

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING BULLYING

### WHAT IS SCHOOL BULLYING?

*Bullying* is exposing a person to abusive actions repeatedly over time. Being aware of children's teasing and acknowledging injured feelings are always important. Bullying becomes a concern when hurtful or aggressive behavior toward an individual or group appears to be unprovoked, intentional, and (usually) repeated.

Bullying is a form of *violence*. It involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful. Bullying may be *physical* (hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing), *verbal* (taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, threatening), or *emotional* (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, extorting, or intimidating). Bullying can occur face-to-face or in the online world.

Bullying is also one or more acts by a pupil or group of pupils directed against another pupil that constitutes sexual harassment, hate violence, or severe or pervasive intentional harassment, threats, or intimidation that is disruptive, causes disorder, and invades the rights of others by creating an intimidating or hostile educational environment, and includes acts that are committed personally or by means of an electronic act, as defined.

An "electronic act" is defined as transmission of a communication, including, but not limited to, a message, text, sound, or image by means of an electronic device, including but not limited to, a telephone, wireless telephone or other wireless communication device, computer, or pager.

### WHAT DO BULLIES DO?

Bullying actions may be direct or indirect.

*Direct* bullying or identifiable bullying actions may include:

- Hitting, tripping, shoving, pinching, and excessive tickling
- Verbal threats, name calling, racial slurs, and insults
- Demanding money, property, or some service to be performed
- Stabbing, choking, burning, and shooting

*Indirect* bullying may be more difficult to detect and may include:

- Rejecting, excluding, or isolating target(s)
- Humiliating target(s) in front of friends
- Manipulating friends and relationships
- Sending hurtful or threatening e-mail or writing notes
- Blackmailing, terrorizing, or posing dangerous dares

- Developing a Web site devoted to taunting, ranking, or degrading a target and inviting others to join in posting humiliating notes or messages.

## **DO BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS BULLY?**

Yes. Typically, boys are direct and more physical while girls bully in more indirect ways. Some bullies use both direct and indirect strategies. Ultimately, it is important to the bully to be able to choose methods that produce the most success.

Although bullying among youths involves both bullies and targets of bullying, some students can be both a target and a bully at the same time. School districts must recognize bullying and develop policies that discourage such behavior and establish the consequences for students who bully at school. Everyone at the school, including parents, must understand that bullying is harmful and must take responsibility to recognize and stop bullying when it happens.

## **WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO ABOUT SCHOOL BULLYING?**

A student may be a *bully* or the *target* of a bully. Some students may be *both*. The majority of students, however, are *bystanders* or observers of bullying, and still others may not be aware of bullying happening at all but may be affected by the problems caused by the behavior.

The *targeted* student needs to know that bullies rarely stop bullying on their own. A bully's aggressive behavior more likely will escalate and over time, he/she will devise bolder methods for hurting people. Telling a responsible, caring adult at school about the bullying and asking for help are essential. The targeted student should also avoid the usual times and places where they come in contact with the bully. The targeted student should choose safe places to be at school, stay with someone, and avoid being vulnerable by being alone or in some secluded area of the school.

The *bully's* primary purpose is to gain power or acclaim. Some targeted students have made the mistake of thinking that use of a weapon or retaliation against the bully will resolve the problem. These choices are not viable because they are rarely effective. Rather than end the problem, retaliatory methods tend to escalate the aggression and hurt or injure unintended victims.

Students who bully should admit to the behavior and acknowledge it as being hurtful. A student who bullies can ask for help just like the targeted student or accept help from an adult whom they trust and begin to explore more respectful methods of expression and for gaining power and prestige at school.

The *bystander* should recognize that he/she must choose to be either a part of the problem or a part of the solution. Hurtful actions can deliberately affect the targeted person, witnesses to the humiliation, and the entire campus climate. *Bystanders* are a powerful majority and can use their social power and personal actions to promote respect for themselves and others.

There are ways to prevent bullying from being established in a school. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Report bullying to a responsible and caring adult.
- Express disapproval by not joining in the laughter, teasing, or gossip.
- Campaign against bullying through school activities (e.g., the school newsletter, the student handbook, school calendar, poster contests, a “student watch” program, plays and productions, or suggestion boxes for safe, anonymous reporting).
- Advocate mediation programs or programs to develop students’ problem-solving skills.

### **WHAT CAN PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN DO ABOUT SCHOOL BULLYING?**

Parents are their children's first teachers. Therefore, parents' words and actions at home will be imitated by their children in other settings. The most important opportunity that parents have is to speak and act in a respectful way and to solve problems fairly and peacefully. Being a positive role model means teaching children respect and peaceable behaviors by example. Suggestions for ways to be a positive role model are as follows:

#### **At home**

- Talk with children often and listen carefully to what they have to say.
- Discuss bullying behavior and how hurtful it can be to others.
- Make behavioral expectations clear and be consistent with discipline when siblings and peers engage in hurtful teasing and bullying.
- Help children understand the meaning of friendship by modeling friendly behavior and showing how friends act positively toward each other.
- Discuss the fact that people are individuals and everyone develops characteristics and personalities that make them who they are.
- Model basic manners and respect for family, friends, and peers.
- Urge children to tell an adult when they are being bullied.

#### **At school**

- Learn the school rules, expected behavior, and consequences of bullying.
- Participate at school, offer services, and attend school-sponsored activities.
- Communicate regularly with your child's teacher.
- Report bullying behavior immediately when you become aware it is happening.
- Ask for and accept the school’s help whether your child is a target, a bully, or a bystander.

If your child has experienced conflict or confrontation with a bully, build his or her confidence and independence with reassurances:

- He or she is not at fault, and the bully's behavior is the problem.
- Everyone is entitled to respect, and he or she does not deserve being bullied.
- You will work with the school staff to address the problem. You are committed to helping the school protect your child and other children from bullies. (Keep accurate records of incidents and be specific about your child's experiences when discussing resolution of the problem with staff.)
- You will meet with your child's teacher, the principal, and/or the school counselor.

Meeting with the family of the bully may be difficult as family members could interpret the bully's behavior as "standing up" for himself or herself. However, if a counselor or principal offers practical advice or interventions that could help resolve the situation, including the bully's family in the discussion could end the problem.