

Bullying Prevention

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SUMMARY: THE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Bullying is a problem:

The American Medical Association has determined that bullying is a public-health issue with short and long term consequences for everyone involved. A study reported by Time magazine (April 18, 05) states that 47% of sixth-graders said they were bullied at least once in the course of five school days. Bullying is the first form of violence that many experience, and it isn't fun. Consequently, children attempt to avoid the experiences, resulting in increased absenteeism. Victims report being unhappy, often get lower grades, and occasionally retaliate. Bullies may be reasonably successful in school, but frequently don't do well as adults. Overall, everyone is affected by a classroom climate that allows bullying, because such a climate is not conducive to learning. Children learn best in environments where they feel safe, respected, and are encouraged to take risks.

Definition:

Dr Olweius maintains that bullying is defined by:

- Systematic, frequent behavior
- An unequal distribution of power
- An intent to dominate, humiliate, or intimidate

Bullying can take many forms in addition to the obvious physical intimidation, including name calling, and using e-mail to promote and spread derogatory rumors.

Causes:

In general, bullies are using behavior that they have determined will gain them status and feelings of control. They usually seek out victims they can successfully bully. Victims do not "ask for it" but there is a group of victims who are not socially successful, and may annoy others, perhaps in an attempt to gain attention from their peers. Bullies use this annoying behavior to justify their own actions. To many bullies, their victims were "asking for it."

Responses:

There are five major levels of a school's response to this problem:

1. **School Wide:** the school establishes a policy about bullying, and an overall response that lets everyone know that bullying is not accepted. The school also sets up a team, or perhaps uses an already existing or established team such as a PBS team that is already addressing management issues, to develop, implement, and monitor programs intended to reduce bullying. If the school has a good behavior management program in place, then the efforts to eliminate bullying will be easily incorporated.
2. **Teaching strategies and classroom climate:** the teachers can identify and teach skills to cope with bullying. The teachers can also develop and implement activities that promote caring, sharing, cooperation, respect and acceptance, to name a few of the aspects of positive classroom climate.
3. **Involving the Parents:** Parents can help develop the school wide program and the school's management plan. They also need to know the school's policies. The parents of both the victims and the bullies need to be involved (and may need guidance) in teaching their children more helpful behaviors.
4. **Response hierarchy:** the school develops a set of responses to handle each incident of bullying. These may include more supervision and loss of privileges for the bully and increased support for the victim. More difficult problems may require an individualized plan.
5. **Intensive individual interventions:** these provide bullies and victims with individual support through meetings with students and parents, counseling, and sustained child and family supports. The goal is to create a culture in which adults stop all bullying immediately, all students learn positive behaviors and become a part of the anti-bullying solution.



Warning Signs that a Child is Being Bullied

What is bullying?

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting and/or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation using gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by phone or computer e-mail (cyberbullying).^{*} Many children, particularly boys and older children, do not tell their parents or adults at school about being bullied. It is important that adults are vigilant to possible signs of bullying.

Warning signs

Possible warning signs that a child is being bullied:

- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings;
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches;
- Has few, if any friends, with whom he or she spends time;
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers (such as clubs);
- Takes a long, "illogical" route when walking to or from school;
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school;
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home;
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments;
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams;
- Experiences a loss of appetite; or
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem.

What to do if you suspect that your child is being bullied?

If your child shows any of these signs, this does not necessarily mean that he or she is being bullied, but it is a possibility worth exploring. What should you do? Talk with your child *and* talk with staff at school to learn more.

1. Talk with your child. Tell your child that you are concerned and that you'd like to help. Here are some questions that can get the discussion going:

Some direct questions:

- "I'm worried about you. Are there any kids at school who may be picking on you or bullying you?"
- "Are there any kids at school who tease you in a mean way?"
- "Are there any kids at school who leave you out or exclude you on purpose?"

Some subtle questions:

- "Do you have any special friends at school this year? Who are they? Who do you hang out with?"
- "Who do you sit with at lunch and on the bus?"
- "Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why don't you like them? Do they ever pick on you or leave you out of things?"

^{*}Children with disabilities may be at a higher risk of being bullied than other children.

