



Talking with kids about
BULLYING





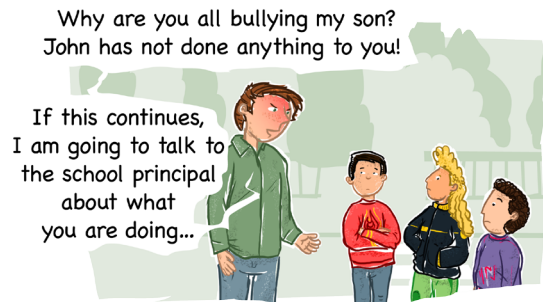
BULLYING

You noticed that the behavior of your 10-year-old son John has changed a lot in the last few weeks. He does not want to go to school anymore and regularly complains about stomach pains and sickness in the morning. He has not been invited to any birthday parties this year, although he received many birthday party invitations last year. You suspect that John might be bullied by his classmates.

How do you react? Select one of the possible reactions and go on reading on the indicated page:



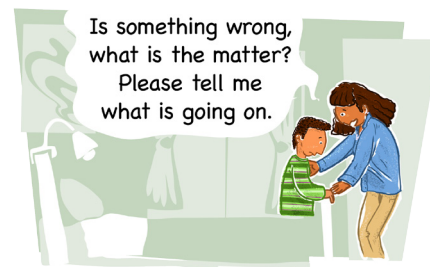
Go to [page 3!](#)



Go to [page 4!](#)



Go to [page 5!](#)



Go to [page 6!](#)

If your suspicions about your child's being bullied are substantiated, you should act straight away!

This is what you can do:



- Instances of bullying in school should be resolved where they arise. Talk to your child's teacher, a social worker or a school counselor, about your concerns. Ask the teacher or school officials how they propose to address this case of bullying. Other people that you might involve as well include the school principal or the school psychologist.
- Make it clear to your child: "We will pursue a resolution of this issue for as long as it takes to ensure that you are going to feel better again".
- Make sure that the enjoyable and positive aspects of your child's daily life are not negatively impacted. It is important that he feels "I am supported by people who love and value me and enjoy being with me. I am important to these individuals, and this strengthens me. Despite everything, there are still many things in my life that I can enjoy."



If you suspect that your son is being bullied, it is very helpful to discuss the issue with his teacher. Do not try to pressure your child into having to tell the teacher about his problems. He may feel ashamed about what he has experienced, or he could be anxious to avoid being called a snitch. All these things could make your child's emotional burden even worse. Bullying is often hidden and even the teachers may only have vague suspicions. However, when you discuss your concerns with the teacher, a clearer picture of the situation is likely to emerge. If the teacher confirms that John is often alone, separated from the group, or prefers to stay in the classroom during break time, then it is worth to follow up with more precise questions:

- Does the class groan as soon as John says something in class?
- Do the other students roll their eyes?
- Are his articulations in class frequently met with derogative comments or even ridicule by others?

Be careful not to voice accusations against the teacher. Bullying is something that often occurs outside the teacher's sphere of influence.

If the teacher has observed this kind of behavior by the classmates towards your child, then the next step should be a meeting together with your child. Advice on how to arrange such a meeting can be found on [page 5](#).

Why are you all bullying my son?
John has not done anything to you!

If this continues,
I am going to talk
to the school principal about
what you are doing...



It is not a good idea to try and tackle John's situation directly. When bullying involves a whole group ganging up on one student, disciplinary measures or sanctions against a single classmate will not resolve the problem. Indeed, a rash and extreme reaction on your part might even worsen the situation.

As bullying is generally a group phenomenon, the problem must be addressed at its source. It may involve a particular class, with implications for the entire school.

As a first step, try to get a more precise overview of the situation. Find out whether your son is indeed being bullied by discussing the matter with his teacher. For advice on how to do this, go to [page 3](#). Following this, a sensitive talk with your child is advisable. More on this can be found on [page 5](#).



It is important that you communicate your worries and observations sensitively when talking with your son. Choose an appropriate setting for your open discussion, as it is often much easier for children to talk about a subject in a casual and incidental way. A walk together, solving a puzzle game, or going for a drive somewhere could all be good occasions for such an exchange.

You should also make sure to allow for enough time, as time pressure will make it harder for your son to talk about these sensitive issues.

A good way to initiate the conversation may be sharing your observations about your child's current situation (see example). Talking about an experience where you had difficulties with other children or in school could also serve as a good conversation starter.

If John opens up and wants to talk with you, be careful to avoid recriminations. Statements such as "Why didn't you tell me earlier? Why didn't you tell the teacher?" can seem like an interrogation and easily evoke feelings of guilt, shame and anger.

You can offer support to your son by affirming him and taking his feelings seriously: "I can see this must have made you feel very sad, I can understand that you don't want to go to school anymore."

You will obtain a clearer picture of the situation when you discuss the matter with your child's teachers. Advice on how to approach this can be found on [page 3](#).



The idea of discussing the issue with John is by far the best one. However, you must take great care not to force your son into a defensive position and avoid his feeling of having to justify himself. Even well-meant advice, such as: "Don't take it to heart", won't help John much if he is indeed being bullied.

Try to reach your child with *open communication*, *nonviolent communication* or *I-messages*.

You want to learn more about "open communication"? See the document ["Talking with kids about homework" chapter "Open communication"](#) on page 4.

You want to learn more about "nonviolent communication"? See the document ["Talking with kids about aggressive behavior" chapter "What can I do? – Tips for dealing with aggressive behavior"](#) on page 3.

You want to learn more about "I-Messages"? See the document ["Talking with kids about drugs" chapter "I-Messages"](#) on page 6.

You can find special advice on communicating with your child about bullying on [page 5](#).

„Talking with kids about bullying” is based on the following references:

Grolimund, Fabian. 2016. «... und alle schauen weg.» *Das Schweizer Elternmagazin Fritz und Fränzi*, September, 11-27.

Grolimund, Fabian und Stefanie Rietzler. 2016. «Mein Kind wird gemobbt. Und jetzt?» *Das Schweizer Elternmagazin Fritz und Fränzi*, September, 32-33.