

ALL ABOUT BULLYING

Bullying due to skin and hair conditions

A child can become the target of bullying for many reasons, including the way their skin or hair looks. Skin and hair conditions such as acne, eczema, psoriasis or alopecia can make children stand out from their peers and leave them vulnerable to bullying. This can be especially distressing in late elementary and middle school, when peer pressure to look and dress the same tends to rise.

WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS NEED TO KNOW

- **Skin and hair conditions often result in visible differences.** They can affect the quality of life and peer relationships of children and adolescents. It is important that caregivers recognize and offer support for the emotional challenges that can occur when a child stands out from their peers.
- **Parents and caregivers can reduce the harm from bullying by showing their children love and acceptance.** Make sure your child is not criticized or teased for their appearance at home. To build self-esteem, compliment your child and encourage them to identify what they like about themselves.
- **Help your child understand their condition and figure out how to talk about it with peers who are curious.** This can help them navigate awkward moments and deal with any teasing that occurs. Let them know it's also fine NOT to talk about it and to change the subject when they find someone's questions offensive.
- **Every child with a skin or hair condition reacts to their condition in their own way.** Some are confident and make friends easily. Others are more sensitive and have a harder time making friends. You may need to help your child find a kind, positive peer group. Look into after-school activities and organizations with good adult supervision. Set up playdates and get-togethers with kind peers.

- **Children who are bullied may fight back.** Your child may lash out with aggression in response to repeated teasing. Try to understand what is happening and help them find ways to respond without resorting to aggression.

WARNING SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

- Avoiding school or specific classes at school
- A drop in their grades
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Frequent head or stomach aches
- Changes in mood (such as being more irritable than usual)
- Loss of friends or interest in social activities
- Unexplained physical injuries
- Damaged personal belongings
- Behaviors such as running away from home, self-harming or talking about suicide

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WHEN THEY ARE BULLIED

- **If you think your child is being bullied, ask them.** Let your child know that it is not their fault and nothing to be ashamed of. Tell them that talking about it can help them feel better and find solutions.
- **To help your child feel empowered, ask what they think should be done to address the bullying situation.** Then work together on a plan you are both comfortable with. It is usually best to report bullying to

the school so that administrators can investigate and put a stop to it. Help your child identify a supportive teacher, aide, or counselor who they can go to with these concerns.

- **Role-play different ways of responding to verbal aggression.** If your child has a good sense of humor, have them think of ways to use humor or funny comebacks to disrupt the bully's focus or defuse the situation. Some children may find it difficult to make jokes in a bullying situation. Instead, they could say, "That's rude," before they walk away to find a supportive friend or adult.
- **If you feel your young child is vulnerable to bullying at school, ask the teacher to always send them with a friendly peer** when traveling in the hallway or other less supervised areas, and seat them with a friend in the lunchroom.

Visit www.chop.edu/schoolbullying to access the "Working with Your Child's School" fact sheet for tips to work with your child's school to respond effectively to specific incidents of bullying.

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

Educate your child's community.

- Educate adults and students at your child's school; work with school and club leaders on school assemblies and awareness programs that promote acceptance and inclusion and discourage aggression and bullying.

- Meet with your child's teacher to share with them how you hope they can help, such as asking them to model positivity and acceptance for the class.

Find resources for your child.

- If your child has a hair condition and would prefer to wear a scarf or a hat at school, get written permission for them to do so. If they have a skin condition and prefer to wear long sleeves or a mask, request that accommodation from the student support team.
- Find in-person or online support groups. Seeing other children who look like them or being able to talk to other children about their condition can help build confidence and self-esteem.
- Organizations such as Wigs for Kids and Locks of Love offer affordable wigs for children with alopecia and other medical conditions.
- If your child becomes depressed, stops doing well in school, or doesn't want to go to school or other public activities, discuss the situation with your pediatrician and connect your child with the school counselor or a community mental health professional.



GET INVOLVED

Children, caregivers and school staff all play an important part in bullying prevention. To learn more about the different types of bullying and ways you can help, visit violence.chop.edu/bullying-schools



FIND SUPPORT

Many organizations offer free resources to victims of bullying. For more information, visit violence.chop.edu/bullying-prevention-resources



LEARN MORE

This handout is part of the "All About Bullying" fact sheet series developed by CHOP experts. To access the full suite of educational handouts, visit violence.chop.edu/violence-prevention-tools#fact-sheets