

Dealing with the Tough Issues...Bullies

“Bullying” is another name for harassment. Bullying can be physical—one or more students hurting another. More often, bullying is verbal and includes persistent teasing, ridicule or talking about another person.

Studies show that both physical and verbal bullying can have serious emotional effects. Children who have been the victims of bullying often report that it affects all aspects of their lives, including their ability to learn. In fact, students who drop out of school list “fear” as one of the main reasons for leaving.

Who Gets Bullied?

The problem is more widespread than many parents believe. Nearly 90 percent of fourth – eighth graders have witnessed bullying—and about one in five children has been the victim of bullying.

Children who are most likely to be victims of bullying are often those who are shy, lack self-confidence or look different, either in appearance or in clothing. Overweight girls or boys who are small for their age are often bullied.

Bullies also seem to target children who respond to their taunts. Girls who cry easily or boys who seem to have a short temper are often the victims of bullying.

What Can I Do If My Child is a Victim of Bullying?

1. Watch for symptoms. Children who are the victims of bullying usually start avoiding school. Their grades may drop. They may withdraw from activities. They may also come home with unexplained bruises or torn clothing. Pay attention if your child seems to need extra money or supplies—these may be going to a bully.
2. Talk and listen. Encourage your child to tell you about what goes on in school. Also ask questions about the trip to and from school.
3. Let the school know. Keep a written record of the times your child is bullied. This will help you show that the bullying is part of a pattern and not a one-time event. Make sure school officials know about these incidents as soon as possible.
4. Give your child some ways of responding to bullies. Since a bully is most often looking for a reaction, children should try to develop ways to stand up for themselves verbally without losing their temper.

What Should I Do If I Suspect My Child Is the Bully?

1. Talk clearly about the behavior you expect. Let your child know that your family does not tolerate behavior that hurts other people.
2. Avoid physical punishments. There is some evidence that it may lead bullies to more aggressive behavior. Instead, try time out or limiting privileges.
3. Reduce the amount of television violence your child sees. Some children are more susceptible than others to televised violence. Limiting or eliminating the televised violence may help.

Remember...Too often children who are bullied suffer in silence. Only by talking about the problem of bullying can parents and schools start to address this issue.