
HOW TO ADDRESS SCHOOL BULLYING

A GUIDE FOR SIKH PARENTS



WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is when a child or a group of children hurt or reject another child.

Many of our Sikh children may be victims of bullying because they look or speak differently.

WHY IS BULLYING A SERIOUS ISSUE?

Bullying is a serious problem that has the potential to damage the self-confidence of children, interfere with their success in school and negatively impact the broader Sikh community as children may feel they must conform to be a part of mainstream society.

Bullying is never acceptable. It should not ever be considered just “part of growing up”. Research and experience consistently show that bullying is a serious issue, with far-reaching consequences for the students involved, their families and peers, and the community around them.

Students who are bullied often deal with social anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, physical illnesses, and low self-esteem. They can also develop phobias, engage in aggressive behaviors, or become depressed. Some students miss school, see their grades decline, or even leave school altogether.



HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD OR TEENAGER IS BEING BULLIED?

A young child may not know the word “bully” but they know when someone is being mean, hurtful, or making them feel sad or scared. They may not tell you out of concern for making things worse if they “tattle”.

Similarly, your teenager may not tell you there is a problem either; instead, they may use terms such as “harassment” or comment about “mean kids” to describe the behavior. Teenagers often prefer to handle things on their own – they might think you’ll get upset or they might find it embarrassing to have a parent involved. It is important to recognize signs of your child being bullied. These signs can include:

- Changes in behavior, attitude, or dress and appearance
- Reluctance to go to school and/or crying or feeling sick on school days
- Not taking part in activities or social events with other students
- Suddenly losing money or a personal item
- Coming home with torn clothes or broken possessions with no or explanations that do not make sense
- Talking about dropping out of school

IS IT BULLYING IF MY CHILD HASN'T BEEN PHYSICALLY HURT?



Bullying can take many forms, including:

- Physical – hitting, shoving, stealing, or damaging property
- Verbal – name-calling, mocking, or making comments
- Social – excluding others from a group or spreading gossip or rumors
- Electronic (commonly known as cyberbullying) – spreading rumors and hurtful comments through the use of e-mail, cell phones, social media websites, and text messaging

Bullying can occur in the following way(s):

- Teasing
- Saying or writing nasty comments
- Purposely leaving your child out of activities or not talking to them
- Threatening your child or making them feel uncomfortable or scared
- Stealing or damaging their property
- Hitting, kicking, or otherwise physically assaulting your child
- Making your child do things they don't want to do

MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If your child is being bullied, listen to what he or she is saying and be supportive.

Ask your child how he or she has been dealing with the bullying, talk about what else can be done, and what action both of you can take to solve the problem. Communicate often and openly with your child. Help your child understand that the bullying that they are experiencing is not their fault. Allow your child to express themselves openly. Listen to your child and consider your child's point of view. **Do not lecture your child and reserve judgment when your child is expressing themselves.** Keep an open mind when you listen. **Notify the school as soon as possible** when you learn about your child experiencing any form of bullying, and keep track of any notable evidence and incidents.



REFRAIN FROM TELLING YOUR CHILD TO “JUST IGNORE THE BULLY”

The only time that this might work is when the bully teases a child for the first time. If a child consistently reports being bullied, it is usually too late for this tactic to be effective, and needs your support.



HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP HIS OR HER OWN PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Help your child make the connection between what he or she wants and what he or she is doing. With these decision-making skills, your child will be better equipped to handle issues later in life. It is best to allow a child to work out the conflict without adult interference so that they learn how to stand up for themselves. **This will help them feel an increased sense of control over life’s challenges and gain confidence.**

DISCUSS WAYS THAT YOUR CHILD COULD REACT TO A PARTICULAR SITUATION

- Help your child feel empowered by encouraging them to handle the situation in a positive way
- Create scenarios for you and your child to role-play a confrontational scenario to practice and model ways to effectively handle bullying.
- **Teach your children to be assertive rather than aggressive or violent when confronted by a bully.**
 - Pick a handful of responses and practice them at home with your child. By role-playing potential scenarios, you increase the chances of your child being able to set boundaries at school. This critical interaction communicates your expectations and feelings about the topic and gives your child a conversation to refer back to if problems arise.
 - For example, when a child is the target of a cruel remark, a brief response such as "Why would you say that?" takes the focus off the insult and places it back in the aggressor's lap, without bullying back. Saying something as simple as "Really?" or "Seriously?" can have the same effect. A bored-sounding "whatever", a confused "what?" or humor can often be enough to derail an aggressive interaction.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO USE THE ADULTS IN THE SCHOOL TO ASSIST THEM IN HANDLING A STUDENT WHO CONTINUES TO BULLY THEM

It is important that your child feel safe at school. Teachers, counselors, and administrators have a responsibility to protect the students on their campuses but can help only when they know a problem exists. Encourage your child to always tell an adult they trust.

