

The last article on bullying received several responses from parents and students alike. It was accompanied by request for help for children of various age group being bullied in school or outside. Bullying has become a vicious trend that although is not new, it is escalating. We are hearing about more children suffering with depression and committing suicide that may have links to them being bullied or teased in school or outside of school.

As the news continues about the rising rates of bullying, parents need to take a stand. Determine if your child is being bullied or is possibly a bully. In either case we need to address it.

How children and young people think about and interpret aggression which is directed toward them is important for their wellbeing. When discussing an experience of bullying with a child or adolescent it may be useful to:

- Ask whether they feel they can change the problem themselves.
- Try to help them feel more in control of the situation. One way to do this could be by offering new behavioral strategies, allowing them to practice those strategies, and making it clear that assertive behaviors may need to be repeated again and again before they are successful. For example help him to say 'I am strong'

Ask about what outcomes they foresee. Do they focus only on negative outcomes? Is that focus making the problem seem bigger than it is, or encouraging feelings of distress and upset which make it difficult when trying to respond assertively? Can they see the possibility for positive outcomes? Try to encourage more focus on positive outcomes, and help students to question whether all the negative outcomes they foresee are *really* that likely to occur.

However, *don't* suggest that negative outcomes are not going to happen: thoughts need to be realistic as well as healthy, and students are likely to quickly switch off if they think adults misunderstand their situation.

Bullying: NO WAY

Prevent your child from becoming a VICTIM:

- Instill self-confidence in your child.
- Help your child establish good social skills.
- Teach your child to speak out for him or herself.
- Teach your child to seek help, if harassed, from you and other caring adults.

Prevent your child from becoming a BULLY:

- Present yourself as a model of non-violent behavior.
- Clearly state that violence is not acceptable.

- Assist your child in finding non-violent strategies for anger management and conflict resolution.
- Seek help from mental health/school counselors to help stop bullying and aggressive behavior.

Go ahead, get started and remember that these are only some suggestions to start conversations and you don't have to be upset, just continue talking to the child. Use your own judgment on how many questions to ask, when, and for how long. If you or your child feels uncomfortable talking about the issue, you may choose to stop for a while and continue the discussion at a later time.

Research has found that remarkable things can happen if parents and caregivers spent at least 15 minutes of undivided time a day listening and talking with their children. Research also tells us that children really do look to their parents and caregivers for advice and help about difficult choices and decisions. We need to **Listen – Learn(understand) - Respect**

PEERS CAN BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Raising children's awareness of the role they play in the bullying process, as well as raising their empathic understanding of the victim's plight, can reduce bullying. Children and adolescents facing bullying problems as bystanders are trapped in a social dilemma.

- On one hand, they understand that bullying is wrong and they would like to do something to stop it – on the other hand, they strive to secure their own status and safety in the peer group.
- However, *if fewer children took on the role of reinforcer when witnessing bullying, and if the group refused to assign high status for those who bully, an important reward for bullying others would be lost. If the peers are part of the problem, they can also be part of the solution.*

School-based educational programs empowering both emotional and moral competence may be useful in enhancing pupils' morality and preventing harmful behaviors such as bullying.

Whether focused on bullying — or on general principles of healthy development and behavior, the messages exchanged between children and their parents in just these 15 minutes or more a day, can be instrumental in building a healthier and safer future for children as individuals, as family members, and as active and engaged participants in the life of their communities.

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