

What Parents Should Know About Bullying

October is National Bullying Prevention Month in the United States. Bullying is the repeated and intentional aggression by one or more persons toward another person of lesser status or power. Such aggression may be verbal, physical, or indirect (such as discrimination). Although bullying often involves face to face confrontation, bullying through social media (cyberbullying) is becoming more common. Bullying is common among young people and has become a serious problem in our schools. A recent issue of the *American Psychologist* (2015, Volume 70, Number 4) summarizes four decades of research on the subject, with some valuable information for parents:

- 1) Bullying appears as early as preschool but peaks in Middle School and then tapers off in the higher grades.
- 2) Bullying almost always has an audience, and the children who watch are often more likely to encourage it than stop it.
- 3) Boys who bully are more likely to use physical intimidation, while girls are more likely to use ridicule or ostracism.
- 4) Bullies tend to pick on children who are different from the mainstream and who have few friends.
- 5) Bullies tend to pick on the same victims repeatedly.
- 6) Children who can find allies usually free themselves from bullying. Even a single best friend to talk to has been shown to diminish the consequences of bullying.

Based on this information there are things parents can do about bullying:

- 1) Teach your child about the dangers of bullying, what it is and how it can harm them or their friends. When talking with them about school or athletic activities, ask about how people are getting along, how comfortable they feel, conflicts that make them feel uncomfortable.
- 2) Check out your child's friends. Are they supportive of each other? Do they intimidate other children?
- 3) Encourage your child to avoid group intimidation of a peer in any form, whether it be joining in teasing or as a bystander.
- 4) Let your child know that it is OK to tell a teacher or coach if bullying is going on.