

School Yard Bullies-Canadian Parents

Safeguarding Our Kids

By Anne Marie Robichaud

Across Canada educators have recognized a growing concern among parents and school officials regarding issues of behaviour and bullying within the school system. In an effort to provide a safe learning environment for all children the "Positive Learning Environment" policy was adopted within New Brunswick. This tool was designed to help school staff, students and parents build a safe and peaceful environment where people feel accepted and respected, and where learning is the main focus. As part of the personal development and career-planning curriculum, all New Brunswick elementary schools are now participating in the "Focus on Bullying" program, an anti-bullying initiative.

Juanita Mureika is a Psychologist/Consultant for Positive Learning Environment and School Psychology at the Department of Education in Fredericton. She believes *"that bullying is part of a lifecycle of power imposition that is learned early in the child's life as a way of solving problems. Eventually this turns into bullying in elementary school, harassment and dating violence in later school years, marital violence, workplace violence/harassment and elder abuse as adults all the same behaviour, just different manifestations by age. If we really want to break the cycle of violence, we need to begin very early, and at home!"*

Here's what parents can do to help reduce bullying:

- **Take Preventative Measures:** Children that are victimized by schoolyard bullies tend to suffer from low self-esteem. One of the best ways of helping your child deal with a bully, or to prevent them from becoming one, is to continue to [build their self-esteem](#). A child that feels good about him or herself is better prepared to handle a bully.
- **Focus on the "Bystanders":** Schoolyard bullies like having an audience when harassing their victims, so it's very important to teach your child how everybody, even bystanders, have a responsibility to walk away and tell a Teacher or Playground Supervisor about the bullying. Explain to your child that by being a bystander, he or she is actually allowing the bullying to continue; show them how they have the power to stop the fight by walking away and reporting the incident.
- **Keep communication open:** Many children that are victims of bullying feel that if they report the incident, the bully will retaliate, or that their classmates will regard them as a snitch. Help your child understand that there is a big difference between being a tattler and reporting incidents of violence and harassment that can jeopardize someone's safety.
- **Watch for signs:** As parents, we need to take seriously any changes in our child's behaviour. If you notice that your child doesn't want to go to school, board the bus, seems frightened or appears to be stressed, there is a strong chance that he is being bullied and you need to investigate further.
- **Take it Seriously:** Chances are if your child has told you a schoolyard bully has wronged him or her, it's not the first time it has happened - bullies tend to seek out the same victims again and again. Believe in your child and assure him that he did the right thing by reporting the incident, and that you will work together to prevent it from reoccurring. But before you report the incident to the Teacher, try and get as many specifics as possible such as who, what, when and where the incident occurred.
- **Report to the right person:** Avoid worsening the situation by calling the parents of the bully. No parent wants their child to be a bully, and this will only create hurt feelings. The New Brunswick Department of Education has an anti-bullying program in place in all of the school districts throughout the province. So if you suspect your child is being bullied, do report the incident to your child's Teacher at once. Your child's Teacher will handle any communication with the other child's parents, mediate the situation, and maintain contact with school officials to see that the problem is resolved. If your child's Teacher is not able to help, then contact the school Principal for assistance.
- **Teach your child how to handle difficult situations:** Dealing with bullies can be extremely intimidating and frightening for a child, so offer them some tips on how to handle these difficult situations. Teach your child some strategies on how to deal with the bully such as changing direction if you see a bully coming towards you, or by playing close to the Teacher on Duty or Playground Supervisor. Tell your child to avoid "hot spots", if the bullying happens in the same place and time each day, show your child ways that they can avoid those places. For example, if your child is being bullied on the walk home from school every day; suggest that he take an alternate route that is open and safe.
- **Don't encourage further violence:** Remind your child that "fighting back" is not the answer and will only escalate the situation. Solving violence through violence does not work and could cause your child further serious harm.

- **Practice Techniques:** Teach your child how to handle schoolyard bullies assertively through "role play" activities at home. As a family, act out various scenario's that could happen on the playground. Have your child try various techniques such as humour or not paying attention to the bully. This is also an opportunity to teach your child how they can intervene and help someone that they see being bullied.

If you would like more information on safeguarding your child from schoolyard bullies through the "Focus on Bullying" program, contact your child's school or district office for details.

Anne Marie Robichaud is a Mom and staff writer for Canadian Parents Online. If you have comments or suggestions please feel free to [contact Anne](#).