

Helping Sikh Children Deal With

BULLYING



Lately, Gurjeet Singh has been coming home from school in tears. He complains that his classmates touch his patka and call him names.

Surinder Kaur suddenly states that she doesn't want to go to school anymore. She tells you that a group of girls have been teasing her because she doesn't cut her hair.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying occurs when a child or group of children tries to hurt or reject another child. Many of our Sikh children may experience bullying because they look different than other school children.

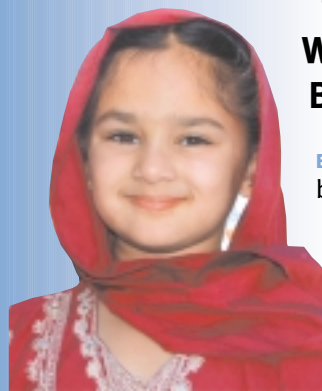
Ways that children bully include: teasing, saying or writing nasty comments, leaving the victim out of activities or not talking to him, threatening the victim, making him feel uncomfortable or scared, stealing or damaging his things, hitting or kicking him, or making him do things that he doesn't want to do. A child may also be bullied when other children make fun of his parents' appearance, accent, or national origin.

Bullying can make a child feel lonely, unhappy, frightened, unsafe and think that there must be something wrong with him. Signs that might indicate your child is being bullied include reluctance to go to school, drop in grades, and loss of confidence. Your child may withdraw from family, friends and community. You may see signs of irritability and moodiness. Your child may try to change her personality and/or appearance to try to gain acceptance from others.

Bullying is a very serious problem that has the potential to damage the self-confidence of our children, interfere with our children's success in school, and damage Sikh communities as children attempt to conform to mainstream ways.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

BE SUPPORTIVE. Ask your child how he has been dealing with the bullying and talk about what actions both you can take to solve the problem. Communicate often and openly with your child, and help your child understand that the bullying that he is experiencing is not his fault. Intervene if



you hear your child put himself down. Encourage your children to share information about school and school-related activities. If anything is more important than talking to your child it is listening to him. Resist getting angry or cutting your child off if the teasing results in him suggesting behavior that is contrary to Sikhism. Encourage your child to express himself openly. Listen to your child and consider his point of view. Do not lecture your child and reserve judgment when your child is expressing himself. Ask questions and listen. Keep an open mind when you listen. Don't put your child off when he is asking questions or sharing his feelings otherwise, you might find that he will stop asking and looking for explanations.



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. By the time a child is consistently being bullied, it is usually too late for this "ignoring" tactic to be effective.

HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP HIS OWN PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS; DO NOT JUMP IN TO RESCUE HIM. It is best to allow a child to work out a conflict without adult interference so that he may learn how and when to stand up for himself. This will help him feel an increasing sense of personal control over life's challenges and problems as he grows.

TEACH YOUR CHILD TO BE ASSERTIVE RATHER THAN AGGRESSIVE OR VIOLENT WHEN CONFRONTED BY A A very common and hurtful form of bullying is name-calling. If your daughter hits someone who is calling her names, there is a good chance that she will be the one who ends up being punished by the school. Teach your children to never defend themselves from bullies by hitting back or using a gun or other weapon. Help your child feel empowered to handle the situations in a positive way. Create scenarios for you and your child to practice and model ways to handle bullying effectively.



DEAL WITH THE CHILD'S EMOTIONS IN A SENSITIVE WAY. Your child may be angry with you as a result of the bullying especially if it involves your appearance, accent or national origin. Explain that the fault lies with the bully's misunderstanding, not with your family.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO USE THE ADULTS IN THE SCHOOL TO ASSIST HIM IN HANDLING A STUDENT WHO CONTINUES TO BULLY. It is important that your child feel safe at school. Teachers, Counselors and Administrators can help only when they know a problem exists. Encourage your child always to tell an adult he can trust. Explain to him that this isn't tattletaling. He has a right to be safe. Instruct him to walk away and get help from any available school staff member in more dangerous situations.

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 on dealing with bullying. Sometimes, it is easier for children to talk to other children or young adults than it is to talk to their parents and other adults. Suggest that your Gurdwara create opportunities for children to meet and discuss bullying and other challenges that they are facing as Sikh children.

HELP YOUR CHILD BE PROUD OF BEING SIKH.

Encourage your child to talk about his feelings and experiences in being a Sikh. Show your child that he is special from an early age. Share and develop family and Sikh pride by visiting Gurdwara on a regular basis, and engaging in Sikh community activities such as Sunday School, cultural programs, camps, and social events. Give your child a regular opportunity to develop friendships with other Sikh children.



HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND HIS UNIQUE SIKH IDENTITY AND APPEARANCE SO THAT HE CAN CONFIDENTLY EXPLAIN IT TO OTHERS. Learn as much as you

can about Sikhism so that you can best answer your child's questions. Offer practical explanations of Sikhism using real-life examples that your child can relate to. 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. Talk to others who may be able to guide you on answering your child's questions.

ENCOURAGE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR CHILD BY ENCOURAGING THEIR INTEREST AND ABILITIES AND TALENTS THROUGH INVOLVEMENT IN CLUBS, SPORTS YOUTH GROUPS, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES. Highlighting their strengths creates confidence in children and provides them with opportunities to make other friends.



Bullies hardly ever pick on people if they're with others in a group. A confident child is less likely to be bullied and will also be better able to deal with any bullying that occurs.

BE A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR CHILD. Be aware of your own prejudices, attitudes and language towards individuals and groups that are different from you. Become the person that you want your child to become. Teach your child to appreciate and respect cultures and religions different than your own.

BECOME INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOL. Take time to go on field trips, volunteer in the classroom, and attend activities that your child is involved in. This will give you an opportunity to understand your son's environment and will help his peers understand more about him. It will also reinforce to your child your interest and enthusiasm in his life.

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 AND EFFECTIVELY.

Ask about the school policy and procedure on addressing bullying. Show the classroom teacher how to tie the patka on your son if it comes off dur-

ing the school day. Explain that nobody is ever allowed to touch your child's patka. Request to speak to your child's class or have another person speak to the class about why their classmate wears a patka and/or has uncut hair. Get involved in Cultural Nights and programs at the school.



It is best to allow your child to work out a conflict by himself, but sometimes parent involvement may be necessary.

REASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT YOU WILL CONSULT HIM BEFORE TAKING ANY ACTION. Certain situations might require your involvement. Always discuss things with your child before you take action. If you don't do this you

might damage your relationship with your child by making him feel that he cannot trust you, or that you do not trust him. Work with your child's teachers to find a solution. If you are not happy with a teacher's response to a bullying issue, do not give up. Speak to a counselor, the principal or to a different teacher. Raise the issue with your child's school and ask what it will do to stop the bullying. Suggest that the school contact the bully's parents. You should also consider contacting the bully's parents. Monitor and record all bullying incidents. If your child is a victim of bullying at school, keep your own written records of the names, dates, times, and circumstances of bullying incidents. Submit a copy of this report to the school principal. Follow up with the school and your child to ensure that the problem is being addressed in a satisfactory manner.

* Bullying can affect both boys and girls. For the sake of writing flow, the pronouns "he" and "she" have been used interchangeably to refer to the bullied child.

PARVEEN KAUR DHILLON

Sikh Education Council
West Coast Manager
Parveen.Dhillon@SikhEducation.com
650.473.9272

SARABJEET KAUR SALUJA-BHUTANI

Sikh Education Council
East Coast Manager
sarabjeet@SikhEducation.com
650.473.9272

