

How to help your child face a bully 1

The new school season has spurred calls from parents regarding their children's safety at school. Many parents are rightfully concerned about their child being bullied and have many questions, including whether it could really happen in a "good school," what can they do about it, and what constitutes "bullying" behaviour. Here is some information to help you understand what your child may be dealing with and to give you some suggestions on how to support and protect your child.

Statistics

According to Young Canadians in a Wired World, a research project initiated by the Media Awareness Network, 34 per cent of students in Grades 7-11 report having been bullied within the school year. Among those, 27 per cent say that have also been bullied over the Internet. Girls are far more likely to be cyber-bullied than boys.

Some studies indicate that bully victims are two to nine times more likely to suffer from depression, have increased suicidal thoughts, and are more likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. (PTSD).

Some studies indicate that up to 58 per cent of children don't report the bullying to their parents. How will this abuse affect your child's self-esteem and sense of self-power?

What is bullying?

Bullying is an oppressive or negative act intended to hurt someone else. It may include many different types of behaviour, including physical harm, verbal abuse, isolating behaviour, acts of humiliation, threats and intimidation.

A bully's power can come from physical strength, social status or intimidating behaviour.

Bullying is a complex social issue. Whether your child is behaving as a bully or feels like a victim, or is simply a bystander while someone else is bullied, it is important to take the situation seriously.

Many parents as well as educators tend to minimize bullying behaviour - they see it as "kids just being kids." Maybe that was the case in our childhood, but things have changed. With the popularity of Facebook, MySpace, chat rooms and texting, bullying has become easier, more frequent, with more devastating effects.

How can you help your child avoid being bullied?

Encourage your child to stay around other people. Most bullies pick on kids who are alone and look vulnerable.

Encourage your child to speak up to a bully. Teach your child how to assert himself. He is not to be aggressive, that will only make the situation worse.

Encourage your child to tell you, or a teacher or a counsellor when he/ she is being bullied. Many children think that adults can't do anything or that it will get worse for him if they do tell. However, many schools have zero tolerance toward bullying, but can do nothing if they are not informed.

When a child is ready to report he is being bullied, make sure he reports it using the word "bullied" so that the teacher will take him seriously. If a child reports he is being annoyed, or someone is being mean to him, the teacher or parent may not take the complaint as seriously.

Inform yourself about your child's school's policy regarding bullying

Bullies are looking for victims. Make sure your child does not fit the profile, by encouraging confident posture and body language.

If your child says nothing, for fear of being seen as a "tattletale," let him know that saying nothing only gives the message that the bully's behaviour is acceptable. If there are no consequences for the bully, why should he stop his behaviour? It will just encourage the bully to continue or even escalate.

I hope this information will empower you to help your son or daughter have a safe and bully-free school year. Rhonda Rabow is a psychotherapist in Montreal. Her website is www.helpmerhonda.ca. To receive her free monthly newsletter, go to www.rhondarabow.com, email her at info@rhondarabow.com



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JJRC
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The bottom line is bullies are cowards and need to be stood up to. Anything less and they don't get it.

I remember my cousin Bobby, who at the age of 15 wore black-rimmed glasses, blond short hair and looked nerdy. He was being bullied by 16 & 17 year olds whenever he went to the local outdoor skating rink. He asked his mother for help and she explained that she couldn't go there and talk to them, for they would just get him when she wasn't there, but she could tell him what to do.

She told him that the next time he was bullied, he was to ignore the one that was bullying him, walk up to the biggest one of the bunch, take a few deep breaths because he would be scared, and let him have it as hard as he could.

That afternoon, as Bobby came home from the rink in the dark, four of them cornered him in the middle of the pedestrian walkway tunnel under the road, away from prying eyes and possible help. One approached him, pushing him backwards, edging him on to fight while the three others stood a few feet away smiling and laughing. It wasn't difficult finding the biggest one, he was a 17 year old and one of the ones hanging back and laughing.

Bobby walked up to him, so scared he was shaking, closed his eyes and let go a roundhouse punch that knocked the bully down on his ass. The three others backed away in awe. He was never, ever bullied again.

I don't think enough is done in schools to paint bullies for what they are, cowards, and exactly how to handle them. The social status of a whimpering bully with a bloody nose goes down pretty quickly.

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