

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How Bullying Can Affect the Entire Family

Being bullied can cause emotional or behavioral changes that may lead to problems at home. However, increased awareness of the most common signs and symptoms can help reduce the difficulties experienced by families who are affected by bullying.

- **Secrecy:** People who are bullied often become secretive at home. This can be particularly difficult for parents to experience, as they may imagine a range of frightening causes for changes in their child. The home environment can become tense, with some parents displaying frustration and suspicion in an authoritarian manner that may make the child even less likely to talk about being bullied.
- **Irritability:** Whether bullying occurs at school or in the workplace, the unnaturally stressful environment that results can make the victim more argumentative at home. In addition, being regularly criticized and disparaged by bullies may lead to the victim overreacting to innocent comments made by family members at home.
- **Withdrawal:** As a result of bullying, some victims may isolate themselves, diminishing the quality of family relationships. Other family members may feel less supported or connected in response to this reduced level of interaction. Over time, this can lead to a decrease in overall closeness in the family.
- **Lying:** Targets of bullying may sometimes feel ashamed, worrying that it is their fault or that it is indicative of critical personal flaws. Whether for this reason, or because they fear that reporting the bully will make things worse, a child may start to lie to their parents about why they want to skip school. Feigned illnesses and other excuses can leave parents deeply worried about their child's physical and mental well-being.
- **Self-doubt:** Sometimes, family members do not take a report of bullying seriously. It may be dismissed as a normal part of growing up, or a consequence of office politics. However, this failure to empathize with the victim's emotional anguish can make them doubt their own perception of reality. This problem is particularly common in children, who may believe their parents are all-powerful.
- **Lack of trust:** If family members disbelieve reports of bullying, the victim may feel painfully alienated. The resulting lack of trust can create a serious rift in the family that may remain long after the bullying itself has been resolved. Although this type of issue can arise as a result of workplace bullying as well, it is more common in cases of school bullying.
- **Anxiety:** When someone lives in fear of bullying, their pervasive feelings of tension can lead to social anxiety in settings they used to enjoy, including family outings.
- **Low self-esteem:** Being repeatedly treated in a cruel and degrading manner will influence the way a person sees themselves, which may then affect their dynamics with loved ones. Targets of bullying may feel less confident about objecting to any unfair treatment at home, and bullied adults may start to doubt their capacities when it comes to performing normal tasks in support of their partner or children.
- **Overprotectiveness:** When serious bullying becomes apparent, some parents will fear for their child's safety so excessively that their parenting style becomes oppressive and limiting.

Given the possibility of these serious consequences of bullying, it is important for families to employ positive preventive strategies. It helps if there is open communication between everyone living in the home and if meaningful conversation is the norm. Children should feel free to candidly discuss their struggles with bullying; it is ideal if they can also view their parents as trusted friends. Meanwhile, adult partners should work to maintain a close bond that encourages honest conversation, even when the

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subject matter is difficult. People who enjoy mutually supportive relationships with their family members are more likely to confide in each other and seek help when life becomes difficult.

Children can also benefit from learning coping mechanisms. If children learn effective strategies for dealing with bullies and understand the importance of reporting such incidents, they will typically experience less emotional trauma in the event that a bully ever does attempt to victimize them.