

Many times it is obvious that your child needs help with schoolwork. A talk with their teacher during a parent-teacher conference may alert you to the problem. Low marks on tests, papers or report cards can also signal your child's need for help. Children sometimes signal the need for help themselves - by repeatedly complaining about not being able to keep up in class.

Your child might benefit from additional help if they have difficulty with the following:

- **Reading.** Being able to identify, interpret and comprehend words at an age-appropriate level.
- **Writing.** Being able to print, spell, punctuate, compose grammatically correct sentences, etc.
- **Math.** Being able to count, differentiate numbers and perform mathematical tasks (like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) at an age-appropriate level.
- **Retention.** Retaining information (including memorizing) taught in class and practiced via homework.
- **Motivation.** Staying motivated to participate in class and complete homework properly.

There are some issues that are not properly addressed by hiring a tutor. These include:

- Difficulty paying attention and following orders, perhaps due to an attention deficit disorder.
- Hyperactivity and inappropriate behaviors in class and after school.
- Slow intellectual functioning, which could be due to an undiagnosed developmental disability.
- Undiagnosed hearing or vision problems, which can hinder learning and participation in class.

If your child is exhibiting these behaviors, consider asking your child's school for a complete evaluation of your child's special needs.

## When does a tutor make sense?

For small problems, it might make sense to see if your child's teacher can work more closely with your child before or after school. Additional homework might help as well. You may even decide to work with your child at home yourself.

However, if your child needs more than just a little help, these approaches may not be practical. In this case, a tutor can be an excellent option. Someone who is not related or otherwise involved with your child can bring an unbiased, objective approach to the job.

# How can I help my child stay motivated?

Somewhere in the middle grades the motivation of some young adolescents for learning takes a nosedive. A young teen may begin to grumble about assignments and teachers, ask to drop out of a favorite activity, complain of boredom or show signs of being lost in the educational shuffle.

Here are some the things that can contribute to low motivation in children:

- **Biological changes.** The onset of puberty distracts some teens. Distractions make it hard to think about the swim team or the social studies project that is due.
- **Emotional concerns.** It may take extra effort to concentrate on a science project when your child is preoccupied with physical insecurities or concerned about being excluded from a special group.
- **The school environment.** A young teen may lose motivation after moving from elementary school to a middle school or junior high. The loss of motivation can be fueled by insufficient support in the new school or by an increased workload and expectations to which the student has not yet adjusted.
- **Social and peer pressures.** A child may be influenced by friends who believe that academic success is not “cool,” or that girls are not good at math.
- **Lack of opportunities.** Some youngsters lack opportunities to take the classes or participate in the activities that they need to spark their enthusiasm. This is most likely with students from disadvantaged families or who are at risk, contributing to perceptions that they are unmotivated.
- **Short attention spans.** Some educators report that it is hard to get students to focus on a long history project when they are used to TV programs and media presentations that are fast, short and entertaining.
- **Undeveloped work ethic.** Some unmotivated youngsters may not have learned that school success takes time and effort. Many attractions compete for students’ attention and, according to some research, some students expect school and activities to be consistently exciting. They are not aware of the fact that both in school and daily life, they can learn valuable lessons from activities that are not always fun and that achievement usually requires real effort.

Use the following tips to help encourage your child’s motivation:

- **Be a good role model.** Young teens benefit from seeing their parents putting forth their best effort, completing work and meeting obligations. Parents need to demonstrate that they value learning and hard work.
- **Let your child know that sustained effort over time is the key to achievement.** Teach him or her to set high goals and to work hard to achieve them. Help your child to see the value of tackling challenges and of finding ways to meet or exceed those challenges.
- **Steer your child toward appropriate classes and suitable activities.** Young teens need opportunities to excel and be useful. Success can be a powerful motivator and boredom may be a sign that your child has not enough opportunities to develop his or her talents.
- **Offer support.** Insincere praise or praise for poor efforts is no help, but young teens need to be reassured that they can do something. Your child may need hints about how to get started with a new project from you, another adult, an instructor or a book.
- **Find strengths and build on them.** Every child can shine in some area. Identify what your child does best, no matter what it is.

- **Communicate with your child’s teachers, counselors or school principal when necessary.** A drop in grades is not uncommon when students go from one grade level to another. But if your child’s grade drop is extreme or if it persists for more than one marking period, get in touch with someone at the school. It is OK to be a strong but respectful advocate for your child. Because middle-grades teachers may have very full schedules, you may need to show persistence. Call, write or e-mail teachers if you think that many assignments are inappropriate or if your child is unable to complete them successfully. Take the lead if your child is placed in classes that you think are poor in content or that fail to provide your child with sufficient stimulation.
- **Hold realistic expectations.** It is important to hold children to high standards. But when young teens are asked to do the impossible, they may stop trying. Holding realistic expectations requires that you consider your child’s personality and temperament.
- **Be patient.** Children’s motivation generally improves when parents take the steps discussed. However, patience may be required: Many young teens need the gift of time to develop the maturity that allows them to complete homework assignments and chores with a minimum of supervision.

# How can I help my child handle bullies?

According to statistics, as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years, and at least 10 percent are bullied regularly. If your child is being picked on, threatened, harassed or physically assaulted in any way by another child, it is important to respond properly to the situation. Teaching your child how to protect themselves and boost their self-esteem can help keep them from becoming a victim.

## Why Children Are Bullied

Kids often are bullied when they appear vulnerable and different from others. If your child is shy or reclusive, has a physical trait that distinguishes him or her from peers (e.g., smaller than other kids their age), has a disability or is part of an ethnic, cultural or religious minority, he or she may be a target for a bully. It is important to understand that any child can become the target of a bully at any time, given the right set of circumstances.

Kids who typically become bullies often were bullied themselves in some way. Many bullies have been mentally or physically abused, neglected and exposed to negative environments. Growing up in a family where the parents consistently fight, threaten or manipulate each other can have a strong influence on a child. Kids who are routinely criticized can develop insecurity problems. Making others feel out of control by bullying them can help a bullying child feel more in control.

