

## **Bullying - enough is enough**

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School has started, and so has the bullying. As a parent, your child may be the victim of bullying or your child may be the one who is doing the bullying. Either one requires action.

Bullying is all about the balance of power or lack of it. If your child is being taunted, teased, insulted, physically hurt or the subject of malicious gossip, this is abuse. Often, your child may not even tell you or the teacher about the abuse because of fear of retaliation, or the feeling of hopelessness that nothing can be done. Even other classmates who witness the abuse may be apprehensive about reporting it or standing up for the victim because they fear that they might be the next target.

So if your child is reluctant to disclose the abuse, how does a parent know there is a problem? You know your child best, so be a detective. If you notice that your son or daughter is afraid to go to school or use the school bus, but won't say why, you might want to ask a few leading questions. If your child appears anxious, insecure, cries easily or makes up excuses for staying home from school, this may also be a clue.

Bullies seek out the easy targets. They look for kids who are small for their age, new to the school, physically, sexually or intellectually different, timid, isolated or a cultural minority. If you suspect that your child is a victim of bullying, the best strategy is to be there and reassure your child that it is not his fault. Bullying is never the victim's fault.

Validate their feelings and let them know it's all right to feel upset or scared. Confidentially, report your concerns to your child's teacher and principal and offer to assist in anyway you can. Maybe your school will want to start an anti-bullying or zero tolerance initiative. Suggest that your child finds a safe territory with adult supervision or a trusted buddy at school, on the bus or on the playground.

Avoid any urge to tell your child to physically fight back. This can backfire by aggravating the bully even more or by your child getting into trouble. It also teaches the message that it is okay to hurt someone or use physical force.

What if it's your child?

So what if you find out that your child is the one doing the bullying? As unlikely as it may be for a child to tell parents he or she is a victim of bullying, it is even more unusual for a child to admit to his parents that he is a bully.

Again, be a detective, and don't hesitate to ask for help. If your child is coming home with possessions you have never seen before or more money than he normally has, you might want to question how he obtained these items.

Look for signs. Does your child get along well with others? Does she often resort to violence to resolve conflicts? Is your child imitating aggressive behavior he may have witnessed at home, on video games or through the media?

Don't be surprised if your child denies, rationalizes or minimizes any involvement in a bullying situation. Consult with the teacher and principal and try to get the facts then follow it up.

Unwise to take the side of a bully

Although we like to take our children's sides in situations, it is unwise to take the side of the bully and it is vital that you let your child know that bullying is neither okay nor acceptable.

The bully seeks power by putting another person down. This makes him feel like the big shot. If there is an audience, even better.

A bully may be male or female. While boys may use more physical force, girls can hurt each other just as badly by taunting, teasing and spreading gossip about their victims. And we now see more and more girls also resorting to physical violence.

But don't despair' not everyone is willing to put up with bullying. Take the pink T-shirt initiative that two Grade 12 students at Central Kings Rural High started last year. When a Grade 9 boy was bullied and threatened for wearing a pink T-shirt to school, these two boys instigated the "sea of pink" where hundreds of fellow students rallied their support by wearing pink to school the next day.

Take your child seriously if he or she complains about bullying and be your child's advocate by being proactive in helping to identify and solve the problem. In extreme cases, a change in classrooms or even schools may be in order.

No child of any age should have to endure behavior that is damaging physically, psychologically or sexually. Enough is enough.

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