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How parents, teachers, and kids can take action to prevent bullying

Preventing and stopping bullying involves a commitment to creating a safe environment where children can thrive, socially and academically, without being afraid.

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Introduction

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and involves an imbalance of power or strength. It is a repeated behavior and can be physical, verbal, or relational. While boys may bully others using more physical means, girls often bully others by social exclusion. Bullying has been part of school, and even workplaces, for years. More recently, though, technology and social media have created a new venue for bullying that has expanded its reach. Cyberbullying is bullying that happens online and via cell phones. Websites like YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat allow kids to send hurtful, ongoing messages to other children 24 hours a day. Some sites, such as Instagram, allow messages to be left anonymously.

Preventing and stopping bullying involves a commitment to creating a safe environment where children can thrive, socially and academically, without being afraid. APA recommends that teachers, parents, and students take the following actions to address bullying.

Teachers and school administrators

Be knowledgeable and observant

Teachers and administrators need to be aware that although bullying generally happens in areas such as the bathroom, playground, crowded hallways, and school buses as well as via cell phones and computers (where supervision is limited or absent), it must be taken seriously. Teachers and administrators should emphasize that telling is not tattling. If a teacher observes bullying in a classroom, he/she needs to immediately intervene to stop it, record the incident, and inform the appropriate school administrators so the incident can be investigated. Having a joint meeting with the bullied student and the student who is bullying is not recommended—it is embarrassing and very intimidating for the student that is being bullied.

Involve students and parents

Students and parents need to be a part of the solution and involved in safety teams and antibullying task forces. Students can inform adults about what is really going on and also teach adults about new technologies that kids are using to bully. Parents, teachers, and school administrators can help students engage in positive behavior and teach them skills so that they know how to intervene when bullying occurs. Older students can serve as mentors and inform younger students about safe practices on the internet.

Set positive expectations about behavior for students and adults

Schools and classrooms must offer students a safe learning environment. Teachers and coaches need to explicitly remind students that bullying is not accepted in school and such behaviors will have consequences. Creating an antibullying document and having both the student and the parents/guardians sign and return it to the school office helps students understand the seriousness of bullying. Also, for students who have a hard time adjusting or finding friends, teachers and administrators can facilitate friendships or provide “jobs” for the student to do during lunch and recess so that children do not feel isolated or in danger of becoming targets for bullying.

Parents

Parents of kids being bullied

Observe your child for signs they might be being bullied

Children may not always be vocal about being bullied. Signs include: ripped clothing, hesitation about going to school, decreased appetite, nightmares, crying, or general depression and anxiety. If you discover your child is being bullied, don’t tell them to “let it go” or “suck it up.” Instead, have open-ended conversations where you can learn what is really going on at school so that you can take the appropriate steps to rectify the situation. Most importantly, let your child know you will help them and that they should try not to fight back

Teach your child how to handle being bullied

Until something can be done on an administrative level, work with your child to handle bullying without being crushed or defeated. Practice scenarios at home where your child learns how to ignore a bully and/or develop assertive strategies for coping with bullying. Help your child identify teachers and friends that can help them if they’re worried about being bullied.

Set boundaries with technology

Educate your children and yourself about cyberbullying and teach your children not to respond or forward threatening emails. “Friend” your child on Facebook and other social media platforms and set up proper filters on your child’s computer. Make the family computer the only computer for children, and have it in a public place in the home where it is visible and can be monitored. If you decide to give your child a cell phone think carefully before allowing them to have a camera option. Let them know you will be monitoring their text messages. As a parent, you can insist that phones are stored in a public area, such as the kitchen, by a certain time at night to eliminate nighttime bullying and inappropriate messaging. Parents should report bullying to the school, and follow up with a letter that is copied to the school superintendent if their initial inquiry receives no response.

Parents should report all threatening messages to the police and should document any text messages, emails, or posts on websites.

Parents of kids engaged in bullying

Stop bullying before it starts

Educate your children about bullying. It is possible that your child is having trouble reading social signs and does not know what they are doing is hurtful. Remind your child that bullying others can have legal consequences.

Make your home “bully free”

Children learn behavior through their parents. Being exposed to aggressive behavior or an overly strict environment at home makes kids more prone to bully at school. Parents/caregivers should model positive examples for your child in your relationships with other people and with them.

Look for self esteem issues

Children with low self-esteem often bully to feel better about themselves. Even children who seem popular and well-liked can have mean tendencies. Mean behavior should be addressed by parents and disciplined.

Students

Report bullying and cyberbullying

It is important for students to report any bullying to a parent or an adult they trust. Often kids don’t report cyberbullying because they fear their parents will take away their phone or computer. Parents will support their child’s reports of bullying and not take away their phones as a consequence. It is important for kids to remember that bullying is wrong and should be handled by an adult.

Don’t bully back

It may be difficult to not bully back, but as the saying goes, two wrongs don’t make a right. Try not to show anger or tears. Either calmly tell the bully to stop bullying or simply walk away.

Avoid being alone

Whenever possible, avoid situations where there are no other students or teachers. Try to go to the bathroom with a friend or eat lunch in a group. When riding the bus, sit near the front. If you know a student who likes to bully others is in an area where you normally walk to lunch or class, try to use alternative hallway routes.

Remember, report bullying of yourself or other students to your teacher, coach, principal, and/or parent.

Conclusion

Students who experience bullying may feel overwhelmed, depressed, or anxious. If your child or student is having trouble at school or with friends as a result of bullying, a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, can help your child develop resilience and confidence. This will enable your child to be more successful both socially and academically.

Additional resources

- Net Cetera: Chatting with kids about being online
- Stop Bullying Now Campaign
- APA Q and A with Dr. Susan Swearer
- Bullying Research Network

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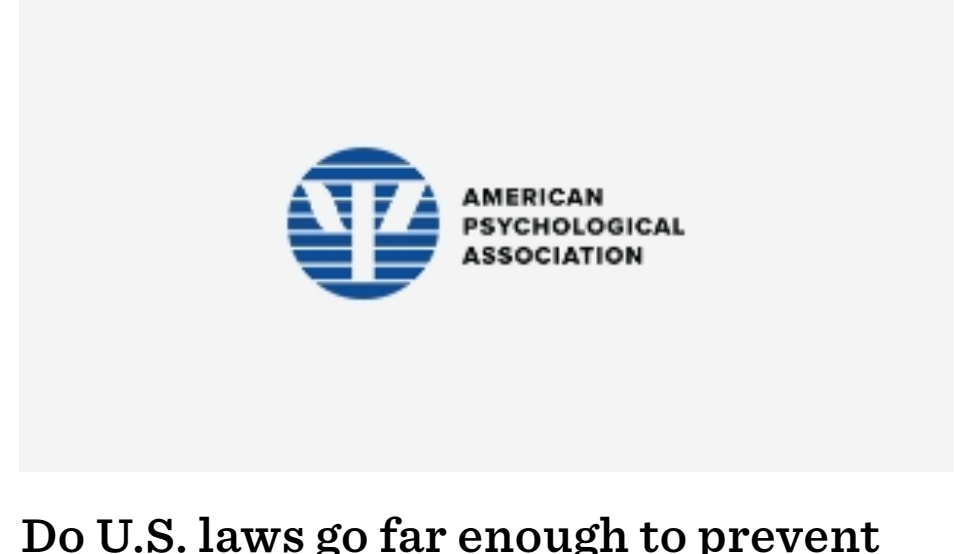
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