Explain to them that this isn't tattling. They have a right to be safe.

DISCUSS BULLYING WITH OTHER SIKH PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO MAY BE ABLE TO SUGGEST WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD HANDLE BULLYING

Remember that your child is not alone in experiencing the pain of being bullied.

- Ask an older brother, sister, or another older Sikh child to meet with your child to offer support, guidance, and strategies for dealing with bullying. Sometimes it is easier for children to talk to other children or young adults than it is for them to talk to their parents and other adults
- Suggest that your local Gurdwara create opportunities for children to meet and discuss bullying and other challenges that they are facing as young Sikh children. SALDEF has facilitated a number of forums for Sikh children to discuss bullying and would welcome the opportunity to serve your local community



HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THEIR UNIQUE SIKH IDENTITY AND APPEARANCE SO THAT THEY CAN CONFIDENTLY EXPLAIN IT TO OTHERS

Learn as much as you can about Sikhism so you may best answer your child's questions. Be prepared to offer practical explanations of Sikhism using real-life examples to which your child can relate. Make sure that your explanations are appropriate to the maturity and age level of your child. Do not be embarrassed to tell your child that you don't know an answer, but that you will talk to others who may be able to guide you in answering your child's questions.

ENCOURAGE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR CHILD

- Encourage their interests, abilities, and talents through involvement in clubs, sports youth groups, and community activities
- Highlighting the child's strengths creates confidence and provides them with opportunities to make other friends. Plus, bullies are less likely to pick on people if they're with others in a group
- A confident child is not only less likely to be bullied but also better able to deal with bullying. If we empower our children to stand up for themselves, they are less likely to be victims and more likely to gain self-confidence.



BE A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR CHILD

- Be aware of your own prejudices, attitude, and language towards individuals and groups that are different from you
- Talk to your child directly about your values, standards, and expectations
- Become the person that you want your child to become
- Teach your child to appreciate and respect cultures and religions different than your own

MEET WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHERS, COUNSELOR, AND/OR PRINCIPAL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR TO EXPLAIN YOUR CHILD'S UNIQUE SIKH APPEARANCE AND YOUR EXPECTATIONS THAT ANY FORM OF BULLYING WILL BE ADDRESSED IMMEDIATELY

- Ask if the school has an anti-bullying policy and procedure for addressing issues
- To get engaged with the school you might:
 - **Speak** to your child's class or have another person speak to the class about Sikhism and why Sikh children wear patkas and/or have long uncut hair
 - **Show** the classroom teacher how to tie the patka on your child if it comes off during the school day.
 - **Explain** that nobody is ever allowed to touch your child's patka
 - **Get** involved in cultural, historical, ethnic, or heritage events and programs at the school.



REPORTING DISCRIMINATION AND HARRASSMENT TO THE SCHOOL

If you believe a student has been treated unfairly—for example, treated differently, harassed, bullied, or retaliated against—because of their race or national origin, there are a number of actions you can take:

- **Notify a school leader** (for example, a principal or student affairs staff) immediately. If you don't get the help you need, file a formal complaint with the school, school district, college, or university. Keep records of responses you receive
- **Write down the details** about what happened, where and when the incident happened, who was involved, and the names of any witnesses. Do this for every instance of discrimination and keep copies of any related documents or other information
- Ask the school or college/university to translate its documents (like a complaint form) and messages into a language you understand. **Ask for an interpreter if you need help speaking** with school staff in a language other than English
- If the school or college/university does not take steps to address your complaint or the discrimination continues, **consider filing a complaint** with the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice at [civilrights.justice.gov](https://www.civilrights.justice.gov), or with the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education at <https://www2.ed.gov/ocr/complaintintro.html> (to file a complaint in English) or <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html> (to file a complaint in a non-English language)

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