

Bullying & Children with Disabilities

Each day, around the world, hundreds of thousands of children miss school because they fear being bullied. Children from the ages of 8-15 rank bullying as a greater problem than AIDS, alcohol, and even racism. It is estimated that each month 1/3 of all youth are bullied. This number is even greater for children with disabilities. In the high school years, 1 out of every 10 students who drops out does so as a result of bullying. Those who are bullied are more likely to become depressed, have lower self esteem, have lower academic achievement, and attempt or complete suicide. By age 24, half of all bullies will have at least one criminal conviction.

Bullying is aggressive behavior used to intentionally hurt someone. This behavior can be physical such as hitting, punching, or kicking. Bullying can also be verbal such as teasing, name-calling, or spreading rumors. Recently, children have begun “cyber-bullying.” Cyber-bullying takes place on the internet in places like chat rooms or through instant messenger. Bullies often pick on quiet, shy kids, minorities, disabled children, and other children who have obvious differences. Although children with disabilities are often targets, in some cases, such as with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), disabled children may also be the bully. Children with FAS may have behavioral problems which can result in poor impulse control and discipline problems. There is also evidence that FAS children who bully may do so to protect other children from being bullied.

Many parents and even teachers underestimate how often children are bullied. Likewise, most bullying incidents go unreported. It is important to be involved in your child’s life and know what’s going on. Become involved with your child’s school, their

teachers and their friends' parents. The earlier you recognize that your child is being bullied or being a bully, the easier the problem will be to fix.

If your child is the bully:

First, watch for the signs of bullying. If your child often uses aggression to deal with their problems or talks about "getting even with" someone, they may be bullying other kids. It is also important to avoid physical forms of discipline since your child may learn these behaviors from you. If you suspect that your child is bullying other children, make it clear both through your actions and by talking to your child that you will not tolerate this behavior. Work with them on developing non-violent responses to behavior such as walking away or talking about a problem. Reward your child for dealing with a problem in a non-violent way.

If your child is being bullied:

The first step is to watch for signs that your child is being bullied. These signs include: avoiding school, coming home with bruises or scratches, and more frequent chronic illnesses such as headaches, stomachaches and trouble sleeping. Try talking to your child about what happens at school. Teach them to walk away from bullies and uncomfortable situations. Work with the school to make sure that your child and others are safe. It is likely that your child isn't the only one being bullied by this person. Make sure you tell your child that this isn't their fault and that you're on their side. Since bullying hurts a child's self esteem, make sure to praise your child and provide them ways to become more assertive (but not violent). Role playing situations may be particularly helpful.

Visit <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp> for great information on bullying.

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The Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project is funded in part by the Georgia Department of Human Resources Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases.

Stats: http://www.womedia.org/lgr_statistics.htm