



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 has witnessed another child 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, asking children specific questions about their day and their interactions with peers is often filled with examples of what occurs throughout the day. At this age, most children will volunteer the information that "Johnny was mean to Billy today. He hit him twice on the head" etc. Ask your child about their perceptions and use this opportunity to discuss his or her feelings about what they witnessed. The parent should explore what their child saw, who was involved and what their child is feeling about what he or she witnessed. Be aware and remember who your child mentions. There may be one or more children that are mentioned on a regular basis and this frequently named child could be bullying the other children. Discuss and ask about your child's interactions with this potential bully. Help your child advocate for himself and their peers should they witness bullying. Discuss with your child how this is unacceptable behavior and not an example of "being a good friend". Consider discussing with the teacher should you see a pattern occurring or you are concerned for your child or the other children's well being.

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 apt to talk as much about what they are witnessing at school but with specific questions, they should be willing to offer this information. Bullying at this age may also begin to go from physical to more indirect ways of bullying, such as verbal, internet, or threats. If you suspect that your child may have witnessed someone being bullied, open the dialog with your child regarding where it is occurring, their perception of the interaction and how they responded. While peer groups are so important at this age and older, 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. Discuss with your child how they think the bullied party may feel and why they think the bully hurts others. Their answers can offer a great deal of insight and help a parent know whether the child connects more to the bullier or the bullied. Help your child

know pro-active ways to get involved if needed and how to be proactive rather than reactive. Also coach your child on how not to be a bully or how not to encourage the bully to continue with their behaviors towards others. Try to expose your child to alternate peer groups and increase positive peer interaction. If you as a parent perceive bullying to be escalating, it may become necessary to let the school know of the issue... whether or not your child is the victim of it.

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 a classmate, 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. If your child shares he or she witnessed someone being bullied, parents should try to have their teen share what it was like to see someone bullied and to verbalize what it might feel like to be a victim of a bullier. Also important would be to determine who their teen relates to when bullying happens. If you determine your child is aligning him or herself with the bullier, take proactive steps. Teach your child more constructive self-advocacy tools, expose your child to more positive peer groups, involve your child in positive outreach activities. Find ways to increase their self-confidence. Parents will also need to determine if the bullying is an on-going occurrence, and may need to contact school representatives to intervene. Parents must explore with their teenagers the potential consequences of on-going bullying including criminal and legal consequences, as well as emotional trauma. Treat it as a problem that CAN be solved.

If your son or daughter has experienced someone 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, December 2006.