

## Parents should take note of signs of bullying

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OTTAWA -- The back-to-school season is full of anticipation for many children, but for some - the victims of bullying - it brings a sense of dread and anxiety.

Nineteen-year-old Robert Frenette knows those worrisome feelings all too well, having been bullied throughout elementary and high school. For students like him, the summer wasn't just a break from the pressure of tests and homework, but from the stress and abuse at the hands of bullies.

"I didn't want to go back to school," Frenette recalls. "It was really hard to get through it."

Frenette, who graduated from his Bathurst, N.B., high school in the spring, said he used to try every trick in the book to avoid going to school.

"I remember trying to hide and I used the excuse that I could not find my shoes," said Frenette, who is heading off to college this fall. He also used to fake feeling sick so he could go home and escape the name-calling and physical abuse he faced from his classmates.

For years Frenette never let on why he was reluctant to go to school but eventually he found the courage to break his silence. Along with another youth who was bullied, Frenette started a website in 2006, [www.bullyingcanada.ca](http://www.bullyingcanada.ca), which offers a newsletter, a venue for victims to share their stories, an interactive chat room, and the latest news and articles on bullying. There's also a campaign underway to have Dec. 17 officially declared a national anti-bullying day.

It's important for parents to "read between the lines" and look for clues in their children's behaviour upon their return to school, said Bill Belsey, founder of the popular website [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) and an elementary school teacher in Cochrane, Alta.

"Some of them are going to be feeling sick to their stomach," said Belsey. "They may be reclusive, they may become sullen, withdrawn, or in their room a lot," he said, adding they may not eat or sleep properly and may wet the bed depending on their age.

Belsey travels across Canada and beyond, giving presentations on bullying and his comprehensive website includes online courses for teachers on how to recognize and deal with bullying. Among the resources for parents on the site is a new tool that Belsey added to coincide with the new school season.

It's a checklist that can help parents gauge how effective their child's school is at addressing bullying.

Belsey encourages parents to approach the school's administration, parent councils and teachers with any concerns they may have.

"They have a right to, because kids have a right to learn and we as educators have as our primary responsibility to create an environment where kids can reach their

potential as learners."

Stu Auty, a former teacher who is now president of the Canadian Safe School Network, said the uncertainty of what the school year will bring for their child also causes anxiety for parents.

"Parents are hoping any victimization their children have undergone will be solved and sorted out," said Auty. "It's the great question - is the school year going to be a good one or is it going to start out in a rocky way?"

The start of the school year is exciting for most kids, said Auty, and parents should support that excitement but also keep "their eyes wide open for any kind of signs."

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