

Bullying: Tips for Parents

Recent incidents of school violence demonstrate that bullying can have tragic consequences for individuals, families, schools and entire communities. Bullying is painful, lasting and related to low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, anger, and other mental and physical health problems. Because of the increased risk of suicide associated with bullying--for victims and perpetrators alike--open dialogue and support are crucial in ensuring safety for our children and teenagers.

Recognize It

Bullying is aggressive behavior. It occurs when a child is targeted by one or more youth with repeated negative actions over a period of time. These are intentional attempts to cause discomfort or injury and can include name-calling, obscene gesturing, malicious teasing, exclusion, threats, rumors, physical hitting, kicking, pushing and choking. Cyber-bullying is also a real and growing problem today. Make no mistake: bullying of any kind is a form of violence that should not be tolerated.

See the Scope of the Problem

- The Journal of the American Medical Association reports that one-third of U.S. students experience bullying, either as a target or a perpetrator.
- More than 70 percent of teachers and students have witnessed bullying in their schools.
- 28 percent of students, in 6th through 12th grade, report being bullied.
- Only a small percentage of children who are bullied, report it. The reason is often because they do not believe adults will help them.

Spot the Bullies

- Both boys and girls bully. Boys bully more often and are more likely to experience physical bullying. Girls are more likely to experience emotional bullying and sexual harassment.
- 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.
- Bullying is linked to depression. Bullies are more likely to have social influence and be overly concerned with popularity. They are also more like to have low self-esteem, be easily pressured by others, be less able to identify with the feelings of others, view violence in a positive way, and have difficulty in following rules.

Know Their Targets

- Those who are seen as being different from their peers or are weak, depressed, less popular, or unable to get along with peers are more likely to become victims of bullying.
- Females in high school (22 percent) are twice as likely as male high school students (11 percent) to report being cyberbullied. They are also more likely to report being bullied on school property (22 percent to 18 percent).
- LGBTQ youth are at special risk of being bullied; up to 85 percent report having been verbally harassed, and 40 percent physically assaulted.



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Take Steps to Stop It Checklist

- Start early. Parent/child talks are essential. 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.
- Stop bullying when you see it. Adults who remain silent when bullying occurs are encouraging it and making it worse.
- Listen and support children who speak up. Telling an adult about bullying is not easy for children. If a child comes to you seeking assistance with bullying, spend time listening to them and provide affirmation and support before taking actions. Read through and discuss our Bullying Checklist with your child as a resource.
- Recognize the signs of depression. Youth who experience persistent bullying can develop signs of depression like sadness, isolation, poor concentration and sleeping problems. These symptoms can affect their relationships and school performance. Many children do not recognize or speak up about their emotional needs. Make sure to reach out and get them help when you see these signs.
- 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 MHA affiliate to make sure that schools treat bullying as violence. Help them develop programs to prevent bullying and promote safe school environments.

Other Resources: You can find more helpful information about bullying at: www.stopbullying.gov

References

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