

Bullying and What to Do About It

Although it has always been around, bullying should never be accepted as normal behavior. The feelings experienced by victims of bullying are painful and lasting. Bullies, if not stopped, can progress to more serious, antisocial behavior. Recent incidents of school violence show that bullying can have tragic consequences for individuals, families, schools, and entire communities.

Recognize it (for what it is)

Bullying is aggressive behavior. A child is targeted by one or more youths with repeated negative actions over a period of time. These are intentional attempts to cause discomfort or injury and can include name-calling, making faces, obscene gesturing, malicious teasing, threats, rumors, physical hitting, kicking, pushing, and choking. More subtle is simply excluding a child from the group. Generally, bullying occurs when there's an imbalance of power favoring the bully. Victims usually feel they don't have the strength to defend themselves. Make no mistake; bullying is a form of violence that shouldn't be tolerated.

See the Scope of the Problem

- The Journal of the American Medical Association recently reported that one-third of U.S. students experience bullying, either as a target or a perpetrator.
- A high level of parents (47%) and teachers (77%) report children victimized by bullies.
- Bullying and violence cause 160,000 fearful children to miss one or more school day each month.
- Only a small percentage of children believe that telling adults will help.
- Children generally feel that adult intervention is ineffective and will only bring more harassment.

Spot the Bullies

They are both boys and girls. Boys bully more often and more physically than girls. Girls are more likely to use rejection and slander. Bullies usually pick on others out of frustration with their own lives. They target other children because they need a victim who is weaker than them. While they may feel uneasy about it, many children tease their peers simply to go along with the crowd. Bullies sometimes suffer from depression. They're often from homes where harsh punishment and inconsistent discipline are used. Sixty percent of male bullies will be arrested by age 24.

Know Their Targets

Girls and boys alike are targeted; those who are physically different in race, body size or clothing; those with disabilities; or those who are dealing with sexual orientation issues. Both groups are kids who are typically anxious, insecure, and suffering from low self-esteem. This makes them good targets. There are few differences among racial and ethnic groups in the numbers of students being bullied. White and black students are more likely to report it than

What You Need to Know...



Others. Three million U.S. teenagers have serious problems in school because they're taunted with anti-gay slurs. According to several surveys, four out of five gay and lesbian students say they don't know one supportive adult at school. They say teachers ignore harassment 97% of the time.

Take Steps to Stop It

- Start early. Parent/child talks are critical. Teach kids to respect others before they start school and continue to talk about this topic on an ongoing basis. Even small acts of teasing should be stopped in their tracks. Don't fail to correct this kind of behavior due to a child's young age. This is exactly when to stop it.
- Teach your children how to be assertive. Encourage your children to express their feelings clearly, say no when they feel uncomfortable or pressured, stand up for themselves without fighting, and walk away in dangerous situations. Bullies are less likely to intimidate children who are confident and resourceful.
- Stop bullying when you see it. Adults who remain silent when children are bullying others give permission to the behavior and thereby encourage it.
- Tell your children to take action when they see bullying behavior. Tell them to speak out against the bully and inform a teacher if the behavior doesn't stop. Bullying continues only when we allow it to.
- Communicate clear policies and consequences. Bullying is less likely in schools where adults are involved and firm about stopping bullying behaviors. Send out a clear message at your school that bullying will have negative consequences.
- Team up. Work with your PTA or local mental health agency, such as Mental Health America of Wisconsin, to make sure that schools treat bullying as violence. Help them develop programs to prevent bullying and promote safe school environments.

For more information, visit our website at www.mhawisconsin.org.

Mental Health America of Wisconsin is a United Way of Greater Milwaukee Agency.



www.mhawisconsin.org