

When Your Child Teases Others

When Your Child Teases Other Kids: What to Say

The Scene

"There's this kid at school no one likes," nine-year-old Karen says between bites of mashed potatoes. "We all tease him a lot. He's a total dork."

The Words You Need

Some children may be embarrassed or ashamed about hurting another person. Some may not realize how hurtful their teasing can be. And you may be angry or embarrassed by your child's behavior. All of these feelings can make it hard to talk to children who have engaged in hurtful teasing. Here are some suggestions to keep the conversation going.

The words: "I'd like to understand what happened, why don't you tell me about it?"

The reason: Giving children a chance to explain, even when they have done something wrong, helps them feel less defensive.

The words: "I wonder how that kid feels when people tease him like that?"

The reason: Encouraging children to imagine what it would be like to be in a victim's shoes nurtures their capacity for empathy and compassion.

The words: "Remember how you felt when Sean was teasing you?"

The reason: Helping children remember similar incidents in their own lives is another good way to help them develop empathy.

The words: "Sometimes when kids tease other kids, it makes them feel powerful for a little while..."

The reason: Kids sometimes feel threatened by direct questions. General statements, or anecdotes about your own life, can encourage children to respond without feeling put on the spot.



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Conversation Tips

Most children know that it's wrong to tease hurtfully, and may feel guilty about doing it. Remember that the goal of these discussions is not to humiliate or embarrass your children, but to help them stop purposely hurting other children's feelings, and to understand more about themselves in such social situations. Encourage them to avoid games that involve coming up with increasingly gross or nasty put-downs. These can lead to hurt feelings and even fights.

Beyond the Rap

Children learn how to interact at home. Before you talk with your child about teasing, take a look at the kind of teasing that goes on in your family. Do you or your spouse tease your children to the point of tears? Have you helped them define the line between playful and hurtful teasing?

It's important to set some clear ground rules about teasing at home. For instance, it is not okay to tease people about something they can't help, such as physical characteristics, ethnicity, or race. If children are involved in that kind of teasing, school authorities or other parents may need to be involved.

Children who persistently tease other children may be having problems with self-esteem or other issues that may require professional psychological help. Such help may be available through your health plan or the school guidance counselor.

The Facts:

- 1 out of 4 kids is Bullied. The American Justice Department says that this month 1 out of every 4 kids will be abused by another youth.
- Surveys Show That 77% of students are bullied mentally, verbally, & physically. In a recent study, 77% of the students said they had been bullied. And 14% of those who were bullied said they experienced severe (bad) reactions to the abuse.
- 1 out of 5 kids admits to being a bully, or doing some "Bullying."
- 8% of students miss 1 day of class per month for fear of Bullies.