## What You Can Do

To help protect your child against bullying, consider these suggestions:

- **Build your child's self-esteem at an early age.** Kids who are praised for their efforts, encouraged to develop talents and taught to keep trying tend to have greater confidence. Try to make your child feel as good about himself or herself as possible by avoiding criticism and negative comments. The more self-respect your child has, the better he or she will be at ignoring a bully's taunts and defending himself or herself when attacked.
- **Encourage your child to express dissent.** One good anti-bully exercise is to teach your child how to speak up respectfully if he or she disagrees with you. Stress that it is okay to express anger and dissatisfaction in healthy, productive ways. Practice negotiating and debating techniques together as alternatives to fighting or being victimized. Teach your child to use direct "I" expressions when someone is making him or her uncomfortable: "I don't like when you treat me that way."
- **Teach your child to stand up for himself or herself.** Emphasize the importance of maintaining eye contact, standing up straight and proud, not showing fear and not backing down to a bully when cornered. A child may be less likely to bully if he or she senses that the other child is not afraid.
- **Teach your child how to ignore taunts.** Tell your child that insults and threats are just words; they cannot really hurt your child. Encourage your child to talk to himself or herself privately with positive reassurances, such as, "I know what he's saying isn't true. I'm not going to give in to his words. I'm stronger than that." Often, the best advice is to tell your child simply to walk away and say nothing.
- **Emphasize avoidance if necessary.** You do not want your child to run away from his or her problems or live his or her life in fear, but you can encourage him or her simply to stay away from the bully, especially if the possibility of physical harm exists.
- **Discourage fighting back.** Getting physical with the bully is giving in to exactly what the bully wants: a chance to exert physical dominance over your child. Your child may end up injured or seriously hurt, and the bully's success will only encourage him or her to continue to victimize others. Tell your child also not to taunt or provoke the bully in any way. However, as a last resort, you may want to teach your child how to use self-defense techniques to protect himself or herself as a last resort. Consider signing up your child for an age-appropriate martial arts class or a sport. A bully may decide to leave your child alone if the bully knows he or she is athletic or trained to defend himself or herself.

- **Keep an eye out for warning signs.** Your child may be frightened to tell you that he or she is being threatened or picked on. Watch for slipping grades, physical marks on his body, missing lunch money, an extended depression or any out-of-the-ordinary behaviors. If you suspect that your child is being bullied, encourage him or her to tell you. If you think your child is covering up or holding back the truth, try talking to his or her friends or their parents. Have they seen or heard about your child being picked on?
- **Respond appropriately.** Do not ignore the problem or overreact. Weigh your options, and talk to your child about what he or she would like to do before you go ahead and do something on his or her behalf.
- **Get help.** If you feel that your child is in danger or that a bully's tactics have gone too far, it is time to get involved and get help. If the bullying happens at school, talk to your child's teachers and principal about the problem, and try to arrange for a school-supervised meeting between you, your child, the bully and his or her parents. If your child has been injured or seriously harassed, file a police report, and explore your legal options.
- **Discourage bullying.** Your child may begin to model some of the bullying behavior to which he or she has been exposed by picking on other kids. Indicate that you will not tolerate bullying. Encourage your child to be a defender of bullying victims instead.

You can do many things to teach your child to avoid being bullied and to help put an end to a bullying problem. There are no easy answers, and you may have to keep trying before you find the right approach that works for you and your child.

# What are some common myths about bullying?

While there are many well-established ideas about bullying, some of those beliefs might not be true. These misconceptions about bullying can negatively impact how parents, students, schools and communities handle bullying behavior. Here is a list of common myths and misconceptions about bullying.

## Myth 1: Bullying is Easy to Spot

There are not always obvious signs that bullying is occurring. Often, bullying takes place at school where parents and sometimes teachers are not present. As a parent, it is important to learn to look for any warning signs of kids being affected by bullying.

Studies have shown that adults, including parents, can help prevent bullying by keeping the lines of communication open, talking to their children about bullying, encouraging them to do what they love, modeling kindness and respect, and encouraging them to get help when they are involved in bullying or know others who need help.

## Myth 2: Most Bullying is Physical (involves hitting, shoving, kicking)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are two modes and four types by which youth can be bullied or can bully others. The two modes of bullying include:

- **Direct:** Bullying that occurs in the presence of a targeted youth)
- **Indirect:** Bullying not directly communicated to a targeted youth such as spreading rumors.

In addition to these two modes, the four types of bullying include broad categories of:

- **Physical**
- **Verbal**
- **Relational:** Efforts to harm the reputation or relationships of the targeted youth
- **Damage to property**

Bullying can happen in any number of places, contexts, or locations. Sometimes that place is online or through a cellphone. Bullying that occurs using technology (including but not limited to phones, email, chat rooms, instant messaging, and online posts) is considered electronic or cyberbullying.

## Myth 3: Bullying is Just ‘Kids Being Kids’

While some might believe that bullying is just a normal part of growing up, it can have serious consequences. Bullying is linked to many negative outcomes including impacts on mental health, substance use and even suicide.

Additionally, victims of bullying are not the only ones that can suffer from the negative effects of bullying. Those who bully others and those who witness bullying are also at risk.

## Myth 4: Kids Tell Adults when they are Being Bullied

According to studies, only about 20 to 30 percent of bullied children talk to an adult about the bullying. Boys and older children are less likely than girls and younger children to tell adults about bullying.

Why are children reluctant to report bullying? They may fear retaliation by children doing the bullying. They also may fear that adults will not take their concerns seriously or will deal inappropriately with the bullying situation.

## Myth 5: Bullied Kids Need to Deal with Bullying on Their Own

While some children might have the confidence and skills to stop bullying when it happens, many do not. Moreover, children should not be expected to deal with bullying on their own.

Bullying is a form of victimization or peer abuse. Just as society does not expect victims of other types of abuse (e.g., child maltreatment or domestic abuse) to “deal with it on their own,” we should not expect this from victims of bullying. Adults have critical roles to play in helping to stop bullying, as do other children who witness or observe bullying.

# How can I speak to my child about diversity and discrimination?

Diversity and discrimination are delicate topics and can be difficult to discuss with children. Children may witness or experience discrimination firsthand, or they may take cues from their parents' distressed reactions to news reports. Either way, they are likely to have questions, and while the topics of discrimination, race and civil rights can be daunting even for adults, having an age-appropriate discussion with them is better than silence.

Consider the following information to learn how to facilitate this discussion and, ultimately, help the child learn how to respect and embrace others' differences.

## When to Talk to a Child about Diversity and Discrimination

It is often said that between the ages of five and eight is a "critical period." During these years in a child's life, they begin to exercise their judgment, largely due to the fact that they are now in school and are faced with new stimuli and decisions to make every day, such as choosing new friends, games, clubs and activities. They begin to form their own opinions, deciding what they like and what they do not like, and what is good and what is bad.

This is the best time to work with the child to help them grasp the importance of diversity and understand that there is zero tolerance for discrimination. By this time, children have not yet had much exposure to people who differ from their own family members. They may not even be aware that there are so many people of different cultural and religious backgrounds out in the world. It is a good idea to start the discussion at this point in time so that when children are exposed to diversity in schools, they are not surprised and are able to embrace and appreciate it.

