

Teaching Tolerance

Teaching tolerance to children is a good way to prevent bullying behavior within a family or outside — at school, for example. As teachers and role models, we can break the cycle of pain caused by bullying and other aggressive behavior.

[Pullout quote:] “It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”

— Maya Angelou [End pullout quote]

Damaging effects of bullying

Bullying can be highly damaging to a person’s self-worth, self-esteem, and physical and mental health. Recent studies have found that people who have been bullied are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety; these feelings tend to stick with them through adulthood. Those who are bullied also tend to show a decline in grades and attendance at school — and have more health complaints.

Witnesses of the behavior have also been shown to experience similar issues with anxiety, depression, and school attendance — while being at increased risk for problems with tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

The person doing the bullying can also be affected with a higher tendency toward aggressive behavior later in life, including being aggressive with their partners and their children. These are just some of the reasons why teaching tolerance as a preventive strategy for bullying is so important.

Teaching tolerance

In many instances, children need to be guided to which behaviors are socially acceptable. Often, simple concepts like sharing or putting someone else’s needs first are a bit of a stretch in a young person’s mind. Yet, once the concept is gently explained to them, or modeled for them, a child can learn to adopt the new behavior. The same is true for tolerance.

Teaching tolerance can happen when you see a situation — in real life or in the media — where someone reacts aggressively toward another person. You can use this as a springboard for a discussion about the behavior and how better choices can be made. Explaining that the aggressive behavior is not acceptable and offering alternatives can be a great teaching moment.

Being a role model

For the younger people in your life modeling the behavior you would like to see in them is the best way to start. When they see you respectfully engage with others, for example, they are more likely to do the same with their peers.

Practicing tolerance

Tolerance is the first step to recognizing uniqueness in others and allowing them to express who they are without judgment or disapproval. From this acceptance, you can teach your family the importance of inclusivity and opening their minds and hearts to people from different backgrounds. Tolerance is a skill and like any skill must be practiced in order for it to feel easy, come naturally, and be authentic.

Celebrating difference

One way to strengthen tolerance and inclusivity is by celebrating diversity. You can broaden your family's experience of diversity by visiting museums, ethnic neighborhood festivals, or ethnic restaurants. Another activity would be to learn some vocabulary from a new language together and explore the cuisine and culture of those countries where the language is spoken.

Your willingness and enthusiasm for trying new and different things should be approached with a spirit of curiosity — and tolerance.

Understanding Bullying

Many faces of bullying

According to stopbullying.gov, bullying can include one or a number of actions to belittle the targeted person, such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, or purposely excluding someone from a group.

These can either be done in person or online. Online bullying can be particularly problematic because the targeted person often feels more isolated — without allies or concerned witnesses.

See something, say something

If you suspect that someone in your life is experiencing bullying — as a target or a perpetrator — take the time to have a long talk about what is going on and look for the best solutions, including seeking help from a professional counselor.

Some signs of bullying from stopbullying.gov include:

- Unexplained injuries
- Feeling sick or faking illness, especially to avoid school or other social situations
- Declining grades, sudden loss of interest in school, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talk of suicide

While experiencing any of these signs is not necessarily a direct indication of bullying, they could point to other problems that need to be addressed immediately. If you notice any of these signs or symptoms in your loved one, seek the help of a health care professional or a counselor.

Your Employee Assistance Program can help you with both referrals and short-term counseling for you and your family.

Employee Assistance Program
24 HOURS A DAY

(800) 222-0364

TTY: (888) 262-7848

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