

Tips From Your School Psychologist

Bullying: Not Just ‘Kids Being Kids’

Preventing bullying is a top priority for parents and professionals in our school community. The behavior interferes with children’s ability to learn and feel safe. Bullying is not simply a case of “kids being kids,” but is a learned anti-social behavior that can be unlearned or, better yet, prevented. As adults we need to create an environment in school and at home where bullying and teasing are not tolerated under *any* circumstances.”

Everyone in our school needs to be committed to eliminating bullying behavior of any type. Our goal is to help our students understand the appropriate way to treat others, and to ensure that no one is victimized by cruel or threatening behavior. As part of this effort we are working to transform what experts call the “silent majority” into a “caring majority” of students who become part of the anti-bullying solution. Elements of effective anti-bullying efforts include:

- **Establishing clear consistent consequences** for bullying behavior that all children understand.
- **Incorporating positive behavioral interventions** with loss of privileges or other consequences.
- **Training for all school personnel** including bus drivers, playground monitors, after school program supervisors, etc.
- **Intervening immediately when bullying occurs**, praising children when they do the right thing, and offering children alternatives to bullying.
- **Teaching children to work together** to stand up to a bully, encouraging them to reach out to excluded peers, celebrating acts of kindness, and reinforcing the availability of adult support.
- **Ensuring that adults are visible and vigilant** in common areas, such as hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, and playgrounds. This includes being aware of behavior on the bus, and on the way to and from school for children who walk, as these are important parts of the school day.

Parents can be active partners in preventing bullying. You are your child’s most important source of support and learning for positive behaviors. Following are a few suggestions to help your child.

- **Be aware of changes behavior or attitudes.** Children who are bullied often give signals that something is wrong. They may become withdrawn or be reluctant to go to school and can experience physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, or problems sleeping. Talk to your child about their concerns and **reassure them that you will work with school to stop the behavior.**
- **Let us know if your child is being bullied.** Call the teacher, school administrator, guidance counselor or the school psychologist.

- **Offer strategies to counter bullying.** Useful strategies include standing up for themselves verbally, such as saying “I don’t like what you said/or did,” or “You can say whatever you want but it’s not true;” walking away from the bully; using humor (practice funny comebacks with your child); thinking of positive images or statements about themselves to bolster self-esteem; and getting help from an adult.
- **Praise your child for appropriate social behaviors.** “Catch” your child doing something good and offer positive reinforcement. Encourage him or her to support their peers, (e.g., asking a lonely classmate to eat lunch or sticking up for a child being teased). Monitor television and video games.
- **Help your child build positive social relationships.** Identify peers with whom they get along. Suggest things they can do together, (e.g., study, eat lunch, come home after school, go to the movies). Also, finding a variety of activities that your child enjoys and does well can help build self-esteem and confidence.
- **Use alternatives to physical punishment.** Consistent alternatives, such as the removal of privileges or additional chores, serve as more effective consequences than physical punishment for inappropriate or difficult behavior.
- **Supervise your children and their friends.** Stop bullying behavior immediately. Have the “aggressor” practice alternative behaviors.

It is very important our children know that adults can and will help them if they are being bullied. Please encourage your child to talk to you, his teacher, the school counselor or school administrator or another trusted adult if they feel threatened or isolated. The school psychologist is available to help. You can reach the school psychologist at your school by calling the school directly and asking to speak to the school psychologist or by going to the school website and emailing the school psychologist directly. Together we can continue to create a healthy, safe, positive learning environment for all our children.