

Recognizing and Responding to Bullying

Recognizing bullying is challenging. Children *and* adults sometimes find it difficult to do. For example, fights between friends or rough play between children with equal power are not bullying situations. They become bullying, however, when one person has more power and uses it to hurt, frighten, threaten, or exclude the other person.

The *Steps to Respect* program defines *bullying* as follows:

Bullying is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose.

Many children don't know how to respond to bullying effectively. Some respond by acting tough or hitting back. But research shows that when children do this, the bullying lasts longer or gets worse. It can even lead to greater risk of physical harm. When children use problem-solving strategies, such as assertively standing up for themselves or involving an adult when necessary, bullying ends sooner.

The *Steps to Respect* program teaches children to judge their own safety first, then to refuse bullying assertively when possible. Assertive behaviors help communicate a message in a serious, direct, and honest way. Acting assertively means to:

- Stay calm.
- Stand tall with your head held high.
- Look directly at the person doing the bullying.
- Speak in a strong, clear, respectful voice.

You can help your child practice *Steps to Respect* skills. Look for opportunities to try the following ideas.

- During regular conversations, have your child practice looking directly at the person he's speaking to. Have him speak in a strong, clear, respectful voice.
- Encourage your child to practice being assertive in bullying situations. Coach her to recognize when her assertive behavior goes too far and becomes aggressive. (Aggressive behaviors include yelling, threatening, or using physical force.)

People of all ages may experience bullying. When children learn to recognize and respond effectively to bullying, they gain positive skills that will last a lifetime.