2. Talk with staff at your child's school. Call or set up an appointment to talk with your child's teacher. He or she will probably be in the best position to understand the relationships between your child and other peers at school. Share your concerns about your child and ask the teacher such questions as:

- "How does my child get along with other students in his or her class?"
- "With whom does he or she spend free time?"
- "Have you noticed or have you ever suspected that my child is bullied by other students?" Give examples of some ways that children can be bullied to be sure that the teacher is not focusing only on one kind of bullying (such as physical bullying).

Ask the teacher to talk with other adults who interact with your child at school (such as the music teacher, physical education teacher, or bus driver) to see whether they have observed students bullying your child.

If you are not comfortable talking with your child's teacher, or if you are not satisfied with the conversation, make an appointment to meet with your child's guidance counselor or principal to discuss your concerns.

If you obtain information from your child or from staff at your child's school that leads you to believe that he or she is being bullied, take quick action. Bullying can have serious effects on children.

If, after talking with your child and staff at his or her school, you *don't* suspect that your child is being bullied, stay vigilant to other possible problems that your child may be having. Some of the warning signs above (e.g., depression, social isolation, and loss of interest in school) may be signs of other serious problems. Share your concerns with a counselor at your child's school.

References

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. NY: Blackwell.

Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. (1999). *The Bullying Prevention Program: Blueprints for violence prevention*. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.



How to Talk with Educators at Your Child's School About Bullying: Tips for Parents of Bullied Children

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power and strength. Parents are often reluctant to report to educators that their child is being bullied. Why?

- Parents may be unsure how best to help their child and may be afraid that they will make the situation worse if they report bullying.
- They may be embarrassed that their child is being bullied.
- Sometimes, children ask parents not to report bullying.
- Parents may fear being seen as overprotective.
- They may believe that it is up to their child to stop the bullying.

Children and youth often need help to stop bullying. Parents should never be afraid to call the school to report that their child is being bullied and ask for help to stop the bullying. Students should not have to tolerate bullying at school any more than adults would tolerate similar treatment at work.

The school's responsibility

All children are entitled to courteous and respectful treatment by students and staff at school. Educators have a duty to ensure that students have a safe learning environment. Fortunately, most educators take their responsibilities to stop bullying very seriously. Several states have passed anti-bullying laws and require public schools to have an anti-bullying program in place. Ask for a copy of your school's policy or check the student handbook to see whether your school has policies that will help resolve the problem.

Working with your child's school to solve the problem

If your child tells you that he or she has been bullied or if you suspect your child is being bullied, what can you do?

- Keep a written record of all bullying incidents that your child reports to you. Record the names of the children involved, where and when the bullying occurred, and what happened.
- Immediately ask to meet with your child's classroom teacher and explain your concerns in a friendly, non confrontational way.
- Ask the teacher about his or her observations:
 - Has he or she noticed or suspected bullying?
 - How is your child getting along with others in class?
 - Has he or she noticed that your child is being isolated, excluded from playground or other activities with students?
- Ask the teacher what he or she intends to do to investigate and help to stop the bullying.
- If you are concerned about how your child is coping with the stress of being bullied, ask to speak with your child's guidance counselor or other school-based mental health professional.
- Set up a follow-up appointment with the teacher to discuss progress.
- If there is no improvement after reporting bullying to your child's teacher, speak with the school principal.
- Keep notes from your meetings with teachers and administrators.

What can you expect staff at your child's school to do about bullying?

- School staff should investigate the bullying immediately. After investigating your concerns, they should inform you as to what they plan to do about it.

- School staff should never have a joint meeting with your child and the child who bullied them. This could be very embarrassing and intimidating for your child. They should not refer the children to mediation. Bullying is a form of victimization, not a conflict. It should not be mediated.
- Staff should meet with your child to learn about the bullying that he or she has experienced. They should develop a plan to help keep your child safe, and they should be watchful for any future bullying. Educators should assure your child that they will work hard to see that the bullying stops.
- School personnel should meet with the children who are suspected of taking part in the bullying. They should make it clear to these children that bullying is against school rules and will not be tolerated. If appropriate, they should administer consequences (such as a loss of recess privileges) to the children who bullied and notify their parents.
- Educators and parents should be careful not to “blame the victim.” Bullying is never the “fault” of the child who is bullied, and he or she shouldn’t be made to feel responsible for being bullied. However, if your child is impulsive or lacks social skills, talk with a school counselor. It is possible that some students who are bullying your child are reacting out of annoyance. This doesn’t make the bullying right, but it may help to explain why your child is being bullied.
- Give the school reasonable time to investigate and hear both sides of the story. Sometimes, a child who bullies will make false allegations about a child as an additional way of bullying them. Educators should not jump to hasty conclusions and assign blame without a thorough assessment of the situation. This entire process should not take longer than a week.
- If bullying continues, write to the school’s principal or administrator and include evidence from your notes to back up your complaint. Putting a complaint in writing is important so there is a record of your concern.
- Most administrators and staff are responsive to bullying concerns. However, if your school administrator is unable or unwilling to stop the bullying, write to your school superintendent for assistance.
- Be persistent. You may need to keep speaking out about the bullying that your child experiences.

