

BULLYING: WHEN OTHERS ARE INSECURE

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Background

Bullying is maltreatment by peers and it can become a significant stressor for bullying victims. The act of abuse encompasses subjecting others to indirect or direct physically, emotionally, or socially abusive actions in an intent to harm, humiliate, or intimidate. According to the U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018), approximately 20.8 percent of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied at school during the 2014-2015 school year. Based on data from the same school year, middle school girls were bullied more frequently. However, bullying can occur during adulthood, also. There are four categories of bullying: Verbal, physical, social, and cyber. When you hear people name calling, mocking, threatening, gossiping, and spreading rumors, these actions or behaviors are verbal bullying. Physical bullying can occur through unwanted hitting, punching, pushing, stealing personal property, and other forms of physical aggression. Social bullying involves ignoring, deliberately excluding, and isolating. Cyberbullying includes using social media, text messages, emails, and gaming sites to send threatening messages, revealing someone's secrets or gossiping for the purpose to embarrass or humiliate others, and taking inappropriate photos of someone and posting the pictures online without the person's permission.

Identifying Bullies and the Side Effects for Victims

You can help your children identify bullies because they are likely to demonstrate the following behaviors: act in a controlling manner, enjoy disruptions, thrive on putting others down, try to draw attention to their power, seek to get a reaction from their intended victims, attack when adults are not around, tease, and enjoy the company of bullies. You can help your children understand bullies by explaining some of the reasons people bully. Bullies often use unhealthy ways to achieve popularity or power, have feelings of jealousy or insecurity, and attempt to escape their problems by projecting their issues onto others. You can identify some of the following side effects of bullying: Manifestations of social withdrawals, increased isolation, intimidations or paranoia especially associated in specific settings such as school, decreased self-esteem, depression, anxiety, physical complaints, deterioration in academic performance, verbalizing thoughts of being picked on, rejected, threatened, or alone.

My Story

I experienced bullying for the first time in middle school. I had finished helping my physical education teachers organize the equipment used during my PE class, and I ran downstairs to the PE locker room to get dressed. By the time I made it to the locker room, my class was leaving out. I found myself alone in the downstairs locker room. Within two to three minutes,

three older girls came into the locker room. I did not know the girls and they did not know me. One of the girls yelled in my direction, "What your name?" I replied, "Trevia." The girls started whispering to each other. Next, they started giggling as they approached me. Within a few seconds, the older and much larger girls surrounded me. The leader of the group told me that they did not like the way I talked, my clothes, or the way I looked. Before I could respond, each girl took a turn of grabbing me by the back of my hair and bashing my face into my locker. Pounding their fists in their hands, the girls threatened me and told me that they would "find me" if I told anyone about the incident. Those girls' words were contrary to my parents' words. Previously, my parents and I had discussed the importance of notifying a caring adult if I thought I was in danger of being harmed or harmed. Therefore, I immediately walked to my school's office and asked to speak to the principal or the assistant principal. I met with the assistant principal and asked for permission to contact my mother. I described the girls and the location that the incident occurred to my assistant principal. The girls, who physically attacked me, were located in the gym's locker room. My mother arrived and we made formal complaints resulting in the girls' suspensions from school for five days. When the girls returned to school, they did not bother me, again. As a result of being bullied during middle school, I can empathize with children and adults, who have shared these unpleasant experiences, and assist them with overcoming the fear of harm and intimidation by increasing assertiveness.

Helping Your Child

If your child complains of being bullied, please see a list of things your child can do:

1. Tell a trusted teacher, counselor, school, nurse, or school administrator.
2. Look strong and confident.
3. Sit close to the driver on a school bus.
4. Avoid finding themselves alone with the bullies.
5. Think before responding and avoid using aggression, threats, or insults.

You can assist your child with filing complaints alleging violations of the anti-harassment policy with the school's administration if the bully is school related. Harassment issues not school related can be addressed with law enforcement. If your child experiences anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, or self-harming, you should ensure your child receives with mental health assistance.

Reference: U.S. Department of Education: National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). Repetition and power imbalance in bullying victimizations at school. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018093.pdf>