



# PREVENTION TALK

## BULLYING: SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

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**W**hat causes a child to bully others? The reasons a child may turn to taunting, hurting, or threatening others are complex. Children who see bullying modeled at home, have been bullied themselves, or who live in circumstances where everyone gets angry on a regular basis are more likely to copy what they know. Bullies often target anyone who is different, especially those who are least likely to fight back. Any weakness or perceived difference may be a starting point for the bully.<sup>1</sup>

How is bullying defined? Bullying takes many forms. It can involve: teasing; physical violence; sexual or racial harassment; property destruction; and cyber harassment via email, camera cell phones, and instant messaging. Both boys and girls engage in bullying, but they can vary in the ways they go about it. Girls tend to use psychological means and boys are more direct and likely to become physical. Repeated incidents, intent to harm, and a power imbalance often occur. To assess whether you are witnessing play fighting or bullying, visit [www.cfchildren.org/resourcef/guidelines](http://www.cfchildren.org/resourcef/guidelines).

### REMEMBER:

*One of the first steps is to find out what might be bothering your child. Frequent conversations with your child or adolescent to ask about what happens at school are useful. Establishing a relationship helps you keep the lines of communication open and gives you a sense of context for what your child or adolescent experiences day-to-day.<sup>2</sup>*

### THINK ABOUT:

- Research has identified both academic and emotional consequences linked to bullying. Young people who bully are more likely than those who don't bully to skip school and drop out of school. They are also more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and get into fights.<sup>1</sup>
- Be alert for possible signs of bullying such as missing belongings or money, poor concentration, sleeping problems/bedwetting, faking illness to avoid school, unexplained changes in routine, and/or feeling irritable.

### ACTION STEPS:

- How to help if your child is being bullied: Parents can play an active role in solving the problem by working with school staff and counselors to develop a strategy.
  - Comfort your child by being a good listener.
  - Offer support by validating his/her feelings; see this resource for ideas: [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov).
  - Make a plan; see tips at [www.kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/problems/bullies.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/bullies.html).
  - Continue to offer support and intervene if needed; adjust this with the age of your child.
- How to help your child stop bullying: Since there is not a single cause of bullying, it is wise to look at all possibilities including interactions at home. Discovering the root of the problem will be easier when parents remain calm and avoid becoming defensive. Below are a few suggested actions, or for more ideas visit [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov).
  - Be clear that you do not tolerate bullying and spell out consequences for bullying.
  - Teach respect for differences in others and reinforce and praise positive behavior.
  - Talk with school staff and develop a plan together to help your child develop skills to avoid problem behaviors.
  - Find out if your child's friends are engaged in bullying and explore a group intervention through the principal and other school staff.

*For more information call:*

### SOURCES:

- <sup>1</sup> Nemours Foundation. (2004, November). Bullying and your child. Retrieved July 22, 2005, from [www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/bullies.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/bullies.html).
- <sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Mental Health Information Center, Center for Mental Health Services. (2003). Bullying is not a fact of life. Retrieved August 11, 2005, from [www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SVP-0052/#four](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SVP-0052/#four).
- <sup>3</sup> United States Health Resources and Services Administration. (n.d.). Stop bullying now. Retrieved August 11, 2005, from [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=effects](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=effects).