

A Community Care Team Newsletter Fall 2012

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Bullying: Not a Rite of Passage (Part 1 of a 2-Part Series)



Most bullying is verbal or relational, including exclusion or isolation.

What is Bullying?

Experts define bullying as "a series of repeated, intentionally cruel incidents, involving the same children, in the same bully and victim roles." This describes many different types of behavior, ranging from teasing and deliberately excluding an individual from a social situation or ignoring them, to physical intimidation or assault. Sometimes it is an individual doing the bullying and sometimes it is a group.

sometimes it is a group. But it always involves an imbalance of power. Both boys and girls are bullied and are bullies.

How Prevalent is It?

It is estimated that 80% of students have been bullied at one time or another by other students. Bullying occurs on average, every 7 seconds and a bullying incident lasts only about 37 seconds. While bullying can be physical in nature, it is much more likely to be verbal or relational (exclusion or isolation). One in 10 students is regularly bullied.

Fifteen percent of 4th-8th graders are severely distressed by bullying.

What is the Impact? Students who are chronically bullied are more likely to suffer long range consequences such as low self-esteem, increased anxiety, depression, trou-

bled adult relationships and suicide.

Students who are identified as bullies in middle school are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age 24 and five times more likely to end up with serious criminal records by age 30. Student bullies are also more likely to abuse their own children and/or spouse, have a substance abuse problem, have multiple divorces and are less likely to be promoted into leadership positions as adults.



Signs of Bullying

- Complains of head or stomach aches
- Reluctant to go to school
- Has a poor appetite
- Receiving poor grades or grades have dropped
- Seems sad or depressed
- Seems anxious or fearful
- Withdrawal from usual activities
- Expresses anger that seems excessive for the situation
- Relates better to adults than children
- Is picked last for games
- Sits alone at recess or lunch

How Do I Start the Conversation?

Talking to your child about being bullied or teased is not easy. A child who is being bullied feels hurt and humiliated and may be ashamed to talk about it. He may be angry and confused and primed to take his frustration out on you, even while he is seeking your help and comfort. She may be so wrapped up in hurt that she can't hear what you have to say. Judy Freeman,

author of *Easing the Teasing* and longtime school social worker offers some suggestions for talking with your child about what is happening. Remain calm. Listen carefully, with your full attention. Encourage your child to describe the teasing. See page 2 for some suggested conversation prompts.

IN THIS ISSUE:

p. 1
p. 1
p. 1
p. 1
p. 1
p. 2
p. 2
p. 2
p. 2

Caring Hearts/Helping Hands

News You Can Use to Change Your Community
A Community Care Team Newsletter



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Local Efforts to Reduce Bullying

Kaneland area parents and concerned community members have recently come together to form a grass roots group to address bullying. *Knights Against Bullying* has a 3-fold mission: 1) to raise awareness about bullying in the district 2) to ensure that a comprehensive bullying prevention and intervention plan is in place and 3) to reduce bullying by giving a voice to its victims. The group meets at the Kaneville United Methodist Church, 46w764 Main Street Road in Kaneville. For more information or to get involved, contact them at knightsagainstbullying@yahoo.com.

AREA RESOURCES

TriCity Family Services 630/232-1070
Family Counseling Services 630/844-2662
Safe Harbor Counseling 630/466-8657
Heartland Counseling 630/443-9100
Centennial Counseling Services 630/377-6613

Find back issues of our CCT Newsletters at: www.conleyoutreach.org

Why Me?

Intentional, hurtful teasing or bullying is NEVER excusable. Intentional cruelty is NOT acceptable. Having said that, Freeman notes that sometimes children's behavior does bring on teasing, and behavior can be changed. The most common examples she encounters include:

Socially Unacceptable Behaviors Children who look sloppy, have body odor or poor table manners or who are prone to temper tantrums and emotional meltdowns are regular targets of teasing. So are kids who behave in ways typical of much younger students. While individuality is to be encouraged, it is important to assess whether your child's behavior is appropriate or out of the norm for kids that age. Helping a child stop behavior for which he is being teased involves two steps: telling the child that the behavior is the cause of the teasing and finding a way to help the child remember not to repeat the behavior. Even when

the behavior stops, the teasing may not because the child has been labeled. Our next CCT newsletter will offer strategies for this situation.

Disabilities and Differences

If your child has a disability or difference for which she may be teased, be proactive. Some parents speak to the class about the child's difference. Information can also be shared with parents of classmates. This reduces uneasiness and satisfies curiosity.

Parents' Behavior

It is sometimes difficult to recognize that our behavior as parents may be causing a problem for our children. Being overprotective and helping your child do things she should be doing on her own can lead to teasing, especially when it is done in the presence of peers. A child who is not allowed to do for himself is given the message that he is unable to do for himself. This is often internalized as incompetence and can result in low self-esteem. Children with low self esteem are often targeted by bullies.

Conversation Prompts

- Who is the teaser/bully?
- Is the bully a classmate, a friend, neighbor or a child on the bus?
- Is the teaser older, younger or the same age as your child?
- Is the child teased about a physical trait or difference or about what he does or does not do in class, on the bus or on the playground?
- Where is the bullying occurring?
- How long has it been happening?

Freeman warns not to give premature advice. Wait until your child has finished talking. If you interject comments and advice, she may clam up or cut the conversation short. **Don't overreact.** Validate your child's feelings. Work with your child to figure out why she is being teased or bullied and some strategies to reduce or address the issue.