



# **Making a Difference in Bullying**

**What parents of  
adolescents need to know**



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## WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is a relationship problem.

Bullying is a form of abuse at the hands of peers that can take different forms at different ages. Bullying is defined as repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Craig, 2000). Through our research, we understand bullying as a disrespectful relationship problem:

- Children who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others
- Children who are victimized become increasingly powerless and find themselves trapped in relationships in which they are being abused.

Read on to learn about how you can make a difference in bullying.

### Is your adolescent being bullied? Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone you trust, like a parent or teacher. They can offer support and develop a plan to end the harassment.
- ◆ Think about how your behaviour may be making the problem bigger or smaller.
- ◆ Ignore the bullying and walk away...make them think you just don't care.
- ◆ Try not to show that you are upset when bullied.
- ◆ Laugh it off...humour shows you're not bothered.
- ◆ Stay close to students you can count on to stick up for you.
- ◆ Stay away from areas where bullying happens.
- ◆ Act confident...hold your head up, make eye contact, walk confidently.
- ◆ Make time to do things that make you feel good about yourself.
- ◆ Do what's right...carrying a weapon may get you in trouble
- ◆ Be assertive, not aggressive...fighting back can make things worse.

## 10 THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO ADDRESS BULLYING. . .

### BE A ROLE MODEL

Think about how you use power in your life. Model the use of positive power by respecting and supporting others. Avoid the use of negative power, such as bullying, yelling, and manipulating. Parents set the tone for family relationships and youth learn relationship skills by watching their parents' behaviour. Set a good example by coping with frustration and resolving conflicts in productive ways.

### BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

It's hard to admit that your adolescent is being bullied or bullies others. It's important to honestly evaluate their involvement in these types of behaviours in order to intervene. Ask yourself the following questions: How does my child deal with conflict? How does my adolescent deal with anger and frustration? Does my child have attitudes that support the use of aggression? Does my child have close friends who have a positive influence on him/her?

### PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND ACCEPTANCE

Talk to your adolescent about the inaccuracy of stereotypes with regard to race, religion, sexual orientation, and other individual differences. Teach your adolescent that unique attributes make people special and convey the message that being different does not mean you are less deserving of respect from others. Monitor your own use of stereotypes and derogatory language.

### TALK, TALK, TALK

Many adolescents are reluctant to come forward and talk about bullying...therefore, it's up to you to start the conversation. Talk to your teen about the importance of healthy relationships and what constitutes bullying, sexual harassment and dating aggression. Offer your own experiences with bullying as a starting point. These types of conversations let your teen know that you care about what they're going through and that you're a source of support for them.

### ENJOY BEING WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT

A healthy and positive parent-adolescent relationship is the basis for healthy and positive relationship skills, such as self-expression, social skills, a sense of boundaries, trust, and respect for others. One way to promote a positive parent-adolescent relationship is to make your home a place where your adolescent and his/her friends want to spend time.

## Does your adolescent watch bullying?

### Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone you trust, like a parent or a teacher. It's their job to intervene and make the bullying stop.
- ◆ Walk away and get help...if you stay and watch, you are part of the problem. If you get help, you're part of the solution.
- ◆ Be assertive, not aggressive. Speaking out helps, fighting and insulting others doesn't.
- ◆ Ask for help from others in speaking out against harassment...there's strength in numbers.
- ◆ Make an anonymous report to school staff if it's too hard to speak out publicly.
- ◆ Invite the student being targeted to leave with you
- ◆ Stand up for those who are targeted...they may not be able to do it for themselves.
- ◆ Stay safe...if speaking out doesn't make the harassment stop, get help from someone who can safely intervene.
- ◆ Be aware...wouldn't you want someone to step in if you were being targeted?

## Does your adolescent bully others?

### Sharing these tips with him/her may help

- ◆ Talk to someone you trust, like a parent or a teacher. They can offer support and help you find ways of getting along with others better.
- ◆ Put yourself in other teens' shoes...think about what it must feel like to be beat up, threatened, or excluded. Would you want to be treated that way?
- ◆ Make an excuse and walk away from situations where you might bully.
- ◆ Resist peer pressure to bully...do what's right
- ◆ Find ways to use your power and influence in a positive rather than a negative way.
- ◆ Apologize to the people you've hurt.
- ◆ Hang out with friends who will keep you in check.
- ◆ Remember that everyone is unique and different... different doesn't mean worse or better than you.
- ◆ See people as individuals, not stereotypes.
- ◆ Know that if other teens watch and laugh, it doesn't mean they like it when you target others.

