

SELF HELP

Dealing with bullying: What parents can do to help

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I've noticed that many television shows (e.g., sitcoms, dramas) have been airing episodes about bullying recently.

This is clearly an issue that draws attention and concern in the school, community and

media due to the detrimental effects it has on children and adolescents.

As such, I believe that it is a topic that deserves considerable discussion by parents, school professionals and community leaders.

Bullying affects millions of children and adolescents all across the country in every school and community.

Being a victim of bullying is associated with school dropout, poor psychosocial adjustment, criminal activity and other negative long-term consequences.

Both boys and girls can be victims, although victims are more likely to be boys, be physically weaker than their peers, have few good friends and may display poor social skills and academic difficulties.

Bullying interferes with learning and feeling safe.

It is critical that parents are aware of steps they can take to assist when their child is being bullied.

First, it is important to watch for signs of changes in your child's behavior or attitudes.

Some examples include becoming withdrawn or being reluctant to go to school, or experiencing physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches or poor sleep patterns.

If you notice these signs, talk to your child and reassure him or her that you will work with the school to stop the bullying behavior.

One way to work with the school might be to get involved in anti-bullying programs.

At home, you can teach your child anti-bullying strategies such as standing up for him or herself verbally by saying, "I don't like what you just said/did," or "You can say whatever you want, but that doesn't make it true."

You could also teach strategies such as walking away, using humor, using self-talk to think of positive statements or images of himself or herself to boost self-esteem or seeking out an adult for help.

You might also help your child identify peers with whom he or she gets along and suggest things that they can do together to build stronger peer connections.

Being bullied as a child can have lasting effects on academics, socialization and self-esteem.

Be sure to watch for the warnings signs in your children and intervene if necessary.

Remember there are adults trained to deal with bullying in the schools (e.g., guidance counselors, school psychologists, teachers) and be sure to reach out to these individuals if your child is being bullied.

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