

Bullying Affects All Children – Together We Can Beat It!

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What is Bullying?

When we talk about bullying it is important for us to know what exactly we are discussing. We want to know what is happening to our children and we want to know how to best help them. What is normal kid behavior that needs adult guidance? What behaviors can we leave alone? Which are serious and need our action? These are questions that parents, teachers and community members need to consider.

What do you do if your child tells you that the kid next door is calling them names when they walk to school? Should you do something if your daughter tells you that a girl in her gym class takes her backpack and tosses it around every day? What about threats on the phone? What about an all out fist fight behind the community centre? We need to know where and when to intervene.

Bullying is any hurtful behavior that happens over and over and is done on purpose. If some action is occurring over and over again and is meant to be hurtful, then it is bullying. It can be teasing, taking someone's belongings, pushing, name calling, threats, hitting, spitting, making nasty remarks, ignoring, spreading rumors or giving dirty looks. If it happens repeatedly, if it happens on purpose, if it is hurtful – then it is bullying.

If there is bullying in your school or community, you need to know it is affecting your child. Your child is either the bully, is being bullied or is watching others being bullied. Bullying affects all our children.

The Bully

If your child is the bully, they are setting a way of acting that will take them into their adult life believing that violence and hurting others is acceptable. Their friends come to expect nasty behavior from them, and out of fear – not respect – they do what they can to keep on good terms with the bully so that they do not become the next target.

The Bystander

Your child may not be the bully, and they may not be bullied, but they are the ones who see their classmates, neighbors and friends being bullied. They are watching the violence. They see and feel what is happening to those around them. They wonder what they can do to change the situation, but most often they feel helpless to bring about a change. They live in fear that they may be next. They come to see their communities or schools as places where people are picked on and hurt.

The Bullied

Your child may be the one picked on. They may be bullied. If your child is bullied, in time they will come to feel powerless. Day after day they are picked on, teased and hurt, and it seems nothing can be done and no one cares. A lot of their energy is spent on thinking about how to avoid the bully - time that should be spent focusing in school or having fun with friends. These children are abused. If they are being bullied they may come to believe that they deserve this hurtful treatment, or they may lash out when they can no longer stand the pain.

What Causes Bullying

Bullying doesn't just happen. It is caused and allowed by certain factors. Community, school, family and the bullies themselves all contribute to the problems of bullying.

Community

Some communities have an attitude that violence is not so bad. Adults themselves act out in public with little disapproval from the people around them. Children are seen fighting and no one stops to tell them they should stop. There is a feeling that the community is a place where bad things happen and they are allowed.

School

Lack of supervision, especially in the hallway and schoolyard, contributes to bullying. Our schools are often crowded. The classrooms are full, the hallways are packed, and our children feel the tension of the situation. When this is added to lack of supervision, bullying is bound to take place.

Family

Families where children are not shown love and affection and where they see the adults in their lives act aggressively provide the perfect grounds to create a bully. Children who see adults yell, learn to yell. Children who see their parents fight, learn to fight.

Personality

Some children are more active than others. They tend to act out quickly when upset and easily turn to aggression when frustrated.

What You Can Do About It

Your Community

Our children have energy, talents and abilities. They are growing and learning who they are and who they will become. They are longing to find out what they are good at and what interests them. Children need to have opportunities to participate in worthwhile events and on-going activities. They need healthy ways to spend their time. That might be a sports clubs, games nights at the community hall or art classes. We need to create healthy ways for our children to learn and play together.

Your School

Your children spend their days in school. Schools that are well supervised and have a climate of acceptance and warmth are places where our children can succeed. Schools need to have high expectations of behavior that help students learn positive ways to interact with each other. This is not the job for the principal and the teachers alone. These are our children and we have a part to play at home, in the community and in school. Schools need to have policies that include a response to the bullying, immediate consequences and follow up. You as a parent should play a part in helping the school create and monitor anti-bullying programs.

Your Home

You are your child's most powerful influence. Lead by your example; your child can be taught that violence and hurtful words are not the way to solve problems. Make it clear that hurting each other is never okay. Express strong disapproval when the topic of bullying comes up. Your children need to know it is not acceptable behavior. Create a home that is healthy and loving. Talk about what you expect from them. Listen to your children and trust that you are able care well for your children.

What To Do If Your Child Is Bullied

- Don't expect children to solve the problem on their own or that it will go away.
- Let your child know you are there to help them.
- Ask your child if they are being bullied. Sometimes children do not want to let their parents know because they are embarrassed. Look for signs of being afraid to go to school, few or no friends, torn clothing and a general increase in fear.
- Talk to the school right away. Make sure that your child is safe. Encourage the school to contact the bullies' parents and work to decide on consequences for the bully.
- Arrange for your child to have a supportive classmate to walk them to school and home each day.
- Find activities to build your child's confidence.
- Even if you think the bullying has stopped, keep checking in with your child and see how they are doing.

About the Crisis & Trauma Resource Institute Inc.

CTRI provides professional training and consulting services for individuals, communities and organizations affected by or involved in working with issues of crisis and trauma. For additional resources visit: www.ctrinstitute.com