

Help your child develop a healthy story about themselves.

To make this story, talk with your child about their illness or difference. Have them think about:

- What is different about me?
- What is the same about me?
- Did something happen that made me have this difference?
- If not, why do I have this difference?
- What can I tell other people about what they see?

Help your child think about who they are as a whole person. Consider these questions with your child:

- What is important to me?
- What am I good at?
- What makes me feel proud?
- What are my special qualities and interests?



FMCI
Family Medical
Coping Initiative

The **Family Medical Coping Initiative** is dedicated to improving coping skills for patients and families dealing with medical conditions and care. We provide educational programs for staff and caregivers of Boston Children's Hospital patients and make medical coping resource information available to clinicians and families. Though we are unable to see patients and their families for psychotherapy, we aim to provide support via online webinars, materials, and consultation to staff.

We believe in the power of children and families to grow and make changes that support their own psychological health and wellbeing in the face of medical challenges—throughout the life of the child and the family.

We believe that patients, caregivers, and staff can work together as a team to improve medical experiences for children and their families.



Scan this QR code, with your phone's camera, for the FMCI Family Webinar about this topic.



Boston Children's Hospital

Where the world comes for answers

Helping Your Child Manage Staring, Questions, Teasing and Bullying About Their Medical Illness or Difference

A Practical Guide for Preparing Your Child



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When your child has a medical difference or illness, uses a medical device, or has an appearance difference, they can be subject to curiosity and sometimes unkind actions by peers and adults. The behaviors of others can include staring, questions, teasing, and bullying. This brochure offers practical suggestions for responding to these challenging situations.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE IS STARING

STARING is when someone looks at your child for longer than a normal gaze. It often makes the child feel uncomfortable. Explain to your child that staring often happens when people are curious. Most of the time people are not trying to be mean.

Help your child make a plan. They can:

- Stay confident even if someone is staring.
- Stare back. (Staring at the other person's nose can feel more comfortable than looking at their eyes, but they can't tell the difference!)
- Look back and smile.
- Turn and walk away, with their head held high.



ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Because people are curious, they may ask questions. Your child can prepare and practice answers to typical questions:



DEALING WITH TEASING AND BULLYING

TEASING is often meant to be playful. It can be annoying but can also hurt someone's feelings.

BULLYING involves a repeated pattern of behavior that is meant to cause harm or make another person feel bad and powerless. Remind your child that bullies are looking for a reaction. This can help children plan how to respond or not respond.

Help your child prepare and practice a response to the negative behaviors. They can:

- Think about: "Whose opinion is more important—the other person's or mine?"
- Build armor. Children can think about themselves as having a shield and being strong.
- Develop answers to the mean comments, such as: "Yeah, I have a birthmark." or "Yeah, my wheelchair helps me get around."
- Turn and walk away.

WHEN SHOULD A PARENT GET MORE INVOLVED?

- The bullying is a bigger problem than your child can handle.
- Your child is not sleeping at night.
- Your child has an unexplained injury.
- Your child has frequent headaches or stomachaches.
- Your child has a change in eating habits.
- Your child refuses to go to school or other regularly visited places.



WHAT ADDITIONAL ACTIONS CAN A PARENT TAKE?

- With your child, reach out to their doctor, school staff, clergy, or other supportive adults to help make a plan of action.
- Advocate for changes to the difficult environment or remove your child from it.
- Find a psychotherapist for your child to help them manage their feelings about these experiences.
- Remember that the child who is bullying may need help too.

