



Take Action Against School Bullying

The stereotype of the school-yard bully who hits, shoves, pushes, shuns, or sneers his way to getting lunch money, prized possessions, or recognition can no longer be dismissed as “boys will be boys” by today’s schools or parents. Bullying now expands into “abuse” of other children, using weapons such as guns and knives as the instruments for resolving conflict, seeking revenge, gaining acceptance, or instilling fear. Too many of us have watched with horror as bullies have taken center stage nationally with violent actions that have led to injuries and the loss of life.

Being bullied causes children of all ages to skip school, avoid classes, lose concentration, perform poorly with school assignments, withdraw from school functions, or participate in high-risk activities. Bullying also may cause children to feel anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or of low self worth. *According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, more than 43 percent of middle school and high school students avoid using school bathrooms for fear of being harassed or assaulted. The Harvard School of Public Health reports that one in 15 students avoid certain places at school because they fear being attacked.*

Your child can expect to encounter bullies at any age and *may be among the 15 to 20 percent of children who encounter bullying more than once or twice in a school term, according to studies on bullying by Dan Olweus at the University of Bergen in Norway.* What actions can you take to help your child and your child’s school set and maintain a standard of conduct where conflicts are resolved peacefully and with positive outcomes, without tolerating bullying? Consider these choices:

- ◆ Advocate for school based anti-bullying programs and conflict resolution- training for school personnel and students.
- ◆ Communicate with school administration about concerns for school safety and expectations for close supervision of students in hallways, cafeterias, bathrooms, and on playgrounds.
- ◆ Enroll your child in athletic or recreational sport activities that emphasize self-discipline, self-control, and self-esteem to help increase self-confidence.

- ◆ Talk to your child about practicing these five steps offered by the American School Counselor Association: ignore, move away, ask to stop, tell firmly to stop, tell an adult.
- ◆ Create a safe haven for your child to talk to you at home about being bullied without fear of being called a “wimp.” Teaching your child to fight back with physical force only encourages a bully’s aggressive behavior and increases your child’s chances of being hurt physically, potentially outside of the school setting.
- ◆ Ask teachers and other school personnel to separate your child from a bully.
- ◆ Report abuse of your child personally, removing your child from the stress of the responsibility of telling a teacher or school administrator. Talk to your child about the difference between “tattling” (to get another child in trouble) and “telling” (to report when he or someone else is in danger).

School administrators, faculty, and parents should be very attentive to promoting awareness, education, and programming on violence prevention especially at the start of each school semester, which represents the time when school-associated student homicide events are highest, according to a study released in August 2001 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information about long term actions to build safe schools, contact the Community Education Department of Riley Hospital for Children at 317-274-2964.