



Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Teasing vs. Bullying

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"Jenny and Marcus sitting in a tree... K-I-S-S-I-N-G..." We've all been on the receiving end of being teased and we've all been guilty of teasing someone else too. Usually, when a friend teases us, we laugh it off and move on. But sometimes when one person makes a comment with the intention of teasing someone, the other person may interpret it as hurtful ridicule or even bullying.



Is Teasing OK?

Yes (and no)! Teasing can be okay when the person doing the teasing does it without meanness AND the person who is being teased knows it is not meant to be unkind and interprets it as playful joking. In fact, good-natured teasing can have several positive outcomes:



- **Teasing can build social bonds.** Mutual teasing between two people can create a playful social exchange that helps the individuals connect to one another in a lighthearted and fun way.



- **Teasing can teach social rules.** When a friend says "Hey! Were you born in a barn?" It's the friend's way of saying "Close the door behind you!" without sounding bossy or judgmental.



- **Teasing can help children learn to deal with constructive criticism.** When constructive criticism is delivered in a jest, such as in teasing, it can be easier to take.



- **Teasing can lighten a tense situation.** When someone is dealing with a stressful situation, some humorous teasing can ease some of the stress and lighten the other person's mood.



- **Shared teasing can be fun.** Back-and-forth ribbing between two friends can be entertaining!



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When is Teasing NOT Okay?

Teasing is NOT okay when it is meant to be mean or when the person being teased perceives it as being mean. (Even if the person doing the teasing is not trying to be mean, if the person being teased feels that it is mean, the teasing is NOT OKAY!) It is also not okay when the person doing the teasing does it repeatedly or continues the teasing over a long period of time. When teasing causes hurt feelings, it crosses the line and can be considered bullying (especially if it continues over time). Here are some warning signs that teasing may have gone too far:



- Your child has started crying a lot or cries regularly.



- Your child has become more reserved or quieter than normal.



- Your child doesn't participate in activities that he/she used to enjoy.

- Your child is no longer friends with many of his/her previous friends.



- Your child has started saying negative things about himself/herself.

- Your child complains often of having a stomach ache or "not feeling well."



- Your child suddenly doesn't want to go to school or daycare.

- Your child has difficulty concentrating or completing tasks.

- Your child's grades have unexpectedly dropped.



While good-natured teasing can have some positive benefits, if it crosses the line into bullying, it can have many negative outcomes. If you feel like your child is being teased too much, or that the teasing has crossed the line, talk to your child about his/her feelings regarding the teasing. If you feel your child is being bullied, talk to your child's teacher, guidance counselor, or principal. For more information about bullying, see Handy Handout #280, "Beat Bullying!" and Handy Handout #545, "Cyberbullying."

Resources:

"The Difference Between Teasing & Bullying," accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.preynet.ca/bullying/educators/the-difference-between-teasing-and-bullying>

"The Difference Between Teasing and Bullying," accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/common-challenges/bullying/difference-between-teasing-and-bullying>

"Friendly Teasing or Hurtful Bullying – How Can You Know the Difference?" accessed March 20, 2020, <https://project-hear.us/friendly-teasing-or-hurtful-bullying-how-can-you-know-the-difference/>

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