

Have You Prepared Your Child For The School Bully?

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Last edited: Tuesday, July 13, 2004

Posted: Tuesday, July 13, 2004

This article serves to remind parents to prepare their child for the very real possibility that their child will encounter a bully. It also offers suggestions about how to cope with a bully and provides insight to the characteristics of a bully and their intended victim.

School violence. The very words send shivers down a parent's spine. Does the phrase school bully evoke the same emotions? It should.

As subtle as it may seem, bullying is a form of violence. Experts estimate that almost 75% of today's youth will be involved in some aspect of bullying before they enter high school. And the chances are, your child will be one of the statistics. Long gone is the idea that bullying is a natural process of youth, a coming of age. It is unacceptable behavior and the long lasting ramifications are far too great to ignore.

Before you can prepare your child for the bully, it is important to understand what constitutes this type of behavior. Bullying is defined as aggressive behavior repeatedly targeted at a child of lesser physical or emotional strength. However, although a child might not be the target of a bully, bystanders are also victims.

Bullying behavior is typically classified in three categories:

- Physical bullying is physical intimidation, hitting, kicking, pushing, choking, and/or spitting.
- Verbal bullying is name-calling, threats, taunting, teasing, rumor spreading, and slander.
- Social bullying is intentional exclusion and isolation from social and peer group activities by manipulation and rumor spreading.

The characteristics of a bully include impulsive, dominating behavior, a low frustration level, a lack of empathy, a need to be the center of attention, and unhealthy attitudes towards violence and its consequences.

Although many believe insecurity and self-loathing are at the root of a bully's problem, usually the opposite is true. Bullies tend to be over confidence. They portray a fearless nature and physical strength, qualities often admired by their peers.

Many factors within a child's environment can contribute to their aggressive behavior, including family, peers group, neighborhood, society, and school. Children who bully are more likely to experience violence or neglect in the home and have less supervision and involvement from their parents. Children picked on by older siblings tend to become bullies themselves. Others see bullying as a means to gain acceptance, friendship, and popularity.

The victim of a bully is typically a child who appears insecure or cautious, a child that rarely defends or retaliates when confronted, and/or a child lacking in social skills or physical strength. Unfortunately, since bullies lack compassion, children with physical disabilities are also prey, and so are overweight children, and those that wear glasses or have a speech impediment. However, any child can be the victim of a bully. Bullies will also challenge popular children in attempt to gain more popularity. Sometimes it is just a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The bully needs an audience. Therefore, bullying primarily occurs on school grounds and is played out in front of a group. Lunchrooms, playgrounds, hallways, locker rooms, and bathrooms are prime areas for confrontation.

The elements of confrontation include the leader (bully), the followers, the victim, and the bystanders. Research shows that over 75% of school children will be involved in some aspect of bullying before they reach high school, playing at least one, if not more of these roles.

The consequences of bullying are many. Children will go to great lengths to avoid being the victim of a bully. If they are not prepared in a positive way, they will naturally resort to negative ways of coping such as cutting class, feigning illness, poor grades, and social withdrawal.

For a child repeatedly victimized by a bully, humiliation, fear, anxiety, and depression are constant companions that can lead to harmful, shocking, and unexpected behavior from an otherwise shy and timid child.

Victims may feel ashamed and tend to view themselves as failures. They are more prone to stress related illnesses such as headaches and stomachaches. In extreme cases, the victim of a bully can experience severe depression and entertain thoughts of suicide.

Lack of safety is a top concern to young people, and bullying is a real and constant threat. When a child's sense of security is compromised, the child usually responds by taking the role of bystander, even if the victim is a friend. This burdens a child and may cause him or her to harbor feelings of guilt because they did nothing to stop or prevent the bullying. Reasons for not reporting bullying or helping a friend in trouble include fear of retribution and exclusion as well as other personal consequences.

A lack of security deeply damages the learning environment and process. It may result in the disruption of the classroom, and preoccupy students. It can also inhibit a child's creativity and self-expression. Subsequently, this leads to poor attention spans and academic achievements suffer.

Prepare Your Child For The Bully

- Teach your child to walk tall and proud and to maintain eye contact. Body language is important in all aspects of your child's life. Portraying a positive, self-confident stature will help your child cope in many areas.
- Teach your child to accompany the confident posture with positive, self-affirming thoughts that valid his or her rights as a person. These affirmations will aid your child in speaking up without provoking a bully, and very well serve to defuse the situation.
- The element of surprise can make the bully take a step back. Bullies like easy prey. A joke, a flip comment, or a question is an unexpected response to harassment, and might be just enough to make the bully think his actions aren't delivering the desired outcome.
- Help your child to identify role models. Encourage your child to read stories that inspire. Share this time with your child and point out how strength of character and perseverance can achieve positive outcomes without resorting to violence or force.
- Writing is another avenue to help your child cope. Encourage your child to keep a diary or journal, write poetry, or write songs. Creativity and self-expression are important and productive tools used to work through negative issues. Writing provides a safe outlet for a child. Point out the benefits of journaling positive experiences as well as expressing their feelings about bullying.
- Friendships are very important. If your child has difficulties making or maintaining friends, intervene and help. Friendships are a protection against bullying. Observe and identify children that might have things in common with your child and arrange a visit. Encourage your child to join activities that will build strength and confidence.

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