

What to Do When Your Child Feels Left Out at School

Feeling left out can range from a painful one-time disappointment to a repeated pattern that needs adult attention. Start by listening for facts before deciding what happened. Ask who was involved, what the child expected, what was said or done, whether this has happened before, and what happened next. Avoid immediately labeling every exclusion as bullying. StopBullying.gov defines bullying as unwanted aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated; intentionally excluding someone from a group can be one form of bullying when those conditions are present.¹ If the event was an isolated social disappointment, help your child identify another way to connect: approach a different peer, join a structured activity, or practice a simple invitation. If the same exclusion keeps happening, especially with humiliation, threats, coercion, or a power imbalance, document the pattern and involve an appropriate school adult. CDC defines school connectedness as feeling that adults and peers at school care about the student and their learning, including feeling supported and that they belong.² Schools can strengthen connectedness through supportive environments and relationship-building practices involving students, staff, and families.³ Help your child identify at least one trusted adult and one realistic place for connection at school. The goal is not to force acceptance from a particular group. It is to understand the pattern, respond proportionately, and help the child build safer, more reciprocal connections.

Did You Know?

- ✓ StopBullying.gov states that purposeful social exclusion can be bullying when it is aggressive, involves a power imbalance, and is repeated or likely to be repeated.¹
- ✓ CDC defines school connectedness as students feeling that adults and peers care about them and their learning and that they are supported and belong.²
- ✓ CDC recommends relationship-building and supportive school environments as ways to strengthen student connectedness.³

Research Sources

1. StopBullying.gov. "What Is Bullying."

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "School Connectedness Helps Students Thrive."

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Enhance Connectedness Among Students, Staff, and Families."

Left-Out Situation Check: What Happened and What Comes Next?

Use this page to separate a one-time disappointment from a repeated pattern and decide on a proportionate next step.

Child's name: _____ Date: _____

School setting: _____ People involved: _____

1. Describe What Happened - About 2 Minutes

Record what was said or done without adding conclusions about motives.

What happened: _____

2. Check the Pattern - About 2 Minutes

Ask whether this was one event or something that has happened repeatedly with the same people or group.

How often: _____

3. Look for Power or Harm - About 2 Minutes

Note humiliation, threats, pressure, deliberate exclusion, or a power imbalance that changes the response needed.

What I noticed: _____

4. Identify a Connection Option - About 3 Minutes

Choose one peer, activity, group, or school adult that offers a realistic alternative source of support or belonging.

Connection option: _____

5. Decide the Next Adult Step - About 1 Minute

Choose whether to coach, observe, document, or contact a teacher, counselor, or administrator about a repeated pattern.

Next step: _____

What Parents Can Say: "I'm glad you told me. Let's figure out exactly what happened, whether it's a pattern, and what next step will help you feel supported."