## Be Honest

Before you begin to discuss diversity and racism with a child, keep in mind that you should be as honest as possible with them. While it is important to talk to them at a level they can understand, avoid sugar-coating the discussion. You must let them know that discrimination and racism is something that does exist in society, and also explain to them that they may experience or witness it at some point in their life. Of course, you should not make the child afraid or paranoid, but try your best to be as realistic as possible.

## Explaining Diversity

The first thing you should explain to the child is that every single person is different. Start off by providing them with simple examples of ways in which you both differ. For example, if you are the child's father and she is your daughter, you could explain how you differ from one another in height, gender or hair length. Once the child grasps this idea that everyone is unique, bring up the following types of diversity with them:

- **Race and physical appearance:** Explain that everyone looks different from one another, whether in height, hair color, hair texture, skin color, eye color, facial features or the types of clothes they wear.
- **Cultural background:** Explain that there are numerous cultures in existence and that everyone enjoys doing different things.
- **Religion:** Explain that there are many kinds of religions which people follow and each one has a different set of beliefs.
- **Traditions and holidays:** Explain that there are a variety of traditions and holidays that are celebrated by people at different times of the year.
- **Language:** Explain that there are many other languages that are spoken by people besides the child's native language(s).
- **Family structure:** Explain that some people have brothers, sisters, no siblings, two parents, one parent or no parents. In addition, mention that different cultures, races, and religions can exist within one family and that everyone in a family is not necessarily the same.

This may be a lot of information for the child to take in, so try not to overwhelm them with it all at once. Consider discussing these different areas of diversity over a period of time. Children do not have extremely long attention spans and may have trouble focusing during a lengthy conversation. Encourage the child to ask questions and to think of their own examples of ways that people can differ from one another. This will make the lesson a mutual conversation and an interactive experience for them.

## Explaining Discrimination and Racism

After you feel that the child has a good understanding of the concept of diversity, you should begin to explain that sometimes people do not accept and appreciate diversity, and that this is wrong.

Start the conversation with a very basic definition of discrimination in words that your child will understand. For example, you can say that “some people treat other people differently because of their race, gender (being a boy or a girl), culture or where they are from.” The child may or may not be able to remember the word “discrimination” and that is OK - the most important thing at this age is to just understand the concept of discrimination and know that it is unacceptable.

If the child is a bit older and you feel that they can remember these terms, you can explain that the word “racism” refers to a specific form of discrimination: when a person treats another person differently because of what race they are.

Help the child understand exactly what you mean by “some people treat other people differently” by giving examples in simple terms. For example:

- One person or group is mean to another person or group
- One person or group is unfair to another person or group
- One person or group says bad things about another person or group
- One person or group tries to hurt another person or group

Reiterate that it is never OK to treat someone badly just because of what they look like. Ask the child how they would feel if someone was mean to them just because of their hair or eye color. Having the child think from the perspective of someone being discriminated against will help them better understand the seriousness of the issue.

## Answering Questions

Naturally, the child will likely ask you questions about race, diversity and discrimination. It is important to let them ask these questions instead of “shushing” them. Ignoring their questions can leave them feeling confused and with even more questions. Be receptive – it is better for them to ask you a blunt question such as “Why does that person talk weird?” or “Why does that person have different skin color?” than to ask the person they are referring to directly. Remember: the child likely does not mean any harm. Children are just naturally curious beings and they do not always realize that their questions may sound rude.

Use these questions as teaching moments. In the case of “Why does that person talk weird?” you can explain that everyone has a different way of speaking and many people even know different languages. Gently remind your child that this is not “weird,” but that differences like these are what make each person unique, interesting and exciting.

If you are ever unsure about how to respond to a question, do not avoid it or change the subject. Inform the child that they have asked a good question and that you will provide an answer to him or her soon. This will give you some time to formulate an appropriate answer for the child.

# How can I encourage tolerance and acceptance in my child?

When most children begin school, they are exposed to other students and teachers of various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. If a child has rarely encountered people of diverse backgrounds prior to starting school, this may be an eye-opening experience for him or her. Some children may become overwhelmed by the amount of diversity surrounding them while others may be very excited to learn more about their peers' backgrounds.

Sometimes, young children say things to people of other races and ethnicities that may come across as rude or insensitive. Most of the time, they do not mean any harm but are simply curious about others' differences and want to learn more. School-age children are very easy to influence, so it is important to encourage them to be tolerant and accepting of diversity at this young age. This will set the foundation for their future interactions with people of diverse backgrounds.

Consider the following information to learn more about how to encourage tolerant and accepting behavior in children.

## Avoid Encouraging 'Color-blindness'

Many believe that taking a "color-blind" approach to race and ethnicity is the key to tolerance. Being "color-blind" or "race-blind" refers to the ideology that one should not pay attention to others' race, ethnicity, or culture. The goal is to view everyone as the same.

To many, this may sound like a safe approach: ignoring race and personal differences in order to treat people as equally as possible. However, this ideology can have grave consequences. Many people feel that their culture, ethnicity, race and religion define who they are. When someone tries to be "color-blind" by ignoring another person's personal characteristics and beliefs, they are disregarding part of their identity. Color blindness can additionally lead to erasure of any struggles or difficulties that others may have had to overcome because of their background or identity.

Encourage your child to embrace others' differences and to be tolerant and accepting of them. Remind them that every single person has a unique background and different experiences that they can share with other people. Let your child know that it is OK to celebrate their own unique traits with others and vice versa. Emphasize that tolerance and acceptance is important because individuality is what makes the world exciting.

## Facilitate Exposure to Other Cultures

Exposing your child to the customs, traditions and celebrations of other cultures is a great way to show them what diversity truly means. Children thrive on hands-on experiences. Here are some examples:

- If there is a parade or festival in your area in honor of a cultural holiday or celebration, take your child to experience it.
- If your town or city has a cultural center, make regular visits there to learn about multi-cultural events and activities you and your child can participate in.
- When you go out to eat with your child, pick unfamiliar cuisines to enjoy.
- Cook new types of food and dessert at home with your child.
- Teach them basic words and phrases such as "hi", "bye" or "I love you" in other languages.
- Encourage him or her to pick out age-appropriate multicultural books from the library.
- Create various arts and crafts with your child from different cultures.

Enjoying the traditions, customs and characteristics of other cultures in ways like these helps children understand that diversity is exciting because there is so much to learn from others.

## Be Gentle with Your Child

The way you act toward your child will influence how tolerant they are to others. If they feel loved and cared for, they are more likely to pass this care and respect along to others they meet. However, if they feel that they are being hurt or treated unfairly by you or another family member, it may be difficult for them to grasp the concepts of tolerance and acceptance. Their logic will be, "If I am not treated nicely, why do I need to be nice to others?"

