Teasing

Have you heard these names and phrases in your child care? Teasing is very common with young children. At one time or another most children will see both sides—what it's like to tease and be teased. Although teasing is common, it has been found that it can lead to bullying, especially if not addressed with children when they are younger.

Watch what you say to children

Joking and having fun with children is fine, but watch how children react. Joking about something a child is struggling with, such as a fear or speech problems, makes him feel bad. Watch name-calling. The child who is always last doesn't need to be called “Slowpoke.” You set the example for the children. Make sure the joking you do with children is done in a way that won’t hurt anyone’s feelings.

Sometimes activities starts out as a fun game but can lead to teasing. For instance rhyming initial sounds with names can be a fun game that you probably do. But sometimes names rhyme with words that can be hurtful (“Fatty Patty”, “Bossy Joshy”) and used out of context, it can turn into taunting.

Why do children tease?

From the time a child begins to move on her own, she tests the limits to see how far she can go. Teasing becomes part of testing the limits. How many times can I call this child “Stinky” before he starts to cry? What will Susie do if I call her a boy? When the other child gets mad or starts to cry, the child doing the teasing knows her words can get others to react.

Teasing can be used to set aside groups of children. You may see a few children playing together. When another child comes to join them, he is told, “No, you can’t play with us.”

Some children tease because that’s the way they have been taught to talk with others. If a child often hears put-downs at home, from friends, or favorite TV shows, he’s going to do the same thing.

Some children tease kids to give them a sense of power. If Joey teases Sam and Sam reacts with

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Helping the child who is teased

You can’t stop the words from coming out of another person’s mouth, but you can help a child cope with being teased. Children do not know how to negotiate with other children or lack social and problem solving skills, so it is important to assist them in responding to teasing. Let the child know you understand and you’re there to help. Say to him, “Eric, it makes you mad when Jena calls you a ‘cry-baby,’ doesn’t it?” Help him go to Jena and tell her that she hurt his feelings. You may have to help him say the words, but it’s important that she hears that her words hurt another person. Talk with Eric about choosing children to play with who are nice to him.

Coach the child to change his response. We can’t control what others say, but we can choose our response. If the Eric doesn’t react to Jena, it takes all the fun out of teasing. Talk with him about walking away or keeping his focus on his play instead of the teasing, but understand this is very hard for a young child to do.

What to do with a child who teases

Keep your cool. It’s upsetting to hear one child teasing another. Remember, the child doing the teasing is looking for a reaction. Make the child think about what is being said by saying, “Kaliah, why are you calling Ezra a ‘stupid head’? Remember, we don’t hurt our friends.” Try to find out the reason for the name-calling. Is Kaliah just trying to be funny, get the attention of his friends or being cruel?

Talk with children about hurt feelings. Help children who tease to think about being in the other child’s shoes. Ask them how they would feel if someone called them “Shorty” or “Fatso” because of the way they look. Talk about keeping some thoughts to ourselves so we don’t hurt other people.

Teach children about the differences such as why children look different, wear glasses, or dress in a certain way. Children that are viewed as “different” may be teased more than others. When children don’t understand something, they often make fun of it.

Role-playing using puppets or dolls can work as a preventive measure to teach children about “differences” and help them develop strategies to deal with teasing comments. An example would be having a puppet wearing glasses and another puppet teasing the child about the glasses, calling the puppet “Four Eyes”. An effective response to the teasing may be as simple as saying, “Thank you for noticing my new glasses, I like them too!”

Teaching children to stay calm, using relaxation techniques (such as deep breathing or counting to 10), avoiding the teaser, and using distraction are some other strategies teachers can use with children who are teased.

Make sure all children get positive attention from you each day and that you set up some special time during the week to spend with each child. That time should be spent on things he likes doing to help him to feel important.