

Spotlighting Teen Issues: Bullying

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The Facts About Bullying

Bullying is a major problem among our youth — and it is steadily increasing. Many professionals fear that adults are just not aware of the harmfulness of bullying because it is so common and widespread. Here are the facts from the National Education Association.

- An estimated 160,000 children miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students.
- One study reported that 85 percent of girls and 76 percent of boys have been sexually harassed in some form, and only 18 percent of those incidents were perpetrated by an adult.
- Young bullies carry a one-in-four chance of having a criminal record by age 30.
- One in seven students is either a bully or victim.
- Fifty-six percent of students have personally witnessed some type of bullying at school.
- Fifteen percent of all school absenteeism is directly related to fears of being bullied at school.
- Seventy-one percent of students report incidents of bullying as a problem at their school.
- One out of 20 students has seen someone with a gun at school.

Preventing Bullying

We should begin to teach children not to be bullies and not to be bullied while they are very young. However, it is never too late to teach your children/teens about bullying. We can teach them better ways to express their feelings and wishes. **We need to teach children/teens how to solve bullying problems.**

Research shows that teens who are bullied often experience low self-esteem and depression. If your teen is a victim of bullying, you can help reduce intimidation and fear by **listening and offering to help**. If your teen is the bully, you'll need to emphasize that this kind of behavior is unacceptable as well as to discuss why he or she might be doing it and how to stop.

Different Ways of Bullying

Bullying behavior is sometimes hard to define. What is the difference between good-natured ribbing and bullying? Sometimes teasing resembles bullying, but teasing is less hostile and is done with humor, rather than harm. Teasing usually promotes an exchange between people and is done in fun, whereas bullying is a one-sided dose of intimidation.

Although a bruise or a black eye may be a concrete sign your child/teen is a victim of bullying, there are many different ways kids bully. They aren't always easy to spot.

Cyber bullying — Bullies forward and spread hurtful messages and/or images through e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms and electronic gadgets like camera cell phones. Cyber-bullies use this technology to harass victims at all hours, in wide circles, at high speed.

Emotional bullying involves isolating or excluding a person from group activities, shunning the person at the mall, and spreading rumors. This kind of bullying is especially common among girls.



Physical bullying involves things like kicking, hitting, biting, pinching, hair pulling or threats of physical harm.

Racist bullying attacks through racial slurs, offensive gestures or jokes about a teen's cultural traditions.

Sexual bullying involves unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive or inappropriate comments.

Verbal bullying usually involves name-calling, incessant mocking and ridicule.

Despite the common notion that bullying is a problem mostly among boys, both boys and girls bully. The difference is in the way they bully. Girls tend to inflict pain on a psychological level. For example, they might ostracize victims by freezing them out of the lunchroom seating arrangements, ignoring them at the mall or shunning them by not inviting them to slumber parties.

Boys aren't as subtle and can get physical. For example, boy bullies are more apt to insult their victims than ignore them. Instead of isolating a non-athletic victim during a gym class dodgeball game, they might relentlessly target the child/teen throw after throw.

When Talking to Your Child About

Bullying, Here Are Some Things You

Need to Say

- Dealing with bullies can be hard, but remember **you** are not the problem. The bully is.
- You have the right to feel safe and secure.
- If you are different in some way, be proud of it!
- Spend time with your friends. Bullies hardly ever pick on people who are with others in a group.
- Try to ignore the bully, tell them to stop and walk away whenever the bullying starts.
- Even if you think you've solved the problem on your own, tell an adult in case it happens again.

Common Mistakes Parents Make About Bullying

- **Failing to listen seriously to complaints about bullying.** Your teen could be in danger. You need to step in if there is even the slightest possibility that your teen might be hurt.

- **Telling you teen, "Just tell him/her to stop."** Teens need to learn ways to deal with bullies in order to stop the abuse. Bullies rarely just go away.
- **Advising teens to hit back.** Aggression among teens can escalate quickly over very minor issues. Too many teens are carrying weapons. Bullying **MUST** be taken seriously. Too many teens are

being emotionally or physically injured due to meanness. The best way to help teens avoid being victims of bullies is to teach them what to do the first time they are bullied.

For More Information

American Academy of Adolescent & Child Psychiatry — Bullying

<http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/80.htm>

Bullying and Harassment Information for Teens

http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/html/cd_rom/school_safety/pubs/NCVC02.pdf

Dealing with Bullies and How Not to Be One

<http://www.ncpamd.com/Bullies.htm>

National Educational Association

<http://www.nea.org/index.html>

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center

<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/bullying.asp>

Teenagers Today - Cyber Bullies

<http://teenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/cyberbullies.htm>

References

Borba, Michele.(1999). *Parent Do Make a Difference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Hoover, J.H., & Oliver, R. (1996) *The bullying prevention handbook: A guide for principals, teachers, and counselors*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

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