Of course, most of the time, parents do not mean to emotionally hurt their children. However, simply saying “No!” or “Stop that!” when a child does something undesirable may leave him or her feeling hurt and embarrassed. Children need an explanation for why their behavior was wrong. Being scolded without explanation can be confusing and make them feel like they are simply a bad person.

Take the time to let your child know how much you appreciate them. They are young and may need a reminder every now and then that your love is unconditional. Giving them this unconditional love can inspire them to be tolerant, appreciative and accepting of others, too.

## **Be a Role Model**

One of the most important things you can do to encourage tolerance and acceptance in your child is to be a good role model. When children are young, they look to their family members for guidance on how to behave and react. They will remember what you do in certain situations and emulate you when they experience the same situations in the future.

Keep a close eye on your own words and actions to ensure you are teaching your child the morals and values that you want to teach them. Sometimes, adults inadvertently say things that are not meant to be offensive or hurtful, but can be easily misinterpreted by children. Be cautious of how your future actions can influence your child’s young mind.

## **How to Handle Intolerant Behavior**

Eventually, your child may witness racial intolerance or insensitivity in some form, if they have not already. A common example of this is students at school ridiculing or bullying another student for how they look, sound or dress.

Often times, young children do not intend to hurt other students in this way. They often times feel pressured by a peer or group of peers to participate in bullying because they are afraid of becoming isolated for standing up for the bullied student.

Let your child know that although it may not be easy to stand by their own opinion and beliefs, it is the right thing to do. Ask your child how they would feel if someone made fun of their skin color and appearance. Your child will likely say that they would feel bad, sad or angry. Remind them that these are the same feelings that another student who is being bullied would feel, too.

Instruct your child to never participate in this kind of behavior. If your child can, they should try to help the individual get away from the bullies. If this is not possible, your child should tell a teacher or other member of the administration about the incident so it can be put to an end before it escalates even further.

If the intolerant behavior is directed toward your child, they should calmly distance themselves from the bullies and inform a teacher or the administration about the behavior. Remind them to always tell you or another family member they can trust if they are ever faced with intolerance. Knowing they always have someone to talk to will put them at ease.

# How can I help my LGBTQ child?

Providing support to your child is paramount and can make all the difference for parents of children and teens who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning to do. Often, LGBTQ children can feel ostracized by their family when parents do not accept them; studies have shown that parents' rejection of an LGBTQ child can fuel mental health problems. While it may take time for the LGBTQ child to understand and accept their identity, the same is true for parents and other family members.

The following are ways parents can make their children feel affirmed and keep them safe and healthy.

## Consider the Facts

There are many different ways a parent might feel about their child coming out; while some accept it easily, other parents may need more time to understand or respect their child's identity. However you may feel, it is important to learn the facts surrounding LGBTQ youth.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), studies show that LGBTQ children who are accepted by their families are less inclined to:

- Experience depression
- Attempt suicide
- Use drugs and alcohol
- Become infected with sexually transmitted diseases

Other facts to consider:

- **Your child's identity is not "just a phase."** In fact, most LGBTQ youth are aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity by the start of adolescence.
- **There is no "cure."** Some parents push their children to undergo conversion therapy to change a child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Research indicates this therapy is not effective and is alternatively harmful.
- **Homosexuality is not a choice.** Sexual orientation is caused by factors such as genetics and the biology of brain development.

Similar to your child's self-acceptance journey, there are definitive stages most parents experience when presented with change. While not everyone will experience these emotions in the same order, it is important to note that these feelings are normal and can be worked through.

- **Stage 1: Denial.** When your child comes out, you may feel initial denial or doubt. While this may be the case, it is important to trust your child's word. You may feel afraid of how your child being "out" will change the perception of your family.
- **Stage 2: Grief.** You may grieve the child you "knew" as you mourn the disappearance of the life you envisioned for them. However, fundamental goals and visions for your child, such as love, happiness, or starting a family can endure.
- **Stage 3: Blame/ guilt.** You may find yourself determining "why" your child is LGBTQ or wonder where you went wrong. The truth is your child's identity is normal and results from complex biological, genetic, and hormonal factors.
- **Stage 4: Fear.** You may fear telling the truth about your LGBTQ child, particularly how others will react. At times, this fear may be justified if you sense someone may be hostile to you and/or your family. Your child should determine when and how is best to discuss their identity with others.
- **Stage 5: Anger.** You may feel angry at yourself for not recognizing the truth sooner, at a religious community, or other family members for rejecting your child. It is important to realize that anger can be a healthy emotion as long as it is not directed at your child for expressing their identity.

- **Stage 6: Self-realization.** At this stage, you may realize that it is you and not your child that must change. Find ways to support your child by surrounding your family with a loving and supporting community, or reconsider the family picture to reflect this new reality.
- **Stage 7: Acceptance.** This stage includes loving your LGBTQ child for who they are, unconditionally. At this stage, you are a source of hope and encouragement for your child.

## Affirm Your Child

To create a healthy dynamic, parents and families of LGBTQ youth can:

- **Be open to listening and talking.** Many LGBTQ individuals may be afraid to come out due to religious, societal, or family pressures. By offering a non-judgmental ear you affirm that they are worthy of being heard. Ask them what you can do for them.
- **Challenge homophobia and transphobia.** In a 2018 report by Human Rights Campaign, 67 percent of LGBTQ youth report they have heard family members make negative comments about LGBTQ people. Make your child feel safe by sending the message that offensive remarks and attitudes will not be tolerated in and out of the home; normalizing hateful words or simply ignoring them perpetuates violence towards LGBTQ youth.
- **Let them know they are loved.** A simple “I love you” can go a long way and let your child know they are supported as they are.

## Stay Involved

One of the best ways to support an LGBTQ child is to stay involved in their life and give them hope for the future. You can do this by:

- **Looking out for bullying.** Bullies typically target those they deem “different” out of fear, ignorance, and insecurity. If you see behavioral changes in your child, declining grades, or engagement in risky behavior, it may be time to reach out to a teacher or guidance counselor.
- **Encouraging healthy relationships.** Parents who show interest in who their child spends time with significantly lower the danger and health risks associated with teens in unhealthy relationships.
- **Connecting your child with LGBTQ resources, organizations, and events.** Doing so will make them feel less alone.
- **Seeking out resources and education** to deepen your understanding of LGBTQ youth experiences.

# How can I encourage healthy and safe social media use by my child?

Social media is part of many teens' daily routines. It is important to understand both the positive and negative uses and effects of social media. Being aware of this can help parents guide their teens to use these platforms in a healthy and safe manner. Consider the following information to teach your teen to regulate their social media usage.

