

Bullying: What Makes Children Vulnerable to Bullies? To Bully?

If you're concerned about your child's interactions with other kids, or if you suspect your child may be turning into a bully, here's food for thought from those who study both the victims and perpetrators of physical, cyber and psychological harassment.

Kids are more likely to be the victims of bullies if:

- They demonstrate aggressive behavior (children who do not develop the verbal skills to express feelings and resolve issues are more often bullied)
- They demonstrate oppositional behavior and hyperactivity (research shows that children who do not attempt to get along with peers and children who are far more active than others and who make irritating actions are also vulnerable to rejection and bullying)
- There is abuse, neglect or violence in your home.

Other factors include:

- Speech problems
- Physical clumsiness
- Physical or mental disabilities
- Shyness and unsociability - Willingness to submit to a bully (to be accepted, for example)

What makes children more likely to bully? They are the kids who

- Have higher levels of anger and impulsivity
- Are defiant toward adults
- Have few friends and less sense of belonging
- Seek to dominate or manipulate
- Are poor losers
- Lack nonviolent communication strategies and skills
- Refuse to accept responsibility for their behavior
- Crave attention

They may also:

- Have punitive or coercive parents (in other words, a harsh home environment where children are yelled at, called names or threatened)
- Watch television, movies and videos where put-downs are depicted as acceptable
- Interpret innocent actions as hostile and uses these as excuses to strike out (for example, when bumped into)
- May be victims of bullying
- Come from homes where there is abuse, neglect or violence

What is bullying? Yes, it's having your lunch or lunch money stolen, or being beat up, or having rumors spread about you. It's also:

- Threatening (for example, to hurt a child, the child's pet or someone the child loves if the child doesn't do or give something, or if the child reports what has happened)
- Stalking and cyber stalking (for example, following someone)
- Theft and vandalism of possessions (stealing or destroying school supplies, lunch, electronic games, sports gear)
- Sexual, religious or racial harassment, which can be slurs, gestures, or electronic bullying (referring to the victim with a derogative name, using rude gestures, using e-mail or web sites to spread hurtful or untruthful messages about the victim's sexual activity or orientation, or about the victim's religion or race)
- Public humiliation (for example, insulting someone on the playground, sports field or at a scout meeting or party)
- Excluding someone socially ("You can't play with us," or getting up and moving when the victim sits down at the same lunch table)
- Spreading lies or rumors (in conversation, with notes, with e-mail or on such web sites as Facebook, with falsehoods or innuendoes)

If you suspect or know that your child is being bullied, consider volunteering or observing in your child's classroom or on the playground or sports field. With your child's help, document the incidents. Ask your child if earlier bullying has been reported to the appropriate adults. If not, list the dates and places that bullying has occurred, who was involved (the bully and the witnesses, if possible), and what happened.

Take this to the appropriate adult. If the bully is an adult, and you have observed the bullying, try to discuss the issue in a nonconfrontational way. One expert suggests saying, "My child seems to be afraid of school. Any ideas why that might be?" Take notes on the responses, and if necessary, discuss them with the principal or other supervisor. A helpful resource for dealing with school bullying is Allan L. Beane's "Bullying Prevention for Schools: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing a Successful Anti-Bullying Program," published by Jossey-Bass in 2009.

You can also help your child deal with bullies by using books that allow kids to practice responses. With "My Name Is Not Dummy," "I Want to Play," "Heidi's Irresistible Hat," "Amy's Disappearing Pickle" and "Bully on the Bus," your child can role-play through typical situations and be better prepared to communicate with peers.

Links

My Name Is Not Dummy:

http://www.ParentingPress.com/b_nd.html

I Want to Play:

http://www.ParentingPress.com/b_iwp.html

Heidi's Irresistible Hat:

http://www.ParentingPress.com/b_heidi.html

Amy's Disappearing Pickle:

http://www.ParentingPress.com/b_amy.html

Bully on the Bus:

http://www.ParentingPress.com/b_bully.html

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