

How to Stop Bullying in Schools

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Overview

Bullying is a problem that can derail a child's schooling, social life, and emotional well-being. A report issued by the Bureau of Justice Statistics states that bullying occurs on a daily or weekly basis in 23 percent of public schools across the United States. The issue has gained more attention in recent years because of technology and new ways to communicate and harass one other, such as the internet, cell phones, and social media. Adults may have a tendency to ignore bullying and write it off as a normal part of life that all kids go through. But bullying is a real problem with serious consequences.

Identifying bullying

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Everyone wants to believe that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," but for some children and teens (and adults), that's not true. Words can be just as harmful, or even more so, than physical abuse.

Bullying is a behavior that includes a whole range of actions that cause physical or emotional pain, from spreading rumors, to intentional exclusion, to physical abuse. It can be subtle and many children don't tell their parents or teachers about it out of fear of shame or retribution. Children may also fear they won't be taken seriously if they report being bullied. It's important that parents, teachers, and other adults constantly look for bullying behaviors.

Some warning signs that your child is being bullied include:

- unexplained cuts or bruises
- damaged or missing clothing, books, school supplies, or other belongings
- loss of appetite
- trouble sleeping
- emotionally reticent
- taking unnecessarily long routes to school
- sudden poor performance or loss of interest in school work
- no longer wanting to hang out with friends
- asking to stay home sick because of frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or other ailments
- social anxiety or low self-esteem
- feeling moody or depressed
- any unexplained change in behavior

Why it's a problem

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Bullying has a negative effect on everyone, including:

- the bully
- the target
- the people who witness it
- anyone else connected to it

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's site Stopbullying.gov, being bullied can lead to negative health and emotional issues, including:

- depression and anxiety
- changes in sleep and eating
- loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- health issues
- decrease in academic achievement and school participation

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Bullying prevention strategies

Engage your child

The first thing to do if you notice that something's wrong with your child is to talk to them. The most important thing you can do for a bullied child is to validate the situation. Pay attention to your child's feelings and let them know that you care. You may not be able to solve all their problems but it's essential that they know they can count on you for support.

Be a role model

Bullying is a learned behavior. Children pick up antisocial behaviors like bullying from adult role models, parents, teachers, and the media. Be a positive role model and teach your child good social behavior from an early age. Your child is less likely to enter damaging or hurtful relationships if you as their parent avoid negative associations.

Get educated

Continual training and education is essential to stop bullying in your community. This gives teachers time to talk openly with students about bullying and to get a feel for what the bullying climate is at school. It will also help children understand what behaviors are considered bullying. School-wide assemblies on the subject can bring the issue out into the open.

It's also important to educate school staff and other adults. They should understand the nature of bullying and its effects, how to respond to bullying at school, and how to work with others in the community to prevent it.

Build a community of support

Bullying is a community issue and requires a community solution. Everybody has to be on board to successfully stamp it out. This includes:

- students
- parents
- teachers
- administrators
- counselors
- bus drivers
- cafeteria workers
- school nurses
- after-school instructors

If your child is being bullied, it's important you don't confront the bully or the bully's parent yourself. It usually isn't productive and can even be dangerous. Instead, work with your community. Teachers, counselors, and administrators have information and resources to help determine the appropriate course of action. Develop a community strategy to address bullying.

Be consistent

It's important to have a plan for how to deal with bullying. Written policies are a good way to have something that everyone in the community can reference. Every child should be treated and dealt with equally and consistently, according to the policies. Emotional bullying should be addressed in the same way as physical bullying.

Written school policies should not only prohibit bullying behavior, but also make students responsible for assisting others who are in trouble. Policies should be clear and concise so that everyone can understand them at a glance.

It's important that rules for bullying are enforced consistently throughout the school. School staff need to be able to intervene immediately to stop bullying, and there should also be follow-up meetings for both the bully and the target. Parents of affected students should be involved when possible.

Empower bystanders

Often, bystanders feel powerless to help. They may think that getting involved may bring the bully's attacks onto themselves or make them social outcasts. But it's essential to empower bystanders to help. Schools should work to protect bystanders from retaliation and help them understand that silence and inaction can make bullies more powerful.

Work with the bully

Don't forget that the bully has issues to deal with as well and also needs help from adults. Bullies often engage in bullying behaviors out of a lack of empathy and trust, or as a result of issues at home.

Bullies first need to recognize that their behavior is bullying. Then, they need to understand that bullying is harmful to others and leads to negative consequences. You can nip bullying behavior in the bud by showing them what the consequences of their actions are.

Outlook

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Bullying is a common issue when growing up, but it's an issue that shouldn't be brushed away. Solving it takes action from members of the entire community and addressing the issue head-on will bring it out into the open. Support must be given to those who are bullied, those who witness bullying, and the bullies themselves.

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