

Formative Consequences for Children Who Bully

Bullying is about power and children naturally experiment with their power and may become involved in bullying. The important thing is to help them learn from the experience.

Formative consequences not only provide a clear message that bullying is unacceptable, but also build awareness and skills to promote children's responsibility, and positive leadership (Pepler & Craig, 2000). Formative consequences provide support for children and youth to learn the relationship skills and acquire the insights that they are lacking. In this way, the consequences for bullying can provide an opportunity to educate and support children and youth who are in difficulty. When children bully, their privileges can be withdrawn and replaced by an instructive activity from this list of suggestions below:

To encourage empathy

1. Help your children learn the language of emotions to identify their own feelings and those of others. Help them identify and label feelings of shame, embarrassment, anger, fear, sadness, etc.
2. Have your children draw a picture of what they think it must feel like to be bullied. Talk about the feelings that children who are bullied might feel.
3. Have your children talk with you, a sibling, or another adult about their bullying experiences and the impact it had on them.
4. Have your children watch a movie about bullying (e.g., *Mean Girls*, *Back to the Future*) and encourage them to focus on the feelings of the victimized person. Help them to identify these feelings by looking out for facial expressions, body posture, and tone of voice.
5. Have your children identify instances of bullying in the media (e.g., television, newspapers, radio, magazines, websites) and talk with them about their reactions to these instances.
6. Talk with your children about their own strengths and weaknesses and how they can use power to help, not hurt, others.

To make amends

Bullying is wrong and hurtful. It is a relationship problem that requires a relationship solution. The goal is to repair the relationship in a way that is genuine and caring and restore the relationship to a respectful foundation. Sometimes children aren't at a point where they are able to restore a relationship. At the least, the child needs to find ways to be respectful of other children and their rights to feel safe.

If your children can restore the relationship in a genuine way, without being forced, help them find a way to make amends.

7. If they are sorry for their behaviour and genuinely want to make amends, have your children write a letter or card of apology to the children who were victimized.
8. Encourage your children to make a verbal apology that includes taking responsibility for the behaviour and indicating what they will do to ensure the children who were victimized feel better.

It is important that the children who were victimized want to participate in this process and that the apology is given privately rather than publicly. Apologies conducted in front of others can leave both children feeling embarrassed.

9. Encourage your children to repair or restore property or personal belongings that were damaged as a result of the bullying.

To help your children associate power with kindness and positive activities

Everyone needs to feel that they are being effective in the world and have the power to make things happen, including children and youth. This is what we mean by empowerment. The goal is to help children identify and use their power in positive ways that help and support others.

10. Encourage your children to perform 5 acts of kindness and describe how they felt after completing each act.
11. Encourage your children to observe other children in school or individuals in the community and look for acts of kindness. Have your children describe what they observed and how they think the people felt.
12. Identify your children's strengths and abilities and provide them with opportunities to highlight these skills in ways that help others. For example, if your children excel at soccer, have them assist with this activity with younger children.

If your children have bullied and you are preparing to address it, remember that you have a lot of power over your children. It is essential that you are constructive and avoid using your power aggressively. If you model bullying for your children, it will be difficult for them to develop healthy relationships. Remember – this is an important learning opportunity.