Have the conversation early and often

The majority of kids who are bullied do not report it to an adult. The latest statistics show that only two in five bullied students ever notified an adult about the bullying. Kids often report feeling embarrassed or feeling as though adults will be unhelpful or make things worse. Here’s how to make sure your children know they can come to you:

• **Set aside a time every day to check in with your children.** Talk about both your day and theirs to help them open up.

• **Be an active and supportive listener.** Make sure your child knows you are always there to listen and will not overreact to the information they tell you. If your child reports something that is bothering or challenging them, ask them how you can help, and follow through.

KnowBullying is a smartphone app that provides guidance for parents to talk to their children about bullying. (http://1.usa.gov/1D43NPb)

Follow up and provide support

Even after an incident of bullying is resolved, your child may need support and reassurance that bullying will not happen again. Here’s how you can stay involved:

• **Follow up with the school or agency point of contact.** Check in to make sure plans are being followed and no further incidents have been reported.

• **Seek additional resources and support.** Sometimes your child might need support beyond what you or the agency or school can provide. Seek out mental health providers or mentors to help your child build resilience.

• **Get involved in bullying prevention and school climate efforts.** Schools are encouraged to engage parents when they begin planning and implementing bullying prevention efforts. Volunteer to be part of these efforts to help ensure a safe environment for all students.

Bullying in the District of Columbia: What to Do When Your Child is Involved

Parents, guardians, and caregivers play a critical role in preventing and resolving bullying issues for children. This guide can help adults who suspect their child is being bullied or bullying others.

School/agency name: __________________________

Bullying policy URL: __________________________

Bullying point of contact (POC): __________________________

POC contact info: __________________________

bullyingprevention@dc.gov | 202-519-3333
Ask your child to share specifics and how he/she happened. Ask what your child would like to do. Focus on resolving the situation for your child. If your child is able to, ask them to write down what happened in their own words. Assess whether the incident meets the definition of bullying. Be careful not to imply that your child was at fault. Do not blame the victim. For instance, if someone tells you that your child was a bully, the parents of the other child might become angry or aggressive toward you and your child. It is best to use words like, “Let’s work together to make sure this doesn’t happen again.”

Consider who to ask (all adults who were present) and what questions to ask.

When children or teens tell their parents about being bullied, parents’ initial reaction may be to react and feel. Remember that your child will take cues from you on how they should feel. Don’t overreact. React if your child reports any hurt or fear (including sleep problems).

Recognize there are always two sides to a story. Think about how you would react if someone told you that your child had done something wrong. Our tendency is to want to punish the “bad kid.” Some form of reprimand or discipline is often appropriate, but sometimes it is not necessary to resolve a situation and may even make a situation worse. Focus on what is going to help prevent further bullying.

Make a plan of action with your child. If you and your child agrees that school or agency intervention is needed, or if the bullying has continued despite your best efforts, consider filing an appeal. If you believe your child has been the target of bullying:

• Report the incident to the school or agency. Request they investigate and how similar incidents have been handled in the past. Provide as much detail as possible, including the date, time, location, people involved, what was said or done to make your child upset, and your child’s reactions and feelings. Ask how the school plans to address the issue.

• Make a plan of action (including school/program work with the school or another third party as mediators to help resolve the situation. This may mean your child getting more adult supervision in the cafeteria, or having sessions with a school counselor, for example. Often, children and teens do not want or need parents to intervene on their behalf. They want to feel they can solve problems on their own. Work with your child to see whether there is a solution they can work for all involved.

• Consider filing an appeal. If you are not satisfied with the resolution of the investigation, you may also contact the DC Office of Human Rights (http://ohr.dc.gov/). This office may assist in determining what information you need during the process. Ask, for instance, the outcome of an investigation may appeal the decision.

If you have any questions on how to contact your child’s school, please contact us for further information. Visit us online at https://ohr.dc.gov. You may also contact the DC Office of Human Rights at (202) 536-0183 for further information.