

PARENT INFORMATION

Bullying Prevention

Bullying: A Code of Silence

There is a hidden culture of aggression that has become commonplace in schools. Boys demonstrate bullying through direct, overt, open attacks and in-front-of-your-face behaviors while girls bully more by indirect, covert, subversive, and behind-the-back encounters. Bullying, derived from the word, mobbing, has always been with us. It is an old phenomenon. It is, however, on the increase. With parents spending 10-12 hours less per week supervising their children as compared with the 1970's, and with the influence of screen time (television, video games and internet), bullying or peer abuse, is dominating the attention of our teachers and administrators and overall culture in our schools. Whether it is relational bullying, social ostracism, name-calling, threatening or gossiping behaviors, bullying is represented by repeated behavior and power differential. Professor Dan Olweus, a Scandinavian researcher, has been researching bullying since the 1970's. He defines bullying in the following way: *a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Such negative actions include intentionally inflicting, or attempting to inflict injury or discomfort upon another.*

Interest became heightened in Norway in 1982 when three school children killed themselves after being bullied. Since that time, Dr. Olweus has been researching bullying in Norway and Sweden and throughout the world: England, Germany, Canada and the United States. Bullying continues to pick up momentum with the number of school shootings and attention to suicides linking the incidents to malicious teasing and taunting (bullycide).

There is a clear message being set by states that bullying will not be tolerated. The era of boys-will-be-boys and the new trend, girls-will-be-girls, is over. At least 12 states have enacted anti-bullying legislation with three others (Illinois, Oregon and New York) having it in the legislative pipeline. They are Georgia, Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Washington and West Virginia. Legislators cite the following evidence for enacting bullying laws:

- a. In of the latest school shootings documented from December 1974 through May 2000 by the CIA and FBI, two thirds of the attackers felt bullied, threatened, attacked or persecuted by others prior to the incident;
- b. 10% of students who drop out of school do so because of repeated bullying; and
- c. school-age bullying has been identified as a precursor to adult criminal behavior. 60% of boys, grades 6th-9th, will have a criminal record by age 24.

Proponents insist that investing now in efforts to curtail school bullying could save states huge amounts of money by reducing crime and its investigative, prosecutorial and prison costs.

The lessons learned from research are numerous. Listed below are some facts regarding bullying.

- a. *Children are more likely to be bullied in elementary school.*
- b. *Most bullying is non-physical behavior such as name-calling.*
- c. *Most bullies use bullying behaviors with more than one victim.*
- d. *In elementary school, most students who are bullied tell a teacher or parent. When students reach middle and high school, children are less likely to reach out for adult intervention.*
- e. *Bullying is most likely to occur during school hours.*
- f. *Most students think that they should be involved but do not know how.*
- g. *Class size does not increase the frequency of bullying behavior.*
- h. *Students who bully have average to above average self-esteem.*
- i. *Most victims who are bullied are not bullied because of external deviations like red hair, glasses, etc.*
- j. *Empathy crystallizes in elementary years.*
- k. *If a child is being bullied, ask the student to log the bullying behavior (where, what type of bullying, when, how and who's doing it).*
- l. *Bullies do not pick on others at random but instead engage in a shopping process targeting preferred victims.*
- n. *Bullies consistently see other children as more aggressive than themselves. They see threats where none exists and take these imagined threats as provocation to strike back.*
- o. *Children who are potential victims must learn to recognize the importance of body language.*
- p. *As a result of a bullying episode, there must be contrasting feelings. The child who bullies may feel excited, powerful or amused while the victim feels embarrassed or hurt.*
- q. *Bullies are as popular as well adjusted students. Victims occupy the bottom of the schoolyard food chain, the lowest rungs of the social ladder and the bottom of the pecking order.*

In conclusion, to make an impact bullying should be addressed at home, at school, at play and in the community. It must be a systemic effort for sustained effect. It's everyone's responsibility. Bystanders can make a difference. Students know first hand who is being bullied and should confide in an adult about the peer abuse. Trust your intuition and intervene. Develop a safety plan for the victim. Identify where the bullying is happening, the hot spots.

Jimmy Carter stated it well with the following poem. *Peace is active, not passive; Peace is doing, not waiting; Peace like war must be waged.*

Our goal then is to wage war on bullying. Call it what it is, *bullying behavior*, and that it will not be accepted at school or at home. Every student has a right to come to school and not be called names, threatened, ostracized, or isolated. School should be a safe haven.

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