

ALL ABOUT BULLYING

Weight-related bullying

Children who are heavier than their peers are more likely to be targeted for bullying. It's just one visible difference among many that can draw attention and make a child vulnerable to harassment from aggressive peers.

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

- **Bullying can have physical and mental health consequences.** Experiencing bullying damages children's sense of self-worth and can lead to depression, anxiety and eating disorders. It has even been linked to suicidal thoughts and behavior.
- **Peers are not the only bullies.** Youth with larger bodies are often teased or bullied by family members, coaches or teachers. Some adults may think teasing youth about their weight will motivate them to lose weight, but this is not helpful – it's hurtful.
- **The cafeteria, gym and playground are bullying “hot spots.”** Weight-related bullying often occurs when children are eating in the cafeteria, or when they are expected to be active, such as during recess, gym class or sports practice.
- **Victims of bullying sometimes bully others.** This can happen for a lot of reasons, including wanting to fit in or trying to feel better about themselves. A child with a larger body might, at different times, be both the victim and the bully.

WARNING SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED ABOUT THEIR WEIGHT

- Avoiding sports or gym class
- Anxiety about gym or camp, especially if they have to change clothes in an open changing room
- Avoiding playing outside or going to playgrounds, parks, etc.

- Not wanting to eat in front of other people
- Eating when feeling a strong emotion
- Eating when not hungry or eat past feeling full
- Sneaking food
- Avoiding certain clothing, such as shorts or tank tops
- Wearing sweatshirts or jackets in warm weather
- Depressed mood, sadness, withdrawal and/or changes in sleeping patterns

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO ABOUT WEIGHT-RELATED TEASING AND BULLYING

Build resilience

- Parents and caregivers can't always control what happens to their child outside the house, but they can control what happens at home. Let your child know you love and accept them no matter what! Make sure they are not criticized, teased or bullied for their weight at home.
- Work on encouraging confidence and self-esteem in all areas, including body image. Compliment your child and encourage them to identify what they like about themselves. Highlight all the great things their body can do, such as dancing, taking walks, making art, or giving and receiving hugs!
- Teach your children that it is NEVER acceptable to make comments about or judge other people's bodies. Don't complain about your weight, tell someone they look more attractive or pretty because they lost weight, or comment on someone else's weight gain.
- If someone makes a comment about your child's weight, tell your child it does not mean there is something wrong with their body or that they should change their appearance.

- NEVER respond to a child's upset feelings about weight-related bullying by suggesting a diet or weight loss.
- Connect your child with positive, confident role models who are heavier — either in-person or through social media. Social media tends to amplify and recommend more of the content users actively seek out, so encourage your child to follow influencers/content creators that promote positive body image and acceptance.
- Help your child understand the societal pressures at play: Much of American culture over-values thinness. There's more tolerance for making fun of overweight people, even though it's wrong.
- If your child is willing, role-play with them how to handle mean comments about their weight in a range of situations, including critical comments from friends and family or when peers are being mean at school. They can try out assertive comments, smart come-backs, and humorous comments that defuse the situation or give them back a sense of power and control.
- Report any bullying to school staff, so that they can investigate it and make a plan to protect your child. 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.

HELP YOUR CHILD TAKE ACTION

- Listen and support your child if they express sadness or anger about being bullied. Let them know that being teased about their weight is not OK. They do not deserve it!
- Help your child practice saying positive things about themselves to counter any mean comments or negative thoughts they are experiencing.

SEE A SUPPORTIVE HEALTH PROVIDER

- Talk to your child's pediatrician about their experiences with weight-related bullying, so that they are aware of the stress your child is experiencing and can make recommendations and share helpful resources.
- If your child is experiencing signs of anxiety or depression over time, a school counselor or private therapist can help them handle these feelings and cope with weight-related teasing and bullying.



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