



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 behaving aggressively to 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 by using questions that revolve around friendship and then gently but assertively lay down the family rules. For example, you may suggest to your child "I notice that you're having a hard time getting along with Johnny" or "I see that you have a hard time being Staci's friend." And then state the rules: "We don't shove people" or "We don't hit". Then be sure to state family rules such as "You DO share," "You do have to wait your turn at school," etc.

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. It is also important to remind them of negative consequences for continued bad behaviors. You can be direct at this age and ask "So what's going on?" "What caused you to treat Eddie that way?" Refrain from referring to your child as a bully. Point out inconsistencies about your child's responses and behaviors. Be sure to offer your child a positive alternative than the current behaviors they are choosing. "Instead of talking about what you don't like about Mary to all your friends, why don't you find something you do like about her or even talk directly to Mary about your feelings. If you need help on how to do this, just ask and I'll help you." Let them know that privileges related to social interactions will be revoked, such as no phone use for a week, or missing the upcoming school dance, etc. if the bullying behavior continues.

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. Ask specific questions about their day at school such as "So when you're at school and someone bumps into you, what do you do?" or "If someone is really overweight in your school, how do you treat them?" Start a conversation with your young teenager on how we do treat people. "Do you see Mom or Dad treating people that

way?’ Emphasize consequences to their behaviors, such as loss of desired privileges. During the teenage years, it is a good idea to start a discussion on how bullying behavior can interfere with them being successful in life by instead setting themselves up for a life of suspensions, detentions, personal harm, or even police involvement. 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. Have your teenager verbalize what kind of outcomes can be expected with bullying behavior. “What do you think should happen to you if you always shove Tom into the locker at school?” “What would be a better course of action for you to take that will not get you in trouble but also let you share what you are feeling towards Tom?”

If your son or daughter has trouble understanding the consequences or refuses to recognize the serious nature of his or her actions, and you, as their parent feel overwhelmed and not sure what else to do, you may need to consider getting professional help so that your child does not travel further down the road of violence.

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