

A child can become the target of bullying for many reasons, including the way their skin or hair looks. Research shows that teasing and bullying for appearance-related reasons is common. Having skin and hair conditions such as acne, eczema, psoriasis or alopecia can make children stand out from peers and be more likely to be bullied. This often happens because other children do not understand why some of their peers may look different from them.

What Caregivers Need to Know

- Skin conditions can affect the quality of life of children and adolescents, as well as their peer relationships. It is important that caregivers help their child understand their condition to reduce emotional problems like anxiety and depression.
- Help your child understand their condition so that they can explain why they look different. This can help your child make friends and deal with teasing.
- Every child with a skin or hair condition reacts in their own way. Some still make friends easily. Others are more sensitive and may have a harder time making friends and need additional support.
- Some warning signs that your child might be being bullied include:
 - Avoiding school or specific classes at school
 - Getting lower grades than previously on schoolwork
 - Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
 - Frequent head or stomach aches
 - Changes in mood (such as being more cranky than usual)
 - Loss of friends or interest in social activities
 - Unexplained physical injuries
 - Damaged personal belongings
 - Behaviors such as running away from home, self-harming or talking about suicide
- Children who are bullied may at times fight back. For example, they may threaten to touch other peers with the skin that those peers are afraid of. Instead of punishing or encouraging their behavior, try to understand what is happening.

How to Talk with Your Child About Bullying

- If you think your child is being bullied, ask them. Let your child know that it is not their fault and that talking about it is the right thing to do.
- To help your child feel more in control, ask what they think should be done. Then work together on a plan you are both comfortable with. (See the “Helping a Child Who Is Being Bullied” fact sheet at chop.edu/violence.)
- Tell your child to avoid fighting, if possible, and suggest that they walk away from the bully and get help from an adult. If the bullying is happening online, tell your child not to answer any messages from the bully or encourage them to delete the account.
- Depending on your child’s comfort level, have them practice calmly saying why their skin looks different and that it is not something to fear. Then change the focus of the conversation.
- Encourage your child to stick with friends when travelling to and from school, while on the playground, in the lunchroom, and in other areas where there are often fewer adults.

Other Strategies for Handling Bullying Due to Skin/Hair Conditions

- Make sure other adults are aware of the problem
 - If your child has a hair condition, get permission for them to wear a hat at school.
 - Talk to your child's school leaders if there is bullying and come up with a plan to stop it.
 - See the "Helping a Child Who Is Being Bullied" fact sheet.
- Educate your child's community
 - Research shows that other students and adults who take the time to be positive bystanders by supporting victims rather than cheering on bullies often have the most power to stop bullying.
 - Educate bystanders at your child's school by working with school and club leaders on school assemblies and awareness programs like "Wear a Hat to School Day."
- Get help for your child
 - Find children's support groups. Seeing other children who look like your child does and being able to talk to other children can help your child's confidence and self-esteem.
 - Organizations such as Wigs for Kids and Locks of Love offer affordable wigs for children with alopecia and other medical conditions.
 - If your child becomes depressed, stops doing well in school, or doesn't want to go to school or other events, talk to a mental health professional.
- Share these tips with your child
 - Be aware of repeated teasing by others that makes you uncomfortable and know that it is not right for any child or adult to make negative comments about your skin or hair.
 - Say positive things to yourself in your head such as, "I do not deserve to be talked to this way, I can get through this, and things won't always be this way."
 - It is best to avoid fighting back with the bully. Be calm. Try to act as if you do not care. Try walking away or making a joke.
 - Avoid "bullying hot spots" at school. These are places where there are fewer adults around.
 - Tell an adult who can help and support you.

Resources for Families

CHOP Violence Prevention Initiative – chop.edu/violence

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services – stopbullying.gov

Children's Skin Disease Foundation – csdf.org

National Alopecia Areata Foundation – naaf.org

Wigs for Kids – wigsforkids.org

Locks of Love – locksoflove.org

Mental Health Support Websites – infoaboutkids.org; mhasp.org/family-youth

The "All About Bullying" fact sheets are brought to you by the Partner for Prevention Program at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Violence Prevention Initiative, a Hospital-wide effort to interrupt the cycle of violence. For more information about bullying, visit chop.edu/violence.