## Positive Effects of Social Media Use

Consider the following positive aspects of social media use:

- Users can keep in touch with friends and relatives. Interaction with loved ones can provide teens with mental breaks from their daily routine, help them relax and boost their mood.
- Users can choose from a variety of different types of content (such as photos, videos, written posts, etc.) to express themselves and be creative. This can help produce positive emotions and reduce negative ones.
- Community events and volunteer opportunities for teens are often promoted via social media. Studies show that participating in volunteer work can alleviate stress and give one a sense of purpose, both important factors in psychological well-being.

## Negative Effects of Social Media Use

- Harassment, bullying and harmful peer pressure can potentially occur online, which can have a negative impact on a teen's self-esteem and mental well-being.
- Many social media users often post photos of themselves in which they only look their best in order to portray themselves in a positive light. Constant exposure to these types of posts may, over time, cause some teens to feel insecure about their own appearance. In extreme cases, this could result in physical and mental health issues (such as eating disorders, depression, etc.)
- Most social media users post content in which they portray their lives as very exciting. This may include posts about one's social life, vacations, hobbies, or material possessions. Constant exposure to this content can affect users' mental well-being. It may cause someone to feel insecure or stressed if they feel unable to "keep up."

## Open the Channel of Communication

Be aware of what social media platforms your teen uses, how they use it and the types of users they interact with. Sit down with your teen and ease into a mutual discussion about this information first, rather than immediately demanding to see their online profiles and activity. Avoid expressing judgment or anger, as this may cause them to withdraw from the discussion and discourage them from sharing important information with you in the future.

## Discuss Posting

Remind your teen that many social media users only showcase their best selves or may portray themselves unrealistically. Let them know that they cannot believe all the content they see on social media and that this content does not set standards for them to live up to. Encourage them to be creative and honest in their posts, as long as they are appropriate and are not risking their privacy.

## Review Privacy Guidelines

To avoid cyberbullying and online harassment, it is important that your teen has appropriate privacy settings on their social media. Discuss how having a public profile and having followers/friends they do not know can potentially lead to hurtful, inappropriate or dangerous communication. Then, review your teen's privacy settings with them and suggest how they may be adjusted to provide greater protection.

## Warn Against “Sexting”

Sexting is when an individual sends a sexually revealing picture or sexually explicit message via text message or direct message on social media. While it may initially be uncomfortable to discuss this topic with your teen, broaching the subject will ensure they stay safe. Young people may do things in the moment they regret later; as such, it is important to let your child know that individuals have lost out on job opportunities, been blackmailed, and even been charged with a felony or misdemeanor for distributing child pornography as a result of sexting.

## Create a Social Media Use Schedule

Encourage your teen to keep a written log of their social media usage for a week. Then, work together to review their current usage patterns and develop a social media usage schedule for weekdays and weekends.

Since teens should not use social media in school, a few minutes before and after school may be acceptable. In the evening, teens need to focus on schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and relaxation, so social media use should be limited during this time. Identify and suggest a few additional times in the remainder of the day for them to check social media, based on their personal schedule. You and your teen may decide that usage can be higher on weekends.

In general, avoid letting teens go online the hour before they go to sleep, as exposure to screen light before sleeping can potentially lead to long-term sleep problems.

# How can I help a child who is shy?

It is natural for children to sometimes feel bashful among strangers or in new and different situations. However, if your child regularly demonstrates introverted or anxious behavior, they may have a shyness problem. Learn what you can do as a parent to identify these signs and help your child cope with shy feelings.

## Understanding Shyness

You have seen the signs: a blushed face; soft, hesitant or stammered speech; a downward gaze and lack of eye contact; pulling away from the crowd. At some point, every child exhibits shyness. It is a normal and common emotional defense mechanism that helps children, as well as adults, cope with new and unfamiliar social stimuli. By behaving shyly, kids can withdraw briefly from social situations and gain a sense of control. Yet as children mature and are exposed to more people and social environments, their shyness tends to decrease.

Children typically go through different stages of shyness as they grow. Infants experience fearful shyness in response to exposure to new adults. By the second year, a child becomes more socially sensitive as they develop greater self-awareness. A four-year-old begins to experience self-conscious shyness or embarrassment, which can return with a vengeance by early adolescence.

## Causes of Shyness

Some children tend to be shyer than others. Experts believe the reasons for this include:

- **Genetic predisposition:** Recent research reveals that up to one-third of shy adults were born with shyness tendencies.
- **Overprotective parents:** Children with parents who tend to shelter them can grow up to be shy and anxious.
- **Abusive or inconsistent parents:** Studies show that children who experience difficult relationships with their parents often become shy adults.
- **Traumatic and stressful childhood experiences:** Loss of a parent or loved one, a divorce, home or school relocation, severe embarrassment and abuse experienced at a young age often can lead to shyness that lingers into adulthood.
- **Low self-esteem:** Negativity from parents and social environments can lead to feelings of lower self-worth, resulting in more introverted behavior.
- **Learned behaviors:** A child's cultural and family environment may encourage shyness. What looks like shyness to others actually may be politeness in other cultures.

Shyness is hard to predict, and every child is different. A shyness problem can develop at any time during childhood, and shy kids do not always become shy adults. While some degree of shyness is expected on certain occasions, such as having to speak up in class and being a stranger in a new school, a regular pattern of shyness, social withdrawal and introverted behavior can suggest a problem. If it is not addressed, a shyness problem may interfere with a child's social development and ability to learn.

## Tips for Helping a Shy Child

Parents of shy children can try these suggestions:

- **Let your child try new things on his or her own.** Avoid overprotecting or overindulging your child. Allow your child opportunities to learn to cope with his or her own stressful events and experiences. Without being pushy, encourage your child to confront his or her own fears and inhibitions. Offer support, and be there to listen and help when he or she needs it, but try to let your child work it out himself or herself.
- **Foster friendships.** Making new friends can boost your child's self-esteem and confidence. Studies show that shy kids who have best friends become less anxious in social situations. Try inviting a friend over before arranging a date at the friend's home. Experts say shy children often do well befriending slightly younger children, who can look up to the older child as a kind of mentor/friend.

