

Bullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a form of violence common among children. Bullying behavior has been studied in depth by social scientists, who say its key component is “physical or psychological intimidation that occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse.” Bullying typically consists of direct behaviors - such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, and stealing – that are initiated by one or more students against a victim or victims. In addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be indirect such as spreading rumors that cause victims to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion. Although boys who bully typically engage in direct bullying methods, girls who bully are apt to use more subtle, indirect strategies. There are three forms of bullying:

Physical: the most commonly known form; includes hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, and taking personal belongings

Verbal: includes taunting, malicious teasing, name-calling, and making threats

Psychological: involves spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, and engaging in social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation

The Victim: Signs and Symptoms:

- Rather than choosing to go out with friends your child prefers to stay at home
- Taking the bus is no longer an option. Your child pleads with you to drive him to school
- Unexplained bruises or cuts
- Increased sadness or anxiety
- Comes home from school with clothes that are torn or with damaged books
- Appears reluctant to go to school, complaining repeatedly of headaches or stomach pains
- Chooses an “illogical” route for going to and from school
- Loses interest in school work and his grades suffer
- Requests money from you to meet the bully’s demands and might even report to stealing money from you or other family members
- Are typically anxious, insecure, and cautious and suffer low self-esteem, rarely defending themselves or retaliating when confronted
- They may lack social skills and friends and thus are often socially isolated
- They tend to be weaker than their peers

The Bully: Signs and Symptoms:

- Intimidates siblings or kids in the neighborhood
- Brags about his actual or imagined superiority over other kids
- Is hot tempered, easily angered, impulsive and has low frustration
- Has difficulty conforming to rules and tolerating adversities and delays
- Displays antisocial or criminal behavior, often at a relatively young age
- May have the need to feel powerful and in control
- Seems to have little empathy for their victims and often defends their actions by saying that their victims provoked them in some way
- May have come from a home in which physical punishment is used – children are taught to strike out physically as a way to handle problems
- Parental warmth is frequently lacking
- Are generally defiant or oppositional toward adults, and may be apt to break school rules
- Appear to have little anxiety and possess strong self-esteem

What can Parents of the Victim Do?

- Talk to your middle school child to help you remain aware of potentially threatening situations
- Contact your child's teachers periodically for classroom updates
- Look for symptoms such as reluctance to go to school, unusual anxiety, sleep disturbances, noticing belongings that are missing or come home ripped
- Listen carefully to your child's report of being bullied. Be sympathetic and take the problem seriously. Be careful not to over/under react
- Do not blame the victim
- Get professional help if you feel your child needs it
- Encourage your child to keep talking to you. Spend extra time with him
- Remember that hitting back is not a choice at school and should not be encouraged. In a school with a "zero tolerance policy" for physical aggression, encouraging your child to hit back will get him suspended
- Encourage your child to walk away and tell an adult if he feels someone is about to hurt him
- Talk about safe ways to act in situations that might be dangerous. For example, identify a safe space in school in case he is pursued by a bully. Encourage him to walk with other students through the hallways. Discuss which adults he can go to within the school that will be able to help
- Brainstorm and practice strategies with your child to avoid further victimization
- Help your child boost his self-esteem

What can Parents of the Bully Do?

- Take the problem seriously. Avoid denial thinking such as "Boys will be boys."
- Listen carefully and check out the facts, do not believe everything your child tells you. Children who bully are good at manipulating adults
- Explore the reason for your child's negative behavior. Get professional help if necessary for your child/or your family
- Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously, and that you will not tolerate such behavior in the future
- Develop a clear and simple system of family rules. Offer frequent praise and reinforcement
- Follow through with appropriate consequences if the behavior persists. Do not use physical punishment
- Spend more time with your child and monitor his behavior closely. Find out who his friends are, where they spend their time, and what activities they engage in

Resources:

<http://www.bullybeware.com/tips.html>

<http://www.antibullying.net>

<http://www.childsafetyexperts.com/school/school-bullies.shtml>