

BULLYING

****Bullying is defined as the repeated pattern of singling out another person for mean behavior. Bullying is an INTENTIONAL action, meant to bring harm to someone. It is a form of intimidation and domination over someone perceived to be weaker or “less than worthy.”**

Boys and Girls both engage in bullying behaviors, although different forms

1. Boys tend to be more PHYSICAL with their bullying—pushing, knocking down, hitting, tripping, poking, and spitting. They are also more likely to engage in sexual bullying tactics. These can be physical or verbal in nature.
2. Girls tend to use verbal and emotional tactics to hurt someone. Verbal bullying includes: name-calling, taunting, cruel criticism, malicious gossip and spreading rumors. Emotional (or relational) bullying is more subtle than verbal. Emotional bullying is the hardest to detect or observe, and includes: isolating, ignoring, shunning and excluding someone else. The goal of this form of bullying is to alienate and reject a peer.

Children and Teens “bully” for different reasons

1. Contrary to what most people believe, bullies generally have friends and high self-esteem. Think “LUCY” from the PEANUTS. She had plenty of friends and appeared to think very highly of herself.
2. Some common characteristics of children who bully include: impulsivity, low tolerance for frustration, lack of empathy toward others, and have difficulty complying with rules and authority figures.
3. Bullies often refuse to accept responsibility for their own behavior and project blame and false allegations onto their victims to avoid consequences. They lack the insight to see the short term or long term consequences of their hurtful actions.

Signs of a child being bullied

1. The victims of bullying come in ALL SHAPES AND SIZES!! Rich-poor-thin-obese-smart-LD-acne-glasses-popular-unknown-shy-outgoing...there is not a single “type” of child who is excluded from being bullied.
2. If your child is a target, DON’T ASSUME they will tell you or anyone else. They often are ashamed, embarrassed, and fear that telling you will result in more social consequences. They often believe there is no one who can help them and they will often suffer in silence.
3. Warning signs include: decreased school performance, anxiety/fear related to going to school, increased physical complaints, depression symptoms, lowered self-esteem, to withdraw from family and friends, and lack of assertiveness.

Cyberbullying

1. This form of bullying takes place by using cell phones or computers. Texting, Facebook accounts, and MySpace are being used by bullies to taunt their victims.
2. Cyberbullying is extremely harmful to the victim because it can take place 24 HOURS A DAY! The victim never gets a break from the harassment.
3. Cyberbullying tends to be much meaner in context because there is no face-to-face contact. Sometimes, the bully is “anonymous” to the victim, making the harassment even scarier and more anxiety provoking.
4. The victim can easily become a “bully” by engaging in verbal warfare through text or website messaging.
5. Adults should always monitor electronic activity.

What to do for bullies and their victims

1. Since most instances of bullying occur in school settings, be familiar with school policies regarding bullying. Illinois has laws prohibiting bullying, in order to keep all children safe while they are at school. Familiarize yourself with these laws and make sure your school is enforcing them properly!! Be proactive in helping your child or teen resolve issues at school through the school Principal, Social Worker, or Police Officer.
2. If your child is the bully, hold them responsible for their actions. Provide immediate and appropriate consequences. Ask for support from the school or mental health professionals if needed. As a parent, role model positive and respectful behaviors toward others.
3. If your child is a victim of bullying, make sure they have “support” staff at school that help them feel safe. Encourage open communication at home and most importantly, LISTEN to your child’s story. Seek professional help if your child is exhibiting depressive symptoms, such as tearfulness, anger, poor grades, anxiety regarding school, isolation, poor appetite, or disturbance in sleeping patterns. Victims of bullying CAN become suicidal if they are depressed and feel hopeless.

RESOURCES

PBSKIDS.ORG/ITSMY LIFE- for younger children
STOPBULLYING.GOV- for teenagers and young adults
STOPBULLYINGNOW.COM- resources for parents and educators