



PREMIER PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Parents should always take a proactive role in the lives of their children and their children's circle of friends in order to determine whether their child is being victimized by other classmates or "friends". The following examples are ways to get the conversation rolling with your child based on age appropriate stages of cognitive and emotional development.

Ages 5 – 9

With this age group, it will be helpful for parents to approach their child with questions regarding the child's perceptions of what happened. Ask your child if he or she perceives him/herself as having been bullied. The parent should explore whether this is an ongoing or a one time occurrence. If it is the first instance, the parent should be watchful for a continuing pattern. If you do have a pattern of bullying, then these are the things parents ought to know: Where is the interaction occurring and whether it appears adult support is available, i.e. "Is your teacher there when this happens?" Secondly, talk with your child about ways to help him or her advocate for themselves in non-violent ways. Give the child specific things to do such as "if Johnny pushes you, say "Stop it" or "Leave me alone". If they push your child again, instruct your child to verbally advocate again. Should it continue, instruct your child to seek help from an adult with the instruction "I told Johnny twice to leave me alone, and he won't." This lets the adult know that your child attempted to handle the situation, but now needs adult intervention. This saves your child from being labeled a tattler. At this young age, expect your child to want to retaliate. Try to get your child to respond with alternative ways. Get the school involved by making them aware of the problem.

Ages 10 – 12

This is one of the most difficult age groups as it relates to peer and school relationships. Parents need to be observant of their child's interactions, aware of their child's activities with peer groups and engage their child in regular discussions about relationships. At this age, they are going to be less willing to seek adult intervention. Bullying at this age may also begin to go from physical to more indirect ways of bullying, such as verbal, internet, and threats. If you suspect that your child is being bullied, open the dialog with your child regarding where it is occurring, their perception of the interaction and how they respond. While peer groups are so important at this age, it is vital for parents to equip their children with advocacy skills and an open dialog so that your child can talk with you about what is going on. It is important to teach your child to be less reactive to the bullying, thus not encouraging the bullier to continue. Try to expose your child to alternate peer groups and increase positive peer interaction. Also at this age, the

bullying may be occurring outside of school, which will restrict the schools ability to be involved. Regardless, it is important to let the school know of the issue. You may need to advocate with other parents and monitor your child's internet access. You need to take action to protect your child from situations that may fuel bullying. You may need to increase your involvement and supervision in your child's activities.

Ages 13 and up

This is the time to regularly engage your child in a conversation about his or her network of friends and classmates. You might engage in a conversation with them like "Are there any kids in your school who are being bullied? What happens to them at school?" "Have those things ever happened to you?" "So when you're at school and someone intentionally shoves you, what do you do?" Bullying at this age tends to be less overtly physical and more covert, but can quickly escalate into violence, especially with boys. Parents need to be observant of changes in their child's behavior as there may be less verbal discussion as to what is happening on a day to day basis. You may notice more withdrawal, change in amount of time spent with peers, increase in somatic complaints that allow them to miss school, a change in homework patterns and academic performance. This is a good age to share personal examples of your own experiences as a teenager at school when someone wasn't treated well. Then ask your child if he or she is friends with anyone like that or if they have had an experience like that. Offer your teenager help with solving the problem via self advocacy, alternate peer groups, and other ways to increase their self confidence. Treat it as a problem that CAN be solved.

If your son or daughter is experiencing being bullied, and you as their parent notice behavioral changes at any age, feel overwhelmed and not sure what else to do, you may need to consider getting professional help so that your child does not further become a victim.

Provided courtesy of Nancy L. Peskin, MSW, LCSW and JoAnna Snider Anderson, Psy.D, October 2006