

# Parents' Role in Bullying and Intervention

## Behavior Patterns Begin at Home

Behavior patterns begin at home. Teaching your child good communication and social skills at home will go a long way toward his/her success in school. Talk with your child. From the time children learn to talk, parents can have a running conversation with them about how their day went. This makes it natural to continue the custom after the child starts to school. Ask questions about their days. Ask about their friends. Get to know their classmates and friends. Volunteer your services to the classroom whenever possible.

Parents need to be observant of their children's behavior, appearance, and mood, both for signs of the child being bullied or engaging in bullying behavior. Torn clothes, bruises, loss of appetite, mood changes, reluctance to go to school are all signs that something is wrong. These are all signs that a child is probably being bullied. Many children fall deeper and deeper into depression as a result of long term bullying. Signs that a child is engaging in bullying behavior might be impulsiveness, showing no empathy for others, or a desire to be in control. Children who bully are often arrogant and boastful winners and poor losers when they engage in competitive games.

A child who has bonded well with his/her parents and feels warmth and caring from them is much less likely to resort to bullying behavior with peers in schools and elsewhere. The parents should have also set adequate limits for a child's behavior at home and not allowed aggression toward siblings, other family members and peers.

## Discipline at Home Establishes a Pattern for Interaction with Others

The way a child is disciplined at home will establish a pattern for his/her interaction with other children in school. A parent who disciplines a child with yelling or hitting is teaching a child to react in that manner with other people. Often a child who exhibits bullying behavior in school has been the target of that behavior in the home. Boys who observe their fathers handling disputes with a physical response or girl who observe their mothers practicing exclusion or manipulation of friends or family members will likely exhibit the same behavior in school. Although the data shows that both genders can engage in all of these behaviors, it also shows that boys are more likely to bully other boys physically while girls are more like to bully with manipulation and exclusion or with spreading rumors.

Name calling is a favorite form of bullying behavior among some children. Parents need to be particularly aware of the language children hear at home. One mother, in a discussion of the assortment of hurtful words kids use to humiliate others, say, "Oh, faggot is my son's favorite word. He calls his friends that all the time." It apparently had never occurred to her to tell her son that this could be hurtful to his friends.

Racial and ethnic slurs and name calling are another favorite form of bullying. Targets of such name calling should be taught to look the perpetrator straight in the eye and say, "I don't like it when you call me names," but to go no farther. They should be taught not to get into an argument or to try to change the perpetrator's mind. It is a waste of time, and prolonging the situation could lead to physical bullying.

## Parents Must Monitor Their Own Behavior Too

One of the problems that nearly all schools have to deal with at sometime or another is bullying behavior on the part of a parent. Parents who want to address a problem or any other concern with school personnel should learn how to approach an administrator, classroom teacher, or other school staff. A parent who is angry and threatening school personnel solves nothing and makes life more

difficult for his/her child. Further, parents who punish their children for not fighting back physically are adding to their child's problems. Unfortunately, the parent who engages bullying behavior often exhibits this behavior both toward school personnel and his/her own child.

Self examination would be a wise course for a parent whose child has been accused of bullying behavior. The parent's first question, before taking any action, might well be, "What have I done to contribute to this situation?"

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