

# TEASING – HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Most everyone is teased at one time or another. Teasing is a relatively common part of our relationships. Children do not have to be overweight, wear glasses, or suck their thumb to be a victim of teasing – teasing can be about anything. Playful teasing can be fun, constructive, and it can help children develop social skills they will need in adolescence and adulthood. Playful teasing occurs when it causes everyone to smile and laugh, including the person who is being teased. In contrast, hurtful teasing includes ridicule, name-calling, put-downs, and saying or doing annoying things. The person being teased feels sad, angry, or hurt. There is a very fine line between playful and hurtful teasing.

Teasing most commonly occurs on the school bus, on the playground, or in the halls at school because teasers usually need or want an audience to witness their teasing. A teaser will try to target something about your child that is different. Your child could be the tallest in class or wear glasses. But teasing is not just about physical differences. Being the smartest or most reserved kid in class can also make your child a target of a teaser. While you cannot do much to prevent other kids from teasing your child, you can teach him or her how to cope with comments that hurt.

## Responding to Teasing

When a child experiences teasing, it is important to see the problem from the child's point of view. Listen attentively to your child and discuss the teasing in a non-judgmental way. Do not overreact, which can cause the child to overact as well. Convey the message, "You can handle this." Encourage the child to think of ways to deal with the teasing.

Also, let your child know that we all experience teasing at some point in our lives. You can share your own stories of being teased. Let your child know that the teaser is often unhappy or insecure about themselves and teasing is their way of coping. And although that is not necessarily okay, it may help your child understand that teasing is not always about his or her perceived shortcoming.

## Teasing Strategies

- > Using Self-Talk – Encourage children to think about what they can say to themselves when they are in a teasing situation. A child could tell himself, "I can handle this." A child might ask himself, "Is this tease true?" Often, the answer is, "No." He can remind himself of positive qualities to counteract the negative remarks.
- > Ignoring and Not Responding – Displays of anger or tears often invite more teasing. Often, if the teaser does not get a response, it is not as fun to tease.
- > Building "I" Messages – The child expresses how he feels, what has caused him to feel that way, and what he would like others to do differently. For example, a child could say, "I feel upset when you make fun of my glasses. I would like you to stop." This strategy works best in supervised situations such as classrooms. In other situations, it may lead to more teasing when the teaser perceives the child being teased is upset.
- > Incorporating Visualization – Many young children respond well to visualizing words "bouncing off" of them. This image can be created by showing how rubber balls bounce off a person. The child may visualize a protective shield around her that helps the teases "bounce off." This gives the child the message that she can refuse the put-downs.
- > Reframing the Tease – The child can try turning the teasing into a compliment. For example, a child teases about his glasses, calling him "four-eyes." The child being teased could respond, "Thanks for noticing my glasses." Another child may respond to a tease by saying, "That is a great put-down."
- > Agreeing with the Tease – The teaser says, "You are a freckle-face." The teased child responds, "You're right. I have a lot of freckles on my face." This shows the teaser that the child is not a victim.

So? – The response of "so?" to the teaser conveys indifference – that the tease does not matter. Children find this response simple, yet quite effective.