When should law enforcement become involved?

- Consider involving the police if another child has physically assaulted your child or is seriously threatening him or her with bodily injury.
- If the problem persists or escalates and your school officials are unable to stop the bullying, you may want to consult an attorney.
- Ask the school to keep a written record of all offenses committed against your child in case law enforcement officials need the information for further complaints.

Bullying prevention

- Bullying happens in every school, but with an effective bullying prevention program, bullying can be reduced. If your child is being bullied, chances are that there are other children in the school who are having similar experiences.
- If your school does not have official anti-bullying policies or an active bullying prevention program, work with other parents and your school officials to develop one.



What Should I Do If I'm Bullied?

What is bullying?

Bullying happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose. The person being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself. Usually, bullying happens over and over.

Sometimes bullying is easy to notice, such as with hitting or name calling, and other times it's hard to see, like with leaving a person out or saying mean things behind someone's back. Both boys and girls bully, and both boys and girls get bullied. Bullying is not fair, and it hurts.

How to deal with bullying:

- Tell your parents or other trusted adults. They can help stop the bullying.
- If you are bullied at school, tell your teacher, school counselor, or principal. Telling is not tattling.
- Don't fight back. Don't try to bully those who bully you.
- Try not to show anger or fear. Students who bully like to see that they can upset you.
- Calmly tell the student to stop...or say nothing and then walk away.
- Use humor, if this is easy for you to do. (For example, if a student makes fun of your clothing, laugh and say, "Yeah, I think this shirt is kind of funny-looking, too.")
- Try to avoid situations in which bullying is likely to happen. You might want to
 - Avoid areas of the school where there are not many students or teachers around.
 - Make sure you aren't alone in the bathroom or locker room.
 - Sit near the front of the bus.
 - Don't bring expensive things or lots of money to school.
 - Sit with a group of friends at lunch.
 - Take a different route through hallways or walk with friends or a teacher to your classes.

Why don't some kids tell when they see bullying?

- They may not want others to think they are “tattling.”
- They may be afraid that the kids who bully will pick on them next.
- They may think that their friends will make fun of them for trying to help.

Telling is very important! Reporting that someone is getting bullied or hurt in some other way is NOT “tattling.” Adults at school can help. Ask them to help keep you safe after telling. Explain to your friends that bullying is NOT fair and encourage them to join in helping!

What if the bullying doesn't happen at school?

- If there is an adult around, report the bullying to an adult (your youth group leader, minister, or sports coach).
- No matter where the bullying happens, you should talk to your parents about bullying that you see or know about. Ask them for their ideas about how to help.

We ALL must do our part! Kids who are bullied deserve to feel safe and welcome at school and in their neighborhoods. All kids do! TAKE A STAND. LEND A HAND. STOP BULLYING NOW! Check out other activities at www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov for more ideas about how you can “lend a hand” to stop bullying.

References

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying At School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

(Adapted from a Saint Paul Public Schools Posting)

HOW BAD IS THE BULLYING PROBLEM?

Bullying is an international problem. In the Minnesota Department of Education Student Survey in 2000, 74% of student's 8-11 years old and 86% of student's 12-15 years old reported that bullying was a problem at their school. Other studies show that nationally:

- 80% of students are bullied at some time during the school year
- 15% are bullied on a regular basis
- 43% of students fear bullying and harassment at school
- 50% of fights at school are in retaliation for bullying
- 15% of all absenteeism is directly related to fears of being bullied
- bullying is on the increase in schools nationally

BULLYING VS. HARASSMENT

Harassment is a legal term. It involves bothering someone because of his or her gender, race religion, or disability. Bullying may be harassment if the victims are members of a protected group or is sexual in nature.

