My kid is a bully, now what?

Dorothy Horton, PsyD, answers your questions in her latest Ask Doctor Dee column.

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Q: My kid is a bully, now what?

A: Bullying is a negative coping mechanism some children use to respond to violence and intimidation in their own lives. Often this behavior is cyclical, meaning it can cause victims to bully others. Classified as “a form of childhood trauma,” bullying can carry over to adulthood if not corrected. This means parents must intervene when they realize their child is a bully.

According to experts, moms and dads should take these acts of intimidation seriously and not make excuses when someone informs them their child is a bully. When an incident occurs, adults should ask their kids what happened and what role they played in the interaction.

In addition, as a way to inspire empathy, parents should encourage children to imagine themselves in the other person’s shoes.

Adults should think about relationship dynamics at home that might have caused their kids to act out. To help change bullying attitudes and behaviors, youngsters must be taught how to confront, challenge and cope with fears and negative thoughts without causing pain to others.

Finally, parents should explain to children that bullying hurts both the person being bullied and the bully because this behavior can trigger long-term mental health problems for both parties.

If kids continue to bully others, cognitive behavior modification therapy may help to change their negative behaviors.

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