

Differences between teasing and bullying

By Justin Coulson |



Many experts argue that there are important differences between teasing and bullying. Theoretically those experts are absolutely correct.

Similarities

Both teasing and bullying usually involve poking fun at someone, ridiculing them in a way that we think is funny, making them look foolish, and generally mocking, taunting, or joking around with them. There are times when teasing and bullying can become physical.

Differences

Teasing generally involves a sense of play and mutual joshing around. Teasing will rarely, if ever, involve religion, race, appearance or other important characteristics.

Bullying does not involve play or mutual joshing around. Bullying is often about religion, race, appearance, or other important characteristics.

Bullying is differentiated from teasing because of intention. Those who bully actually intend to do harm, whereas teasing is supposed to be a 'no harm' game.

The Problem

There is a problem with this logic though. What matters most and is often overlooked, is that it does not actually matter what the aggressor does.

If your children are being ‘teased’ and they don’t like it, the motivation of the teaser is irrelevant. The teasing has become bullying. Your children are perceiving that harm is being done. They are victims of another person’s unkind behavior toward them, however innocent.

A child who is teased day after day, week after week, will eventually begin to become dispirited – or worse. Teasing can be as harmful as bullying, and while theoretically different, the two are easily perceived by a child to be exactly the same thing.

The solution

By possessing a strong sense of self children can bounce back effectively from teasing. (Other articles in this section describe how you can help your child deal with mean friends, deal effectively with teasing, and develop resilience.) By nurturing your relationship with your child, you can aid in his or her success in overcoming teasing

Reporting teasing and bullying

Parents should treat each situation differently. Some children will quickly develop strategies to overcome teasing or bullying. Others will require assistance. Some teasing will disappear as quickly as it started. Other teasing will become chronic and ongoing. Parents should be discerning about becoming involved for two important reasons.

First, involvement can exacerbate the problem. Some children, in perceiving weakness, will do what they can to expose it to even greater degrees. Parental involvement may highlight a child’s weakness.

Second, involvement can undermine a child’s motivation or attempts to create change him or herself.

If you, as a parent, are concerned that teasing is affecting your child it may be helpful to report your concerns. Children should not be involved in the reporting process during the early stages. Usually a discreet conversation with your child’s teacher will be sufficient. Teachers deal with these issues regularly and can typically manage teasing effectively.

A thoughtful approach will often solve difficulties in schoolyard relationships quickly and simply, particularly if parents are honest, well-meaning, and clear in their concerns. In the event that teasing becomes worse, most schools have clear policies outlining their direction in dealing with such issues. Clear and open communication with the school principal will be the most effective way to deal with teasing and bullying should there be a need to take matters further.