

## Understanding Bullying in Your Child's Life

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It is estimated that every seven minutes a child is bullied in the United States for a total of seven million bullying incidents reported in public schools each year. At least 30% of all school-age children report having been victims of bullying and also 30% of all school children report having bullied someone else. Bullying goes beyond taunts on the playground. At least 32% of children who use the Internet say they have been targets of cyber-bullying behaviors. Among 12-15 year olds 86% report having experienced some form of bullying. When surveyed, more than 55% of all 8 to 15 year olds think that bullying is a bigger problem than drugs, racism and HIV-AIDS in their school.

What is bullying? The most widely accepted definition comes from the U.S. Department of Education. It defines bullying as: any **intentional, repeated, hurtful acts, words or behavior** committed by one or more children against another. Two important words in this definition are *intentional*, meaning that the bully or bullies acted on purpose and *repeated*, which means there has been more than one incident.

Bullying can be in the form of physical, verbal, electronic or written communication intended to cause physical harm, emotional distress, interference with education, be threatening or causing disruption to the operation of a school. Boys tend to be more physical when they are bullying. Girls are more likely to engage in relationship bullying.

Children who are the victims of bullying are more likely to suffer from depression, have a higher risk of suicide, and show signs of traumatic stress disorder. Researchers have found that most often bullying is based on a person's size, race, disability or sexual orientation.

Children who are bullies may become antisocial adults, are more likely to be involved in domestic violence and child abuse, and are likely to have children who become bullies

Over this past spring more than 325 people across the state attended a series of bullying workshops. Those that attended these included; school administrators and staff, agency representatives, counselors, concerned parents and community members. The goal of the conference was to let people know about the definition and incidence of bullying, help schools provide the tools needed to support parents dealing with the issues when their child(ren) is being bullied or are the bullies.

Researchers have found that bullying most often occurs when adult supervision is the lowest; in bathrooms, playgrounds, lunchrooms, on the bus and on school ground when the day is over. It is more likely to occur at school than anywhere else, but can happen anywhere. Bullying happens just as often in rural schools as urban schools, and can affect all economic levels, every race and nationality. To put it plainly, no student is immune from being bullied.

How can parents tell if their child is being bullied? It can be a challenge if your child works hard to hide the fact that they are victims of bullying. If you suspect that your child is a victim you may notice that they are afraid to go to school, never bring friends home, their belongings are often missing or damaged, school is no longer interesting or they seem depressed.

If you suspect that your child is a victim, have a conversation with your child. Take time to listen, build trust, and gather information. Let your child know that you are ready to listen when they are ready to talk.

As a parent, try not to overreact. Document any injury to your child and damage to his or her property. As parents we want to fix all of our child's problems, but don't make promises you aren't sure you can

keep. Work with your child's school staff to make decisions to protect your child. Don't encourage your child to retaliate—this may be viewed as your child being a bully, too! All parties involved should be involved in the creation of a bullying plan.

There are resources available to help parents when their child is being bullied. Malcolm Smith, UNH Cooperative Extension Family & Policy Specialist has compiled a publication on *Understanding Bullying*. This can be downloaded from the internet at <http://extension.unh.edu/Family/documents/BullyBro.pdf> or for fifty cents, you can pick up a copy at the Grafton County Extension Office in North Haverhill. The US Department of Health and Human Services has put together a Resource Kit called Stop Bullying Now—Take a Stand, Lend a Hand. You can visit their website at <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/tip-sheets/tip-sheet-04.aspx> for more resources.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> the NH Bullying Bill was signed into law by Governor John Lynch. It clearly defines bullying and requires school districts to train staff on bullying. It requires schools to investigate reports of bullying within five school days of the reported incident and school districts must prepare an annual report of substantiated bullying or cyber bullying incidents to the New Hampshire Department of Education. A model policy on bullying will be developed for school districts to adapt or modify.

Bullying is a serious issue. Recent highly publicized incidents of school children taking their lives after being bullied cause us all to take a step back and wonder how this could have happened. Decades later adults can clearly remember bullying incidents when they were in school. As parents, let's protect our children from bullies. If your child is being a bully, work with your school to get your child the help he or she needs to stop this behavior.