- **Play and interact with your child.** Spend more quality time playing with, reading to and exploring fun, new activities with your child, especially at a young age. Try role-playing games and social outings to the park, library and other kid-friendly spots.
- **Introduce new social experiences.** In addition to helping your child make new friends, see whether he or she is interested in expressing himself or herself creatively to others. Inspire your child to try out for a play, a sports team or drama, dancing or singing class. Help your child think up something exciting to present to classmates for the next show-and-tell session.
- **Nurture your child's talents.** A natural affinity for a musical instrument, sport or another hobby inevitably will lead to more social interaction as your child becomes involved. Encourage him or her to try new, fun extracurricular activities.
- **Be willing and available to listen.** Encourage your child to express his or her feelings to you. Give your child time to say what is on his or her mind by waiting silently. If he or she says, "I don't talk to the kids at school because they don't like me," resist the urge to say, "Of course they like you!" Instead, try validating how your child feels by saying, "You feel like the other kids don't like you. That must be very hard for you." Do more listening than talking or giving advice; this will encourage your child to verbalize and solve his or her own problems.
- **Be a good role model.** Try to resolve your own shyness issues. Show your child how fun and satisfying it can be to try new things and meet new people. Arrange to give a toast or speech at your next family party to show your child how enjoyable public speaking can be.
- **Boost self-esteem whenever possible.** Compliment your child for his or her efforts and achievements. Reward him or her with praise. If your child has been teased or embarrassed, listen for his or her emotions, and let your child know you understand how he or she feels.
- **Talk to other adults.** Have a discussion with your child's teachers and caregivers about his or her behavior. Ask whether your child appears shy or withdrawn in other settings around different people; then get their advice.

# How can I help my child be more assertive?

Parents and teachers are sometimes reluctant to intervene in conflicts between young children. They do not want to see children harm or ridicule one another, but they want to encourage children to learn how to work out problems for themselves. In such cases, adults have a responsibility to stop violence or aggression in the classroom or at home, both for children who demonstrate harmful behavior and for all other children. We can teach children not to take part in, or become victims of, bullying.

Children who demonstrate aggression, or “bully” other children, may be unable to initiate friendly interactions, express their feelings or ask for what they need. If these children do not improve their social skills, they will continue to have problems relating to peers throughout their lives. In addition, if other children see that aggressors get what they want through bullying, they are more likely to accept or imitate this undesirable behavior.

Young children who are unable to stand up for themselves are easy targets for aggressive playmates. These children inadvertently reward bullies by giving in to them and risk further victimization. Adults do not help by speaking for victims and solving their problems for them. Children must learn that they have the right to say “no,” not only when they are threatened, but in a wide range of everyday situations.

The key to promoting positive interactions among young children is teaching them to assert themselves effectively. Children who express their feelings and needs while respecting those of others will be neither victims nor aggressors. Adults must show children that they have the right to make choices, for example in which toys they play with or (within boundaries) what they wear and what they eat. The more children trust and value their own feelings, the more likely they will be to resist peer pressure, to respect warm and caring adults, and to be successful in achieving their personal goals.

Use the following tips when teaching children assertiveness skills:

- Demonstrate assertive behavior (e.g., saying “no” to another child’s unacceptable demands), and contrast aggressive or submissive responses through demonstrations. Let children role play with puppets or dolls.
- Intervene when interactions seem headed for trouble, and suggest ways for children to compromise, or to express their feelings in a productive way.
- Teach children to seek help when confronted by the abuse of power (physical abuse, sexual abuse or other) by other children or adults.
- Remind children to ignore routine teasing by turning their heads or walking away. Not all provocative behavior must be acknowledged.
- Teach children to ask for things directly and respond directly to each other. Friendly suggestions are taken more readily than bossy demands. Teach children to ask nicely and to respond appropriately to polite requests.
- After a conflict between children, ask those involved to replay the scene. Show children how to resolve problems firmly and fairly.
- Show children how to tell bullies to stop hurtful acts and to stand up for themselves when they are being treated unfairly.
- Encourage children not to give up objects or territory to bullies (e.g., say, “I am using this toy now”). Preventing bullies from getting what they want will discourage aggressive behavior.
- Identify acts of aggression, bossiness or discrimination for children, and teach them not to accept them (e.g., say, “Girls are allowed to play that, too”).
- Show children the rewards of personal achievement through standing up for themselves, rather than depending on the approval of others solely.

# How can I nurture my child's mental health?

Mental health determines how we look at ourselves, our lives and the people we know and care about. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, evaluate our options and make choices. Given the trauma we have all faced recently with the COVID-19 outbreak, this is a good time to assess whether you are supporting your child's mental health.

A child's mental health affects his or her daily life and future. Schoolwork, relationships and physical health can be affected by mental health. Like physical fitness, mental fitness is important at every stage of life. Caring for and protecting a child's mental health is a major part of helping that child grow to become the best they can be. The following tips can help you promote your child's physical safety and emotional well-being:

- Set clear and consistent expectations for your child. It is important that these expectations are understood and enforced by anyone who is responsible for your child's care.
- Do your best to provide a safe home and community for your child, as well as nutritious meals, regular health check-ups, immunizations and exercise.
- Be aware of stages in child development so you do not expect too much or too little from your child.
- Encourage your child to express his or her feelings; respect those feelings. Let your child know that everyone experiences pain, fear, anger and anxiety. Try to learn the source of these feelings. Help your child express anger positively, without resorting to violence.
- Promote mutual respect and trust. Keep your voice down—even when you do not agree. Keep communication channels open.
- Listen to your child. Use words and examples your child can understand. Encourage questions.
- Provide comfort and assurance. Be honest. Focus on the positives. Express your willingness to talk about any subject.
- Look at your own problem-solving and coping skills. Are you setting a good example? Seek help if you are overwhelmed by your child's feelings or behaviors or if you are unable to control your own frustration or anger.
- Encourage your child's talents and accept his or her limitations.
- Set goals based on your child's abilities and interests—not someone else's expectations. Do not compare your child's abilities to those of other children; appreciate the uniqueness of your child. Spend time regularly with your child.
- Foster your child's independence and self-worth.
- Help your child deal with life's ups and downs. Show confidence in your child's ability to handle problems and tackle new experiences.
- Discipline constructively, fairly and consistently. All children and families are different; learn what is effective for your child. Show approval for positive behaviors. Help your child learn from mistakes.
- Love unconditionally. Teach the value of apologies, cooperation, patience, forgiveness and consideration for others. Do not expect to be perfect; parenting is a difficult job.

# How can I teach my child to be more responsible?

Responsibility is not a trait anyone is born with—it must be learned. A responsible person is one who acts appropriately whether anyone is watching or not. Children need to be taught how to act decently, have self-control and be respectful of others around them, even when they might be tempted to do otherwise.

To build a strong foundation of responsibility in children, parents and other influential adults can teach the following:

- Self-respect
- Basic manners
- Fairness
- Honesty
- Courage
- Compassion
- Respect for others
- Self-control
- Humbleness

Becoming responsible should become a habit for a child. Thus, good traits must be taught very early and practiced over time. Actions can be better teaching tools than words. Parents and other influential adults should behave responsibly so that when children observe their actions, they learn through observation.

