

Which words are best?

As children grow, they should learn the correct terms associated with CLP. This will make it easier for them to answer questions with confidence.

The goal is to find words that tell the truth in a comfortable way. Families can develop a “script” for a child. The script might have three parts:

1. Acknowledge the difference.
2. Give a brief, simple explanation.
3. Move on.

For example, a child might say, “Yes, I have a scar on my lip. I had surgery when I was little for cleft lip and palate. It doesn’t hurt me. Do you want to go play?”

Parents can help a child decide which peers to share more or fewer details with. In some situations, a child can be very brief (as with the sample sentence, above). A child may choose to share more details with close friends.

How can parents help with teasing?

Unfortunately, teasing does happen. It is common for parents to feel angry with the children who tease or even angry with their parents.

First, talk with your child. Ask how she/he feels about the situation and wants to handle it. You could find out: Who did the teasing? Was it a friend, a classmate, a stranger, or a school bully? What was it about? Was it a mean comment, a joke that went bad, or a remark based on lack of understanding?

After talking it through, you and your child can decide how to respond, both now and later. A child might choose one of the following options, based on the situation:

Don’t engage at all.

- Ignore it/walk away.

Engage briefly.

- Tell the person “Please stop” or “That’s not nice,” or
- Provide information, like, “After having surgery, the body heals with a bumpy red line which is a scar,” or
- Remind the teaser that these experiences are unique and show strength, not weakness.

Whatever the response, it is important to do it with confidence, both in tone of voice and body language.

Summer camp can be a great resource for teasing. Some kids enjoy going to camp for kids born with CLP. The kids at camp often do a lot of sharing about how they handle teasing and bullying. These kids also tend to stay connected throughout the year.

What about more serious situations?

If your child is being bullied, or if the teasing doesn’t stop, it may be helpful to involve other children’s parents, a teacher or school administrator, or a health care professional.

Professionals on a child’s craniofacial team may be able to help with a specific situation. Federal law protects students from harassment based on a medical condition. Many states also have laws that protect students from bullying.

Parents should remind their child to always talk with parents after being teased or bullied. A child can talk about what happened and how she/he handled it.

How can parents speak with others?

Many parents find it helpful and reassuring to talk with other parents of kids born with cleft lip and palate. There are many support groups on social media. Another option is to connect with a family in your area. Ask the coordinator on your child’s team for information.

Where do we go from here?

The ideas in this factsheet are just a starting point. There are many other resources that can help a child feel better about handling social situations. Kids can benefit from this support, even for situations that don’t seem “serious.”

Local resources might include teachers and other school personnel, a child’s pediatrician, members of the cleft team, and psychologists or counselors.



Special thanks: Members of the ACPA Learning Resources Committee

Subject Matter Expert: Celia E. Heppner, PsyD

Editors in Chief: Ron Aronovich, DMD and Lynn Fox, MA, MEd, CCC-SLP

Managing Editor: Leanne Magee, PhD

Associate Editors: Doug, P. Olson, DMD, MS and Carol J. Ritter, RN, BSN

Writing Consultant: Amy Mendillo

revised March 2018