

Teen Health Kit for Parents

✓ Putting a Stop to Bullying

Bullying is an old and widespread problem. Most of us can recall episodes of bullying that we, or our classmates, were subjected to during our school years. Research estimates indicate that the problem affects far more students than teachers or parents are aware of. A recent study of 1,041 students in four Toronto area schools (Grades K-8) showed that the proportion of children who reported being victimized more than once or twice over the term was between 12 and 15 percent. The proportion of students who reported having bullied others more than once or twice over the term ranged from 7 to 9 percent.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO STOP BULLYING?

There are many effective strategies for parents who wish to stop bullying. An important starting point is to realize that much bullying occurs without the knowledge of teachers and parents, and that many victims are very reluctant to tell adults about their problems with bullying. They may be ashamed to be a victim, and they are afraid that adults cannot or will not help to resolve the situation. They may have been threatened with retaliation if they tell.

Also, adults must re-examine some of their own beliefs in regard to interpersonal behavior before they can intervene effectively. Many teachers and parents tell children not to "tattle," and to resolve their problems themselves. In the bullying situation, though, there is a power imbalance of some kind that ensures the victim always gets the worst of the interaction. The victim and bully both need intervention in order to stop the pattern.

Some important strategies in stopping bullying are: providing good supervision for children; providing effective consequences to bullies; using good communication between teachers and parents; providing all children opportunities to develop good interpersonal skills; and creating a social environment which is supportive and inclusive, in which aggressive, bully behavior is not tolerated.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO IF THEIR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

1. Ask the child directly. Often children do not wish to tell their parents due to shame and embarrassment, or fear that bullies will retaliate if they tell. Look for signs such as: fear of going to school, lack of friends, missing belongings and torn clothing, and increased fearfulness and anxiety.
2. Work with the school immediately to make sure your child is safe, that effective consequences are applied toward the bully, and that monitoring at school is adequate.
3. Advocate for involvement of the bully's parents. If the bullying is happening on the way to and from school, arrange for the child to get to school with older, supportive children, or take him or her until other interventions can take place.
4. If your child is timid, and lacks friends, try to arrange for your child to participate in positive social groups that meet his or her interests. Developing your child's special skills and confidence in the context of a positive social group can be very helpful.
5. Suggest that the school implement a comprehensive anti-bullying program. A home-and school association meeting to discuss and support such an initiative can be helpful.

Useful Web sites:

www.bullying.org
stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov
www.kidshealth.org

Local Resources: Genesee Valley Health Partnership, Inc.
Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum
(585) 615-4381
www.gvhp.org



This Teen Health Kit is provided by the Genesee Valley Health Partnership www.gvhp.org.