Some examples of responsible activities children can observe include:

- Doing household chores
- Keeping track of toys during a trip to the park
- Helping neighbors or friends
- Telephoning police after witnessing an accident
- Not becoming involved in an argument during a sporting event

Do not reward children when they do something that shows responsibility. Children should develop an intrinsic sense of responsibility and need to learn the value of the things they do. Instead, praise a child that is “caught doing something good” and explain how important his or her actions are to their overall ability to be responsible.

However, do not punish or nag a child when he or she is irresponsible; it diminishes his or her self-esteem and begins to establish a fear-based relationship with a parent. Instead, explain how his or her actions impact others when the child does not do the right thing.

Additionally, parents should allow natural consequences when children make mistakes. For example, if a child forgets his or her homework assignment or the supplies needed to do the work, he or she should have to figure out how to retrieve what is necessary or how to explain to his or her teacher what happened. If a parent rescues the child by calling other parents to get the information needed or by going back to school to pick up the items, the child will not learn how to take responsibility for his or her own actions.

Giving children an allowance is another way to help them learn responsibility. However, parents must not bail out a child by providing money for their activities or treats. If the child runs out of money, he or she will learn the consequences of being responsible for a budget.

Even young children can be assigned age-appropriate chores in order to learn responsibility. Having a family chart that lists chores and the status of those chores helps children keep track of what needs to be done, and they begin to recognize the importance of keeping deadlines.

Encourage older children to do volunteer work or take on an after-school or summer job. These are other great learning experiences for responsibility.

# How can I help my child solve school problems?

When your child encounters difficulty in school, it is important to take the problem seriously. Whether your child is having a conflict with her teacher, suffering academically, being picked on by other classmates or is demonstrating behavioral problems, it is your job as a parent to get involved and find a solution. Talk to your child's teacher and continue to monitor their progress in and out of class. The earlier you get involved, the better chance you have of resolving the problem.

## Learning About the Problem

The best way to gauge a potential problem your child may be having in school is to keep the lines of communication open. Talk to your child on a regular basis. Show your child that you are genuinely interested in his or her academic life, and that you are enthusiastic to hear about the ups and the downs of being a student at school.

Avoid asking general questions like, "How was school?" These usually are answered in one word, "Okay."

Instead, ask about a specific project your child is working on, or a new friend he or she has made. You can make it easier for your child to talk about the bigger events if you are already in the daily habit of talking about everyday things.

## Encourage Their Own Solutions

Pay attention to sudden behavior changes, slipping grades and other warning signs that could signal a hidden problem at school. If you suspect that your child is experiencing a challenge at school, show them that you can be a patient listener who will not interrupt or rush to judgment.

If you feel that your child is not disclosing full details, or is afraid to tell you everything, reassure him or her that it is okay to tell parents this information. You will not overreact or "punish" him or her if something is wrong. Let your child know that you may not be able to solve the problem yourself, but may be able to help choose solutions.

Most importantly, listen to what your child has to say. Parents often feel they have to jump in and rescue their child when they are experiencing a problem. Unless your child's safety is an issue, it is usually best to support him or her in their own problem-solving.

Suppose your child comes home and says, "I don't have any friends at school." If you jump in immediately and try to rescue your child by saying, "Of course you do, there is Jenny and Laurie—everybody likes you!" you are really telling him or her that his or her feelings are incorrect. That will likely be the end of the conversation. Instead say something like, "It sounds like you are feeling really lonely today." This response encourages your child to talk more about what is really bothering him or her.

By listening actively, restating what your child has said in a way that conveys you understand how they are feeling, you can help get to the essence of the real situation. You are also empowering your child by showing them that it is possible to make decisions to solve the problem without having a parent intervene.

## More Serious Problems

If your child is having an issue at school, try to avoid instincts to march down to the principal's office and "straighten things out."

There usually are two sides to the story. In most cases, it is best to let the solution rest with the owner of the problem: your child. Solving problems and resolving conflicts are very important skills for children to develop and experience can be the best teacher.

However, there are times when parents need to step in to protect the safety and dignity of their children. If your child is being bullied or assaulted, taunted about their appearance, race or other aspect of their identity, it may be time to get involved.

Try to confirm the facts from parents of your child's classmates who perhaps have witnessed the bully's behavior toward your child. Use the "adult test." As an adult, would you allow yourself to be subjected to repeated taunting or harassment? You would certainly take action if you were assaulted or racially discriminated against. Children have these rights, too.

Talk with your child's teacher about the bullying behavior and the school's response to it. Your child has a constitutional right to an education in a safe environment.

Some schools have conflict resolution programs that can assist your child. You can also approach the other child's parents about the bullying behavior.

If the problem does not stop and it is serious, remember that there are laws that protect both children and adults from assaultive behavior. Consider talking with your local police department's juvenile bureau.

If your child is having personal differences with his or her teacher, talk to other parents about their children's experiences with that teacher. Determine which issues your child needs to solve on their own with your support and which issues need the full intervention of a parent.

Try not to immediately elevate the problem to the level of the principal's office; talk to your child's teacher first. Document everything you learn and log calls and visits that you make.

Model the respectful behavior you would expect of your child in school. If you feel that your child is really being treated unfairly and you and your child's attempts to work it out have not been successful, then it may be time to involve the school administration.

# How do I discourage my child from cheating?

At some point, your child is may be tempted to cheat. Whether in school or on the athletic field, it is important to emphasize that cheating is unacceptable. Instill a strong sense of honest values and be a good role model for your child. If you discover that your child has cheated, the way you handle the situation can discourage them from trying it again.

## Why Kids Cheat

Many people have felt the urge to cheat. From copying someone's answers on a test to bending the rules in a game, there are many opportunities for our children to cheat. In fact, it is a more widespread problem in schools than many parents realize.

There are many reasons why a child may cheat in academics. A young child may not understand that cheating is wrong. If a child has trouble keeping up in a certain subject despite extra efforts in studying, she may feel pressured to cheat to excel in class. If a child's parents are very demanding and put a priority on performance than on effort, the child may feel overwhelmed by the need to succeed at any cost.

Some kids cheat out of laziness or lack of motivation. A child may give activities such as watching TV and playing with friends a higher priority than homework, choosing to procrastinate until it is too late, or deciding from the start not to make the effort at all. In the end, the child may cheat in order to complete the assignment on time.

If a child tries cheating for the first time and finds it easy to do without getting caught, they may continue the behavior. This problem can be compounded if a child is surrounded by poor role models and sees friends and even parents get away with cheating.

