Helping your child cope with bullying: Tips for parents

**What is bullying:**
- Deliberate hurtful behaviours that cause harm, fear, or distress
- Behaviours are repeated by one or more individuals
- There is often a real or perceived power imbalance

**Types of bullying:**
- **Physical:** Hitting, shoving, damaging or stealing property
- **Verbal:** Mocking, teasing, name calling, racist or sexist remarks, threats and intimidation
- **Relational:** Humiliating actions or comments, spreading gossip/rumors, excluding others from group activities
- **Electronic:** Spreading rumors or making hurtful/aggressive comments through instant messages, social media, or email

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**Electronic/Cyberbullying:**
- Especially problematic because torment and humiliation can have a much larger audience compared to traditional bullying at school
- Children are unable to escape the bullying, as online platforms and electronic devices are often accessible at home, school, etc.

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**Statistics on bullying:**
- Prevalence rates: between 10-33% of children report experiencing bullying
- 1 in 3 students in Canada have reported being bullied
- 1 in 10 adults report that a child in their household experienced cyberbullying
- Girls are more likely to be bullied on the internet compared to boys
- 16.5% of parents never or rarely speak to children about cyberbullying

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**Effects of bullying on children:**
- **Academic difficulties**
  - Disliking school
  - More missed days of school
  - Lower grades
- **Mental health difficulties**
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Suicidal thoughts/behaviours
  - Physical symptoms induced by emotions
- **Social difficulties**
  - Social withdrawal/isolation from existing friends
  - Lower social status and greater marginalization
  - Poor social adjustment
  - Loneliness

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**Effects of bullying on parents:**
- Anger that their child is experiencing distress
- Helplessness for improving the situation
- Feeling unprepared for how to help their child cope
- Guilt regarding what they could have done to prevent the bullying
- Frustration from a perceived lack of response from the school

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**Signs your child is being bullied:**
- Physical signs
  - Unexplained bruises or scrapes
  - Somatic symptoms (headaches, stomach aches)
  - Sleep/eating difficulties
- Emotional signs
  - Irritability
  - Low mood
  - Avoiding social interactions
  - Low self-esteem
- School-related signs
  - Negative attitudes towards school
  - Tries to avoid school or bus
  - Coming home with missing items/money
- Cyber-related signs
  - Changes in social media habits
  - Noting that they blocked people
  - Seeming upset after technology use

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**Strategies to help your child cope with a bullying:**
- **Communicate with your child:**
  - Validate feelings
  - Gather information
  - Instill hope
- **Provide strategies that your child could use for dealing with the bully:**
  - Tell an adult
  - Stay calm and minimize reactions near the bully
  - Don’t bully back
- **Get others involved:**
  - Inform the teacher or school principal
  - Consider having your child see a mental health professional if their well-being is impacted
- **Promote prosocial behaviours:**
  - Ensure your child has other social supports
  - Provide social skills training for making new friends to build self-esteem
  - Get your child involved in activities or organizations to meet new children
  - Maintain a positive home environment

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**Reasons children don’t tell adults about bullying:**
- Shame and embarrassment of seeming like a victim
- Fear of getting in trouble
- Fear that telling an adult will make the situation worse
- Fear parents will increase restrictions on their internet access

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**Helping your child cope with bullying:**
- Kids Help Phone Line: 1-800-468-6868; www.kidshelpphone.ca

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**Resources:**