



PARENT RESOURCE

HELPING CHILDREN HANDLE TEASING

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At some point or another, almost all children have to endure teasing from friends, classmates, siblings, etc. For many children, teasing by others is a temporary thing, and they are able to handle it with a minimum amount of difficulty. For other children, however, teasing is more frequent. Some children are more vulnerable to teasing than others, and are singled out for frequent teasing by peers. This may be because the child looks differently than his peers, acts differently, or responds to the teasing in a way that encourages more teasing.

When teasing is frequent, the victims need their parents' help. Teasing can be very painful for children, and it can affect their self-esteem and how they relate to other people. The best thing that parents can do to help children who are being teased is to teach constructive ways to respond to teasing. Here are some things parents can do to help their children handle teasing.

Gather information.

First, parents should try to find out from their children some specifics. For example, parents should try to find out what the teasing is about, who is doing the teasing, where the teasing is occurring, how their children have reacted to different episodes and what occurred afterwards. Parents should try to keep track of such information for a few days to find out what precipitates teasing, if there are things their children may be doing to encourage teasing, and if there seems to be some pattern to it.

Teach appropriate responses.

There are many things children can do to respond to teasing with out teasing back:

Ignore it.

Many teasers quickly give up when they find they have no audience. Parents can teach their children to ignore teasing by turning and walking away without saying a word. Parents should make sure their children know that at first the teaser may try even harder to get a response out of them, and that it's important that they hold their ground and not respond. It shouldn't take long before the teaser gives up.

Develop a quick tongue.

Sometimes a quick response will throw a teaser off track. It is important, however, that this quick response not be in the form of teasing back or name calling. If the taunts are often the same from day to day, parents can teach their children specific responses. For example, to the tease "Your mother wears combat boots," children can reply something like, "That's silly. My mother doesn't even own a pair of boots." Or, if the taunts differ, children can say something like, "I know you're trying to upset me, and it's not going to work no matter what you do."

Practice.

It is important for parents to practice with their children whatever responses they come up with. They should role-play the situation. Parents can try saying things to their children the way the teaser does, and have their children practice their responses. This will not only help children get used to the teasing. As a result of practice, the teasing will become less upsetting. This will also help children develop appropriate ways to respond to the teasing. The more children practice appropriate responses, the more likely they will be to use them when they are teased.

Provide lots of love and encouragement.

Once their children come up with a method that works, parents should support them in their efforts. Parents should make sure they tell their children just how proud they are of them when they attempt to resolve teasing situations.

If the teasing is going on at school or daycare, discuss it with the teacher or child care provider. He or she may be able to help, too. Parents should remember that at some point or another all children are teased. In cases where children are very sensitive to it, or the teasing goes on for a period of time, it is up to the parents to intervene to help their children learn to cope with it.