

## **Bullying in Preschool? Yes, Preschool!**

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Bullying in preschool? Most people think of older children when they think of bullying. A preschool teacher in training said she was surprised at how some boys would punch and kick when they thought she wasn't looking. She also noted four-year-old girls ganging up to ridicule other girls. Hitting, pinching and social rejection happens in preschool. It hurts often for life and is at least very confusing to its victims.

Being "mean" is not rare in preschool. However, when one child or a group of children enjoys the discomfort or hurt of another child there is a definite problem. I have personally witnessed a five-year-old girl's pain as she tried to make sense of a group of girls laughing and taunting her consistently on the school bus. Her mother, dying of cancer and her overwhelmed father, did what they could, but felt helpless.

### **Your young child may be being bullied if he/she:**

- is suddenly scared to go to preschool
- complains of stomachaches or headaches for no reason
- comes home with unexplained injuries
- talks about one particular child doing mean things to him
- has trouble concentrating
- avoids eye contact when you ask about school

### **What to do:**

- Communication – Stay calm and avoid judging your child. They may be embarrassed or scared.
- Talk to the teacher – There are lots of children for whom he/she is responsible. Making the teacher aware will cause her to be more vigilant.
- Take advantage of open doors – During normal preschool hours drop by unannounced for a visit. This keeps staff on their toes. Remain kind but consistently interested.
- Suggest or schedule a parent connection meeting for parents in the class of concern – some parents are unaware, unconcerned, or in denial about such things as bullying.

- Bully-proof your child – Give your child tools to stand tall, look the bully in the eye, tell an adult, and avoid being alone.
- Consider changing classrooms – If you have tried many things and are getting nowhere ask about having your child moved or consider moving him to another setting.

Bullying happens even to very young children. Children's books can open the lines of communication with young children on the topic of bullying. Some ideas: *Shrinking Violet* by Cari Best (Melanie Kroupa Books, 2001; *Myrtle* by Tracey Campbell Pearson (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

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