

BULLYING



Bullying can be defined as repeated and systematic harassment, involving the abuse of power and includes doing or saying something to intentionally hurt someone else. Bullies can work on their own or in a pack and their victims may experience significant psychological harm which interferes with their social, academic and emotional development. Sadly, statistics show that bullying is wide spread. Typically, children do not possess the ability to resolve bullying on their own, therefore adult intervention is essential. Bullying is problematic because many victims are reluctant to seek help, and parents and teachers sometimes fail to recognize a bullying scenario. If bullying is allowed to continue unchecked, there are long term consequences for the victim. On the other hand, timely intervention can help both the victim and the bully to break the pattern.

WHY DO CHILDREN BULLY?

There are many reasons why kids become bullies. Bullies frequently target people who are different from themselves, and seek to exploit those differences. They often choose victims who they think are unlikely to retaliate. Bullies commonly target physical differences like severe acne, obesity, or facial features. Sometimes they target children who behave differently or learn at a different pace. Bullies often turn to this abusive behaviour as a way of dealing with their own problems, such as a divorce, or they're being tormented themselves. Ultimately, they pick a victim to make themselves feel more important, gain social status or generate a feeling of being "in control." Some bullies think their behaviour is normal because they come from families in which everyone regularly gets angry, shouts, and/or calls names. They copy what they know. Although some bullies are bigger and stronger than their victims, bullies can come in all shapes and sizes.

TYPES OF BULLYING

Verbal – Usually involves name calling, incessant mocking, and laughing at a person's expense.

Physical – Pushing, kicking, punching, and throwing.

Cyber Bullying – When technology is used such as: Email, instant messaging, chat rooms and cell phones to target victims.

Relationship Bullying – Silent treatment, rumor spreading, social isolation, exclusion, manipulation of friendships.

Sexual Bullying – Sexually abusive or inappropriate comments, unwanted physical contact.

Racist Bullying – Racial slurs, offensive gestures, or making jokes about cultural tradition.



EFFECTS OF BULLYING

Bullying can lead to serious consequences and victims may suffer physical or mental harm. Parents in particular, should pay attention to signs or hints that their child is being victimized. Possible signs may include:

- Unhappy or frightened
- Feeling unsafe
- Loss of confidence
- Reluctance to go to school
- Declining grades
- Embarrassment
- Broken spirit
- Shyness
- Stomach-aches
- Headaches
- Being exhausted
- Nightmares
- Trouble sleeping
- Sleeping too much
- Anxiety and stress
- Feeling of loneliness
- Panic attacks
- Thoughts of suicide or violent behavior

HOW CAN THE BYSTANDER HELP?

A bystander is anyone who stands by and watches bullying. **Bystanders unknowingly possess a tremendous amount of power.** By laughing, joining in, or simply doing nothing they are showing support for the bully or encouraging them to continue. On the other hand, they can choose to intervene and speak out against unkind words or actions. "When other children intervene – more than half the time, the bullying will stop within 10 seconds" (Hawkins, Pepler & Craig, 2001). The problem is, most bystanders do not feel empowered enough to stand up to the bully. It is imperative that bystanders support the victim by telling the bully to stop, and alert a parent or teacher.

STRATEGIES TO PREVENT BULLYING

- **Act brave, walk away, and ignore the bully** – Tell the victim to look the bully in the eye and say something like, “I want you to stop right now” or “Stop treating me this way, you wouldn’t like it if someone did it to you.” The victim should then walk away and ignore further taunts. Bullies thrive on the reaction they get, and by walking away or ignoring hurtful emails, or instant messages, your child will be sending a message that they are not bothered.
- **Develop friendships** – Maintain the company of trusted friends. Victims can protect themselves by having supportive friends around them. Enlisting the help of friends or a group may help both the victim and others to stand up to the bully. Teach friends to tell the bully that his or her behaviour is unacceptable. When one person speaks out against a bully it empowers others to take a stand also.
- **Talk about it** – Talking can be a good outlet for the fears and frustrations of the victim. A parent, teacher, guidance counselor or a trusted friend can offer support to the victim.
- **Use authority** – Involving an adult isn’t the same as tattling, especially when it comes to someone’s health or safety. Often, adult intervention is the only way to stop the bullying. In extreme cases it may be necessary to contact the police. Safety should be everyone’s concern.
- **Hold the anger** – It’s natural to get upset with the bully, but that’s exactly the response the bully is aiming for. Getting angry or violent will not solve the problem and will probably make it worse. Bullies want to have control over the victim’s emotions. A strong reaction from the victim makes the bully feel more powerful.
- **Never get physical, or bully back** – Victims should never use physical force in response to a bully. Not only does that demonstrate anger, but the victim can never be sure what the bully will do in response.
- **Stay safe** – Be smart by avoiding bullies whenever possible. Don’t put yourself in situations that help the bully. For example, avoid locations where the bully loiters and plan to be accompanied by friends if you suspect that you may cross paths with the bully.

CORRECTING BULLYING BEHAVIOURS

Talk with the bully to raise their awareness by discussing ideas like:

- just because people watch and laugh, it doesn’t mean they like it when you bully
- put the shoe on the other foot and think about how it feels to be bullied
- there are more constructive ways to gain attention

Develop a Code of Conduct for the bully – define unacceptable and desirable behaviours.

Arrange for an effective, non-violent consequence, which is in proportion with the severity of the bully’s actions. This will send a message that the behaviour will not be tolerated.

Increase supervision of the bully’s activities, whereabouts, and who they are associating with.

Praise any effort the bully makes toward responsible or non-violent behaviour.

Change the bully’s viewing and play patterns to non-violent ones (video games, television, etc.) since the modeling of aggressive behaviour can lead to violence at school and later in life.

Seek help from school administrators, social workers, or a psychologist, if extra support is required.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS SUBJECT OR OTHER CRIME PREVENTION TOPICS PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.HAMILTONPOLICE.ON.CA OR PLEASE CONTACT:

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