### ENCOURAGE DIFFERENT PEER INTERACTIONS

Having friends and experiencing positive peer interactions in different settings can minimize the impact of bullying. Encourage your adolescent to enroll in organized sports, lessons, camps, and other activities outside of school so they can experience many different friendships. Talk with your adolescent about their new peers and experiences to ensure the bullying does not continue in these groups.

### PROBLEM-SOLVE WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT

Let your adolescent come up with solutions to a bullying problem and help them to evaluate whether a solution will make the problem bigger or smaller. Help victimized youth practice to be assertive by standing up straight, holding their head up, and looking people in the eye. Adolescents who bully need help with learning alternative ways to solve conflicts, manage frustration, and resist peer pressure to bully.

### BUILD ON ADOLESCENTS' STRENGTHS

Adolescents who are bullied often have low self-esteem. Encourage them to participate in activities they enjoy so they can start to feel good about themselves. For teens who bully, provide opportunities for them to use their power and natural leadership skills in a positive way (e.g., teaching siblings and younger children a new sport or skill).

### BE READY TO LISTEN

If your adolescent reports being bullied, be ready to listen right away. Don't put it off. Thank your child for being brave enough to come forward and explain that it is his/her right to feel safe. Ask for details about the incident and convey your concern. Be willing to respond to all reports, even the seemingly trivial ones such as name-calling. Consistency matters!

### BE YOUR ADOLESCENT'S ADVOCATE

Once your teen has come forward, it's your turn to take action. Make connections with the significant adults in your child's life (e.g., teachers, coaches, activity leaders, other parents) to find out if they were aware of the problem and what steps will be taken to ensure the bullying stops. Keep the lines of communication open with your teen and encourage him/her to talk to you or any other adult who can help about continuing bullying.

## THE MANY FORMS OF BULLYING IN ADOLESCENCE:

### **Physical bullying**

- ♦ Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property

### **Verbal bullying**

- ♦ Name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, humiliating or threatening someone, racist or sexist comments

### **Social bullying**

- ♦ Excluding others from the group, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging friendships.

### **Cyberbullying**

- ♦ Using email, cell phones, text messages, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships

### **Dating aggression**

- ♦ Any intentional sexual, physical, or psychological attack that occurs in a dating relationship

### **Sexual harassment**

- ♦ Unwanted comments, gestures, or behaviour about sex or gender that makes one feel uncomfortable

## HOW DO PARENTS KNOW IF THEIR ADOLESCENT IS INVOLVED IN BULLYING?

Bullying is a covert behaviour and is usually hidden from adults. Look for the following clues:

### **SIGNS OF BEING BULLIED**

- ☑ Afraid to go to school or other activities
- ☑ Appear anxious or fearful
- ☑ Low self-esteem and make negative comments
- ☑ Complain of feeling unwell
- ☑ Lower interest in activities and performance
- ☑ Lose things, need money, report being hungry
- ☑ Injuries, bruising, damaged clothing or articles
- ☑ Appear unhappy, irritable
- ☑ Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- ☑ Threats to hurt themselves or others
- ☑ May appear isolated from the peer group

### **SIGNS OF BULLYING OTHERS**

- ☑ Aggressive with parents, siblings, pets, and friends
- ☑ Low concern for others' feelings
- ☑ Bossy and manipulative behaviour
- ☑ Unexplained objects or money
- ☑ Secretive about possessions and activities
- ☑ Holds a positive view of aggression
- ☑ Easily frustrated and quick to anger
- ☑ Does not recognize impact of his/her behaviour
- ☑ Has friends who bully and are aggressive
- ☑ Child has trouble standing up to peer pressure

## WHY PARENTS SHOULD CARE ABOUT BULLYING

Many people feel that bullying is "*just kids being kids*" and that it's "*harmless.*" In fact, bullying is anything but harmless.

### **RISKS FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO ARE BULLIED:**

- ☑ Depression (low mood, a sense of hopelessness)
- ☑ Social anxiety, loneliness, isolation
- ☑ Poor health (e.g., headaches, stomach aches)
- ☑ Low self esteem
- ☑ School absenteeism and academic problems
- ☑ Aggressive behaviours
- ☑ Contemplating, attempting, or committing suicide

### **RISKS FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO BULLY OTHERS:**

- ☑ Not knowing the difference between right and wrong
- ☑ Delinquency and substance use
- ☑ Academic problems and school drop out
- ☑ Adult criminality
- ☑ Difficulties in their relationships with others
- ☑ Being bullied at the hands of others

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