

How to deal with back-to-school bullying

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Dear Mayo Clinic: My daughter is 9 and worried about going to school this fall because she was picked on by some of her classmates last year. Should I talk to her teachers about this or wait to see how it goes? I am trying to avoid being overprotective but don't want her to worry about being bullied. What do you recommend?

A: Taking steps now to help your daughter - especially since she felt picked on during the previous school year - is the right approach. There are things you can do at home to help her ease into going back and being among her peers. If the [teasing](#) behavior continues, though, or if she feels that she's not safe at school, talk to her teachers immediately.

First, ensure your daughter understands she has a right to be safe at school. Tell her that you want her to let you know if she ever feels unsafe at school. She may be concerned that others will see this as tattling, but reassure her that, when she is scared or feels threatened, she should talk to you and/or another trusted adult such as a teacher or school counselor.

Next, ask your daughter about the teasing. Are there behaviors or something about the way she interacts with others that you can help her manage? As an example, children who may not be comfortable in social situations can be labeled as awkward, and that can be a source of teasing. If this is the case, work with her specifically on social skills, including not interrupting others when they're talking, praising others when they do a good job, and keeping her hands to herself.

You also could ask your daughter to talk with you about ways she could respond to teasing. For example, when teasing is mild, a little humor may help lessen it. Walking away is an appropriate response, too. Let her know she doesn't always have to respond to comments.

In addition, you can help your daughter by facilitating time with her friends so she can build and strengthen those relationships. Kids with at least one good quality friend are less likely to be picked on, and friendships mitigate the negative effects of teasing or [bullying](#).

Finally, help your daughter understand that someone who teases her likely doesn't know her well. Reassure her that the people in her life who do know her, including you and other family members, care about her greatly. Also, remind her that if one of her friends makes an occasional unkind comment, all friends disagree or have rough patches from time to time.

It is important to recognize that teasing sometimes crosses the line into bullying - even at a young age. When teasing continues over time, especially if it is the same person or group of people who do it repeatedly, that is bullying. And it must be addressed. Bullying comes in many forms: physical, verbal, emotional and online. If anyone physically harms or threatens a child, or if behavior is inappropriate, that also requires immediate attention from parents and the school.

If what your daughter is experiencing fits the description of bullying, talk to her teachers and school administrators. They need to know what's going on, so they can intervene. Creating a culture of respect in and out of the classroom is key to bullying prevention. Many schools now have anti-bullying policies that help prevent bullying, and then guide what happens when it occurs.

Many children who are bullied come through it without long-lasting

problems, though the experience is hard at the time. But bullying should be dealt with as soon as possible. Children who are bullied often tend to start disliking school. Their classroom performance and grades often suffer as a result. If the bullying does not end quickly, they also are at risk for anxiety and depression. For more information, [pacer.org/bullying](https://www.pacer.org/bullying) is a reliable online resource that provides science-based advice about bullying and bullying prevention.

Right now, however, as you get your daughter ready to go back to [school](#), take time to talk with her about ways to deal with teasing. And most importantly, ensure she knows that, whatever happens, you are there for her, and she won't have to handle it alone.

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