

# FOCUS

## on Early Childhood Mental Health



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Factsheet #25, 4/11

## Bullying in Preschool

About 1 in 5 children is bullied and bullying happens even in preschool. Most bullying is either physical (hitting, kicking), verbal (name-calling, insults) or social (excluding from play and friendship groups). Bullying is different than typical anger or aggression; the bully intends to hurt and often actually enjoys hurting other children.

### Signs that a child might be a victim of bullying

- The child doesn't want to go to school after previously enjoying it
- The child complains of stomachaches and other undefined physical ailments, or has trouble sleeping
- The child becomes withdrawn, anxious, clingy or whiny, or has unexplained injuries
- The child mentions not liking another child or being bothered by someone

### Characteristics of children who are bullies

- They are often bigger and stronger than other children their age
- They may also be victims of bullying
- They crave attention and don't seem to care about the feelings of others
- They may regularly see bullying behavior at home or in their neighborhood

### What you can do

- Don't ignore or deny the problem, and don't make young children sort out the situation on their own
- Take time to listen, offer support and assure children that they don't need to handle bullies by themselves
- Make clear and specific rules for appropriate behavior and promise to help keep kids safe
- Coach children in how to cope with bullies (e.g., leave, tell the bully to stop, stay with other people, tell the teacher, etc.)
- Encourage and model empathy (e.g., how would you feel if Sam called you names?)
- Praise children when they are doing things like taking turns and sharing with others
- Build on children's strengths so they can develop positive skills and feel good about themselves

### Resources

- "Daycare, Preschool, Elementary School Bullies," <http://bullysolutions.com/>
- "How to Handle Preschool Bullies," by Deborah Carpenter, [www.parenting.com/article/how-to-handle-preschool-bullies](http://www.parenting.com/article/how-to-handle-preschool-bullies)
- "Making a Difference in Bullying: What Parents of Young Children Need to Know," PREVNet, [www.prevnet.org](http://www.prevnet.org)
- Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support Network: [www.papbs.org](http://www.papbs.org) (Resources/Bullying Prevention)