

B is for Bullying

Do you remember saying, "sticks and stones may break my bones?" The final announcement shouted is "*and words will never hurt me.*" Generally this taunt is exclaimed as an attempt to brush off unwanted attention. But, how true is this statement? In 2002, the American Medical Association warned, "bullying is a public health issue with long-term mental-health consequences for bullies and their victims."

No longer is bullying just a topic for talk shows, sitcoms or comic strips. It is gaining widespread public attention. Now it's in our daily news, lunch conversations and PTA discussions. A research study released in April 2005 by Drs. Zimmerman and Christakis stated, "The more TV 4-year-old children watch, the more likely they are to become bullies later on in school." One TV steals the child from activities with peers and parents. When unchecked, it can have serious influence on a child's behavior.

What is bullying? The US Center of Mental Health Services defines bullying as "repeated acts of emotional, social or physical behavior. They're intentional, controlling, and hurtful." By forcing power over another, the bully intends to make the victim feel embarrassed, hurt or afraid. This behavior can be name-calling; excluding or ignoring a person; and taking or damaging property. Sadly, it can spiral to physical harm. On the other hand, the attention, feeling of power and the false sense of importance among peers drives the bully.

What are some signs? Parents and teachers may not see the obvious acts of bullying because they often take place in school bathrooms, hallways, in the back of the bus or community parks. A person is targeted for a variety of reasons such as physical appearance or mannerisms; speech; their name; a timid, shy personality; or for no reason at all. A child who is a victim of bullying may exhibit some of these signs:

- Is socially withdrawn
- Has few friends
- Feels picked on, isolated, or rejected
- Complains of illnesses to avoid school
- Possessions are often damaged or "lost"
- Wants to take some kind of weapon to school for safety
- Talks about running away
- Talks about hurting themselves or others

You might notice other issues such as bedwetting, difficulty sleeping, irritability, poor concentration or problems with schoolwork. Long-term effects can be depression, problems making friends, substance abuse, and conflicts with the law.

If you think your child is being bullied, respond quickly in a positive, respectful manner. Open the conversation with your support to talk openly and honestly about their feelings.

Review the resources below to learn more about bullying and what you can do to help you and your child.

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