



## Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools

# FACT SHEET

FS-SC09

2001, 2008

## Bullying Prevention: Recommendations for Parents

### Is Your Child Being Bullied?

A child is bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Children oftentimes will not tell their parents that they are being victimized.

#### Warning Signs:

- Comes home from school with torn, damaged, or missing clothing, books, and belongings.
- Has unexplained bruises, injuries, cuts, and scratches.
- Does not bring classmates or other peers home after school and seldom spends time in the homes of classmates or peers.
- Seems isolated from peers and may not have a good friend to share time with.
- Appears to be fearful about attending school, walking to and from school, or riding the bus.
- Has poor appetite, headaches, and stomach pains (particularly in the morning).
- Chooses a longer, "illogical" route for going to and from school.
- Asks for or takes extra money from family (money that may go to a bully).
- Appears anxious, distressed, unhappy, depressed or tearful when he or she comes home from school.
- Shows unexpected mood shifts, irritability, or sudden outbursts of temper.
- Has sleeping or eating problems.
- May lose interest in school work and experience a decline in academic performance.
- Talks about or attempts suicide.

### General Characteristics of Possible Victims

There are two types of victims: (1) the *passive or submissive victim*, and (2) the *provocative victim*. Passive/submissive victims signal to others through attitudes and behaviors that they are insecure individuals who will not retaliate if victimized. The provocative victim is a much smaller group of victims. They are characterized by having both anxious and aggressive patterns. Provocative victims are generally boys.

#### Passive/Submissive Victim Characteristics:

- Physically weaker than their peers (particularly boys).
- Display "body anxiety." They are afraid of being hurt, have poor physical coordination, and are ineffective in physical play or sports.
- Have poor social skills and have difficulty making friends.
- Are cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn, and shy.
- Cry or become upset easily.
- Are anxious, insecure, and have poor self-esteem.
- Have difficulty standing up for or defending themselves in peer groups.
- Relate better to adults than to peers.

#### Provocative Victim Characteristics:

- Exhibit some or all of the characteristics of passive or submissive victims.
- Are hot tempered and attempt to fight back when victimized – usually not very effectively.
- Are hyperactive, restless, have difficulty concentrating, and create tension.
- Are clumsy, immature, and exhibit irritating habits.
- Are also disliked by adults, including teachers.
- Try to bully students weaker than themselves.

### What Can Parents of the Victim Do?

Encourage your child to share his/her problems with you. Ensure him or her that this is not tattling. Know that your child may be embarrassed, ashamed, and fearful. Listen attentively and reassure him/her that he/she will not have to face the problem alone.

- Praise and encourage your child. Help him or her take pride in his/her accomplishments and differences. A confident child is less likely to be targeted by bullies.
- Search for talents and positive attributes that can be developed in your child. This may help a child to assert himself or herself.
- Help your child develop friendships. Stimulate your child to meet and interact with new peers. A new environment with new peers can provide a new chance for a victimized child.
-

- Encourage your child to make contact with calm and friendly children in his or her class (or in other classes). This may require the assistance of the school.
- If your child's own behavior (i.e., provocative victim) is contributing to being bullied, try to help your child change his or her behavior without suggesting that he or she is responsible for being victimized. Try to help improve your child's social skills.
- Motivate your child to participate in physical activity or sports. Physical exercise can result in better physical coordination and less "body anxiety." This, in turn, can increase your child's self-esteem and improve peer relations.
- Maintain contact with your child's school. Keep a detailed record of bullying episodes and related communication with the school. Help develop a plan of action for the school to follow. Monitor the situation by maintaining communication with the school and your child.
- Seek help from a mental health professional.

### Is Your Child a Bully?

Children who bully increase their risk for engaging in other forms of antisocial behavior, such as juvenile delinquency, criminality and substance abuse. Bullying behavior should be taken seriously. Doing nothing implies that bullying is acceptable behavior. Typical bullying behavior includes:

- Physical Attacks: hitting, kicking, pushing, choking
- Verbal Attacks or Harassment: name calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing, rumor spreading, slandering
- Social isolation, intentional exclusion, making faces, obscene gestures, manipulating friendship relationships

### General Characteristics of Possible Bullies

Boys are more likely than girls to be bullies. However, girls are more likely to engage in other forms of harassment, such as cyber bullying.

- May be physically bigger and stronger than their victims.
- Have strong needs to dominate and control their peers.
- Are hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and have a low frustration tolerance.
- Have difficulty conforming to rules.
- Are defiant and aggressive toward adults and authority figures. Even adults may be frightened of the bully.
- Are good at talking themselves out of situations.
- Tend to have a relatively positive view of themselves (average or better than average self-esteem).
- Are more likely than their peers to engage in other antisocial behaviors.
- Are more likely to be less popular (particularly primary school students).
- Are more likely to have negative attitudes toward school and get lower grades (particularly junior high school students).

### What Can Parents of the Bully Do?

- Make clear to your child that you take the bullying seriously, and will not tolerate such behavior in the future.
- Develop a consistent family rules system. Use praise and reinforcement for rule-following behavior. Use consistent, non-hostile, negative consequences for rule violation. Set a good example for your child by following these rules yourself. If your child observes aggressive behavior by you, he or she is more likely to act aggressively toward peers.
- Spend more time with your child. Monitor and supervise your child's activities. Know your child's friends, where they spend their free time, and what they do with that free time.
- Build on your child's talents and help him or her develop less aggressive and more appropriate reaction behaviors.
- Maintain contact with your child's school. Support the school's efforts to modify your child's behavior. Enlist help from the school to try and modify your child's behavior.
- Seek help from a mental health professional.

### False Beliefs About Bullying

The following common statements from adults and peers can perpetuate the bully/victim problem:

- "Being bullied builds character."
- "Bullying is part of growing up."
- "Kids will be kids" or "Boys will be boys."
- "What did you do to him to make him treat you that way?"
- "You just have to toughen up." or "You just have to learn how to stand up for yourself."
- "Hit him back. He won't bother you again."
- "I was bullied in school and I turned out fine" or "I was a bully in school and I turned out fine."
- "No kids are bullied in this school."
- "Only children who are different get bullied."
- "Only children in large schools/classes get bullied."

---

### References:

- Lyznicki, James; McCaffree, Mary Anne and Carolyn Robinowitz. 2004. "Childhood Bullying: Implications for Physicians." *American Family Physician*. 70(1).
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Olweus, D., Limber, S. and Mihalic, S.F. (1999, 2002). *Bullying Prevention Program: Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Nine*. Blueprints for Violence Prevention Series (D.S. Elliott, Series Editor). Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado.
- Shore, K. (2001). *Keeping Kids Safe: A Guide for Parents of Toddlers and Teens—and All the Years in Between*. Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press.