## Tips to Discourage Cheating

It is important for parents and other adults to talk with children about cheating before the child attempts it. Consider these suggestions for having a conversation about cheating:

- **Tell your child that cheating is wrong.** Have this talk before your child starts school. Explain that it is dishonest to use someone else's work in place of their own. Review every possible example, glancing at a classmate's paper, plagiarizing writing, disobeying rules in a game or contest, etc. Indicate that you expect your child never to cheat, even when there is no chance of getting caught. Use board games to demonstrate the importance of following the rules, even if it means losing.
- **Emphasize the consequences.** Explain how cheating can negatively affect both your child and others. For example, cheating on a test could detrimentally affect the grading curve for the other students who took the test honestly. Stress that a cheater ends up cheating himself out of valuable knowledge. Someday your child may regret not doing the work herself and learning the subject fully. Explain how honest work is its own reward and brings with it a sense of self-respect and personal satisfaction.
- **Communicate with the teacher.** The next time you meet with your child's teachers, ask what message the school conveys to discourage cheating.
- **Be a positive role model.** Be honest when filing your taxes, obeying the rules of the road, and correctly completing a job. Demonstrate the kind of behavior you would like your child to emulate. Beware of unintentionally sending the wrong message through your words or actions that bending the rules, lying, stealing or cheating is acceptable.
- **Praise your child's efforts.** Do not overemphasize grades. Compliment your child on making an honest effort, demonstrating improvement, and learning important concepts.

## What to do if Your Child Has Cheated

If you suspect your child has been cheating, or if they has already been caught, try the following:

- **Indicate your disappointment.** Tell your child that you do not like what he or she has done, and reinforce that such behavior is unacceptable.

- **Identify the cause.** Get to the root of the problem and try to understand your child’s motivations for cheating, which can help you develop an effective solution. Even if you are very angry, discuss the matter with your child in a calm manner.
- **Talk to your child’s teacher and discuss the problem and the cause.** Explore possible solutions together, including requiring make-up work.
- **Get more involved in your child’s academic life.** Monitor homework and study efforts. Practice proper classroom and study habits together. Keep closer tabs on grades and performance records.
- **Get your child any necessary academic help.** If your child is not grasping the subject matter or has fallen behind due to inability or poor habits, look into study aids, after-school help from teachers and possibly a tutor.
- **Take a look at your expectations.** If you are demanding too much from your child in terms of grades and performance, be more realistic. Come to an agreement together on marks and performance standards.
- **Talk to a professional if cheating becomes a habit.** If your child is a repeat offender and demonstrates a serious problem with cheating, you may want to talk to a family counselor.
- **Emphasize that you will be proud of your child as long as they are doing the best they can.** This may give them the confidence they need to attempt the schoolwork on their own without cheating.

# How can I identify warning signs of student violence?

For some students, different combinations of behaviors, events and emotions may lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior toward themselves or others. Teachers, parents and fellow students can learn to recognize these early warning signs to help determine if further intervention is needed.

## Early Warning Signs

Educators and families can increase their ability to recognize early warning signs by establishing close, caring and supportive relationships with children.

The following are potential early warning signs of student violence:

- Social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation, rejection and persecution
- Being a victim of violence
- Low school interest and poor academic performance
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings
- Uncontrolled anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating and bullying behaviors
- History of discipline problems and violent or aggressive behavior
- Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Affiliation with gangs
- Inappropriate access to firearms
- Serious threats of violence

Keep in mind that these early warning signs are offered only as an aid to identifying children who may be at risk of school violence.

None of these signs alone is sufficient for predicting aggression and violence. Moreover, it is inappropriate and potentially harmful to use the early warning signs as a checklist against which to measure individual children.

School communities must ensure that staff and students use the early warning signs only for identification and referral purposes. Only trained professionals should make diagnoses in consultation with the child's parents or guardian.

## Imminent Warning Signs

Unlike early warning signs, imminent warning signs indicate that a student is very close to behaving in a way that is potentially dangerous to themselves or others.

This type of warning sign is usually presented as a sequence of overt, serious, hostile behaviors or threats directed at peers, staff or other individuals.

When warning signs indicate that danger is imminent, safety must always be the first and foremost consideration. Imminent warning signs will often require an immediate response.

Imminent warning signs can include:

- Serious physical fighting with peers or family members
- Severe destruction of property
- Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons
- Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide
- Threats of lethal violence
- A detailed plan (time, place, and method) to harm or kill others, particularly if the child has a history of aggression or has attempted to carry out threats in the past
- Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons

When a child has a detailed plan to commit violence or is carrying a weapon, immediate intervention by school authorities and possibly law enforcement officers is needed. Parents should be informed immediately when students exhibit any threatening behavior.

School communities also have the responsibility to seek assistance from child and family services providers, community mental health agencies, and other appropriate organizations. These responses should reflect school board policies and be consistent with violence prevention and response plans.

Understanding early and imminent warning signs are an essential step in ensuring a safe school.

## Principles for Identifying the Warning Signs

Unfortunately, there is a real danger that warning signs can be misinterpreted. Educators and parents (and, in some cases, students) can ensure that warning signs are not misinterpreted by applying several principles to better understand them.

These principles include:

- **Do no harm:** There are certain risks associated with using early warning signs to identify children who are troubled. First and foremost, the intent should be to get help for the student. The early warning signs should not be used as rationale to exclude, isolate or punish a child. Nor should they be used as a checklist for formally identifying, mislabeling or stereotyping children.
- **Understand violence and aggression within a context:** Violence is contextual. Violent and aggressive behavior as an expression of emotion may have many antecedent factors – factors that exist within the school, the home and the larger social environment. In fact, for those children who are at risk for aggression and violence, certain environments or situations can trigger this behavior. Some children may act out if stress becomes too great, if they lack positive coping skills and if they have learned to react with aggression.
- **Avoid stereotypes:** Stereotypes can interfere with (and even harm) the school or community’s ability to identify and help children. It is important to be aware of false cues, including race, socioeconomic status, cognitive or academic ability or physical appearance. In fact, such stereotypes can unfairly harm children, especially when the school community acts upon them.
- **View warning signs within a developmental context:** Children at different levels of development have varying social and emotional capabilities. They may express their needs differently in elementary, middle and high school. The point is to know developmentally typical behavior so that behaviors are not misinterpreted.
- **Recognize that troubled children can exhibit multiple warning signs:** Research confirms that most children who are troubled and at risk for aggression exhibit more than one warning sign, repeatedly and with increasing intensity over time. Thus, it is important not to overreact to single signs, words or actions.