WHAT CAN OUR SCHOOLS DO ABOUT BULLYING?

- conduct a bully survey of students and staff
- have a school discipline plan that clearly addresses bullying
- educate staff and families about bullying and how to intervene effectively
- provide an anti-bullying curriculum
- have adequate staff supervision before and after school, on the playground and in the lunch room
- provide supervised games, activities, and equipment for recess
- establish a procedure for reporting bullying
- establish an anonymous bully tip-line
- have consistent consequences for bullying
- help bully victims through coaching and counseling

HOW CAN STUDENTS HELP?

- teach them that it is essential to report bullying
- teach them to speak up to bullies as a group
- teach them to be assertive and support victims of bullying

It is critical to help children feel safe when reporting a bully. Most students feel that reporting bullying to an adult doesn't help and some children think that reporting a bully will only make the bullying worse.

HELPING VICTIMS OF BULLYING

1. AFFIRM THE CHILD

"You were right to tell me about this." "I'm glad you asked me to help you with this."

2. ASK QUESTIONS

"Tell me more about what happened." "Has this happened before?" "Did anyone try to help you?"

3. ASSESS THE STUDENT'S SAFETY

Determine what the child needs in order to feel and be safe now.

4. TAKE ACTION

Talk to the school counselor or administrator.

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE A VICTIM OF BULLYING

- frightened to walk to school
- schoolwork is going downhill
- has damaged clothing, etc.
- becoming withdrawn
- starts fighting with peers or friends
- has headaches, stomachaches, or other stress symptoms
- cries in bed at night
- having nightmares
- possessions or money is missing

unexplained bruises, cuts, etc

STANDING TALL.....Parent's Page

Is Your Child Bullied?

- When returning from school, has clothing which is torn or in disarray. Has bruises, cuts, or scratches which he can not readily explain.
- Does not want to go to school in the morning. Complains of stomach or head aches.
- Goes the long way to school.
- Has sleep disturbances—can't sleep, wakes often, nightmares
- Becomes uninterested in school work.
- Appears sad/depressed, has mood swings.
- Seems to be a loner—few friends, if any
- Lacks self-confidence, is shy or timid.

If your child exhibits any of these behaviors, he/she may be bullied. Talk to them about bullying. You may never know unless you ask.



Reporting the Incident

Here are a few tips if you are a parent who needs to report bullying to a school.

- Write down what your child says so you can remember the details.
- Don't let the child talk you out of getting involved.
- Talk with the teacher first. Then speak with others as necessary.
- Do not contact the bully or his/her parents directly.
- Keep an open line of communication with the school to monitor progress.

Always remember, a parent is a child's strongest advocate!

Parents Helping Victims

- Listen to your child. Treat the problem seriously.
- Remain calm.
- Be supportive of your child. Don't blame the victim.
- Don't tell your child to hit back. Hitting back is against school rules.
- Instead of hitting, teach your child the proper steps of reporting bullying which include telling a teacher what behavior is happening, who is doing it, and how he needs the adult to respond so he feels safe.
- Report the incident(s) immediately to the school.

Bully Characteristics

- Dominates family members. Uses threats to get his way. Intimidates brothers/sisters and/or kids in the neighborhood
- Brags about how he is superior to other kids.
- Has a quick temper, is easily frustrated, and acts impulsively. Doesn't follow rules well and is impatient when made to wait.
- Cheats
- Is defiant and/or aggressive toward adults, both at home and at school.
- Participates in criminal behavior (stealing, vandalism). Hangs out with kids that act the same way.



Helping the Bully

Children who bully their classmates are at risk for anti-social behavior as adults. In a study, 60% of boys who were middle school bullies had at least one criminal conviction by age 24. Here are some ways to intervene:

- Don't deny the problem or minimize it, treat it seriously.
- Don't believe everything your child tells you. Check out the facts.
- Try to find out why your child is exhibiting bullying behavior—get professional help if necessary.
- Let your child know that bullying isn't tolerated.
- Don't model bullying behavior (threats, slaps, etc.)