

Parents & Teachers Hold the Power To Work Together to End Bullying



by Linda Aber

- A study in the medical Journal of Pediatrics found that about 1 in 7 Canadian children aged 11 to 16 are victims of school bullying.

During the school day, children with ADHD, learning disabilities and mild ASD appear extremely vulnerable and at higher risk for being bullied.



The bullying behaviour students either experience or adopt, tremendously impacts on their physical and mental health development. Bullied children suffer from humiliation, insecurity, anxiety and loss of self-esteem. This is too serious to ignore.

Unfortunately, many children are embarrassed to admit they have been bullied, so they seldom tell parents or educators when it occurs. Paying attention to your child is the critical first step, as parents need to be aware of any changes in their behaviour.

Warning Signs Children Who Are Bullied Often Experience:

- Sudden hesitation about attending school
- Somatic complaints (headaches, stomachaches, panic attacks)
- Arrives to school late or just before the bell rings
- Withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Nightmares
- Is sad, angry or scared after receiving a phone call or email
- Loss of friends
- Drop in grades
- Loss of interest in activities s/he previously enjoyed
- Ripped clothing
- Frequent injuries/bruises
- Need for extra money or supplies
- Avoids recess
- Spends time with younger students (may indicate problem with same aged peers)



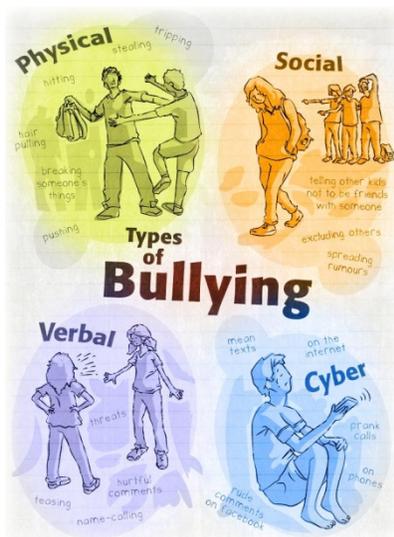
What Parents Need To Do?

- If your child discloses s/he is being bullied and asks for help, take it seriously.
- Since many children are embarrassed to admit being bullied, it takes much courage for them to share that someone is picking on them.
- Step 1 is to honor their courage and listen carefully to them.
- Reassure them by saying, "I am here for you" and "You are not alone in this situation."



Record Incidents in a Bullying Journal

Usually, it will be the parent who must take charge of bringing the bullying incidents to the attention of school authorities.



- Document the dates, times, places in the school, type of bullying, the name of the bully, what your child did to stop it, who they reported it to and if it helped.
- If this is not the first time your child has experienced being bullied, record the actions taken by educators to end the bullying behaviour.

How to Report Bullying to the School: According to Barbara Coloroso, author of *The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander*:

- Arrange a meeting for you and your child with the appropriate person at school.
- Bring to the meeting the facts in writing (the date, time, place, children involved and the specifics about the incidents)
- State the impact the bullying has had on your child and what s/he has done to try to stop the bullying that did not work.
- Work with your child and school personnel on a plan that addresses what your child needs right now to feel safe, what s/he can do to avoid being bullied, to stand up to any future bullying and whom s/he can go to for help.
- Find out the procedures the bully will be going through.

- If you feel the problem is not being adequately addressed by the school, know that you can express your concerns. Let the school know that you will take next steps to the school board and if necessary, in cases of serious abuse, racist or sexist bullying - to the police.

What If Your Child Is the Bully?

- Take it seriously, for another child is being hurt.
- Talk to your child and find out why s/he is bullying. Many times changes at home or school can produce feelings of being lonely, angry, sad, or insecure.
- Help him or her build empathy for others by talking about how it feels to be bullied.
- Ask the educator if your child is experiencing problems at school, (difficulty making friends or struggling academically)
- Children who bully are often bullied themselves by peers or family members. Is there someone at home bullying your child?
- Carefully listen to your child, but check out the facts. Many times, children who bully are good at manipulating adults and can fabricate stories that make them look innocent.
- The school or the victim's parents will have probably documented your child's bullying behaviors. Check the dates and activities to determine a pattern in the bullying behavior.
- Develop clear, simple rules for home & school.
- Offer frequent praise and validation for desired, appropriate behaviour.
- If necessary, get professional help for your child and family.



Set Boundaries with Technology

The internet has created a whole new world of social communications for youth to stay in touch with friends, plus meet new ones. These include instant messaging, chat rooms, Facebook, MySpace, websites, text messaging and email.

Cyber-bullying, (a form of online bullying) spreading cruel, threatening comments/messages and uploading embarrassing pictures from cell phones is considered a Criminal Act.

- Learn everything you can about the internet and what your child is doing online.
- Advise your child to: never give out personal information (name, address, phone, password)
- Teach him/her not to respond or forward threatening emails.
- "Friend" your child on Facebook or Myspace and set up proper filters on their computer.
- If possible, use only one (family) computer and situate it where it is visible and easily monitored.
- Store cell phones in the kitchen at a certain time at night



- to eliminate nighttime bullying and inappropriate messaging.
- Encourage your child to come to you if anybody says or does something online that makes him/her feel uncomfortable.
 - Report any incident of online harassment or threatening messages to your police and Internet Service Provider.
 - Document and keep any text messages, emails or posts on websites as evidence, for police/service providers can utilize them to track the cyberbully.

The Role of the School

School must provide a safe learning environment for all children. Administrators, educators and staff should take bullying problems seriously, investigate incidents and advise parents of the steps they are taking to protect the victim and stop the bullying.

- Written school policies, rules against bullying, harassment and intimidation should be in place plus be enforced.
- Educators and principals should speak to the bully and his parents, who need to be aware of the consequences if the bullying of others does not stop. Should it continue, school authorities must enforce the predetermined consequences immediately.
- Increase adult supervision in school areas where bullying incidents are likely to occur.
- School personnel should be well-informed about the students who are being victimized by bullies. They should monitor, communicate and provide support to victims and their parents.

Parents and educators, working together, hold the power to extinguish bullying. When caring adults create safe emotional climates both at home and in school, children flourish. They feel free to learn, trust, build friendships and enhance their academic and social lives.