

Dear Parents and Caretakers,

Today in lesson 8 of Voices for Safety your child learned about words and actions that can hurt children on the inside of their body by making them feel unsafe or very unhappy. Unfortunately, bullying can sometimes begin as early as preschool. As a parent or caretaker you need to know what to do if your child experiences bullying. The result of bullying cannot be seen like a bruise or a cut, and yet bullying can interfere with a child's healthy development and can have a lifelong negative impact. Some adults have never gotten over the bullying or emotional abuse that they experienced as a child. The goal is to prevent bullying or stop it when it begins. If you think your child is being bullied at any age, here are some useful suggestions:

1. If you notice your child especially stressed, withdrawn, sad, complaining of headaches or stomachaches for no known reason, or talking about another child doing or saying mean things to him or her, encourage your child to talk with you about what is happening. If the problem is ongoing, write the date and a few details after each time your child tells you something happened.
2. Plan with your child how to handle the bully – for example, 1. Encourage your child to use his or her words if it feels safe to do so, 2. Encourage your child to tell the teacher or another trusted adult, 3. Practice with your child what he or she might say to the bully – for example, look him or her straight in the eye and use a strong and confident voice. Do not encourage your child to fight back or to tease and name call– this will not teach your child how to cope with bullying and may even lead to injury. Don't tell your child that he or she needs to "toughen up" or "get over it" and don't tease or call your child names such as "sissy." Check with your child to see how using his or her words with the bully and how telling a trusted adult worked, and find out whether or not the bullying is continuing.
3. Talk to the teacher – don't wait more than a couple of weeks or a month and don't assume that the teacher knows what is going on. Let the teacher know that you are concerned and want the bullying to stop. If the teacher does not respond in a way that satisfies you, talk to the Director or the Principal. Share your notes about what your child told you happened and when. You have a right to know what actions the school or care provider will take to address the problem. Follow-up.
4. Do not confront the child who is bullying or the child's parents. Often this creates defensiveness and can make the situation worse for you and your child. Work with your child, his or her teacher, and principal or director if necessary.

What parents and caretakers say and do also has a big impact on children. Frequent yelling, name calling, insulting comments, slamming doors, etc. are also harmful to children. Children who experience this type of hurt on the inside are more likely to experience problems with healthy development and lifelong problems such as depression, low self-esteem, substance use, and troubled relationships. Next week in Voices for Safety we will continue talking with the children about ways that adults and other children might say or do things that cause them to hurt on the inside. The children will practice responding by use the STOP acronym. If you yourself have been negatively affected by bullying or emotional abuse in the past, please visit the parent's section of the program web site where you will find useful information on healing the past, managing stress, and dealing with a range of difficult problems. There is also information for parents on the safe and healthy discipline of children.

**For more information please visit [voicesforsafety.com](http://voicesforsafety.com), email [info@voicesforsafety.com](mailto:info@voicesforsafety.com), or talk with your Head Start teacher.**