

Preventing Bullying

Everyone can help prevent and stop bullying. No matter who you are, you can influence lives. Everyone needs to be aware of the warning signs and effects of bullying – and ways to intervene and support the person being bullied and the one bullying others.

Bullying is a serious problem that can happen anywhere. It most often involves children, teens and young adults. Older adults are bullied too. This often occurs in the workplace. Bullying can cause serious harm. Fortunately, there are ways to stop it.

What Is Bullying?

Although definitions vary, most agree that bullying involves:

- **Use of power:** Bullies use their power to control or harm others.
- **Intent to cause harm:** Actions done by accident are not bullying. The bully wants to cause harm.
- **Repetition:** Incidents happen to the same the person over and over by the same person or group.

Bullying can take many forms. Examples include:

- **Verbal:** Name-calling or teasing
- **Social:** Spreading rumors, leaving people out on purpose, breaking up friendships
- **Physical:** Hitting, punching or shoving
- **Cyberbullying:** Hurtful instant messages (IM) and text messages, email, chat rooms, Web pages, social media profiles and video games

An act of bullying may fit into more than one of these forms.

What Are the Warning Signs?

People who are bullied may:

- Feel depressed, lonely, fearful, stressed
- Have low self-esteem
- Have eating problems and stomachaches
- Want to stay home from school
- Get sick more often
- Have nightmares and trouble sleeping
- Lose interest in visiting or talking with friends
- Lose interest in school work or begin to do poorly in school
- Feel helpless
- Think about suicide

What Can You Do About Bullying?

Parents and family members can play a key role in preventing and stopping bullying. Here are some things you can do.

- Help your child understand bullying. Explain what bullying is.
- Keep open lines of communication with your child. Listen to any concerns about friends and other students.
- Know what is going on in your child's school. Parents should never be afraid to call the school to report that a child is being bullied and to ask for help.
- Help your child develop strategies and skills for handling bullies. Here are examples of what you can say:
 - Speak up if it is safe to do so. Tell the bully to “Stop it.”
 - Calmly walk away. Act like you do not care, even if you really do.
 - Tell an adult you trust if you see bullying.
 - Stay in a group. Join activities you like and meet other kids.
 - Never reply to a cyberbully. Block messages if you can.
 - Do not let the bully win. Keep doing what you love to do.

What If Your Child Is Being Bullied?

Children may not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed or frightened. If you suspect your child is being bullied, consider these steps:

- **Talk with your child.** Express your concern. Make it clear you want to help.
- **Reassure your child.** Bullying is wrong. Being bullied is not the child's fault.
- **Document ongoing bullying.** Help your child keep a record of all incidents. For cyberbullying, keep a record of all messages or postings.
- **Be aware of other possible problems your child may have.** Some of the warning signs may be signs of other serious problems.

What If Your Child Is a Bully?

If your child is being a bully, it is very important to act immediately.

- **Talk with your child.** Calmly explain that you will not tolerate this behavior.
- **Spend more time with your child.** Monitor his or her activities.
- **Be aware of your child's friends.** Find out how they spend their free time.
- **Work with your child's school.** Make sure the bullying does not happen again.
- **Talk with a school counselor or health professional.** They can get help for your child.

Resources

www.StopBullying.gov

www.SafeYouth.gov

www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/youthviolence

Content of this document has been adapted from StopBullying.gov, a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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