

Understanding Bullying

Bullying means overt, unwanted, repeated acts or gestures, including verbal or written communications or images transmitted in any manner (including digitally or electronically), physical acts committed, aggression, or any other behaviors, that are committed by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the targeted student and create for the targeted student an objectively hostile school environment that:

- 1) places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to the targeted student's person or property;
- 2) has a substantially detrimental effect on the targeted student's physical or mental health;
- 3) has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's academic performance; or
- 4) has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, and privileges provided by the school.

There are several types of bullying.

Physical: Hurting a person's body or possessions. It includes hitting/kicking/punching, spitting, tripping or pushing, taking or breaking someone's things, and making mean or rude hand gestures.

Verbal: Saying mean things. It can include teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, or threatening to cause harm.

Social/Relational: Hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying involves telling others not to be friends with someone, leaving someone out on purpose, spreading rumors about someone, or embarrassing someone in public.

Written or Electronic (Cyber-bullying): Using technology to intimidate, harass, or embarrass. Posting intimidating messages or pictures via computer, cell phones, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter.

Tips for Parents

- Look for a sudden, extreme change in behavior. For example, teen was obsessed with Facebook but now avoids going online. Suddenly becomes obsessed with phone texts. Suddenly disinterested in once beloved extracurricular activity. Refusal to go to school. Unexplained complaints of illness, anxiety, or insecurity.
- Monitor Internet use, cell phone usage, and texts. "Follow" teen on Twitter, "Friend" on Facebook. Talk about online safety (ie: never provide personal information or meet someone in person.)
- Initiate a conversation with your teen about bullying before an incident occurs. Communicate that hurting other people physically or emotionally (in person or online) is unacceptable. Expect your child to respect others and to be tolerant of those with different looks, abilities, beliefs, and backgrounds.
- Review the definition of bullying. Ask your child if he/she has ever engaged in that type of behavior, witnessed or experienced it. Discuss ways appropriately handle conflict.
- Encourage teens to do what they love. Extracurricular activities, clubs, interests, and hobbies can boost confidence and foster a sense of belonging.
- Model how to treat others with kindness and respect. Develop empathy in your child.

If your teen is a target of bullying listen, be supportive, and focus on solutions. Thank him/her for trusting you and coming to you for help. Affirm that it is not his/her fault and no one deserves to be a victim of bullying.

Ask good questions like:

“Who is doing the bullying?” (Could be a group of students)

“How long has this been going on?”

“How often does it occur?”

“When and where does the bullying take place?”

“Who else has seen the bullying?”

“How did you respond?”

Do not advise your teen to fight the bully. Don't let the bully see an emotional reaction.

Practice strategies with your teen like telling the individual to stop in a calm, clear voice. Encourage your child to stand tall, walk confidently, a look person in the eye, smile, and use body language that shows self-confidence. Have your teen consider “blocking” or “unfriending” an individual who bullies.

Keep objective documentation. If bullying continues, seek help from a guidance counselor or principal.

If your teen is bullying others, take it seriously and don't make excuses. Listen to your child's reason, but emphasize that there are always other options and brainstorm better solutions together. Help him own his actions and how those actions affect others both positively and negatively. Help your teen understand the definition of bullying, discuss the consequences of bullying, and hold him/her accountable for their behavior.

If your teen observes bullying, encourage him/her to speak out immediately on behalf of the victim by telling the bully to stop or by distracting the bully. Tell your child to not laugh, join in, or pass it on. Just as importantly, explain that saying and doing nothing actually supports the bullying behavior. (Research shows that when a bystander speaks up against bullying it will stop within seconds and is less likely to reoccur.) Teach your child to be inclusive.

Learn more from these sources:

www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/talking-about-it/index.html

www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/info-facts.asp (includes videos and sites for kids & teens)