

## BULLY BITS for PARENTS

### What is Bullying?

- Legally, bullying is a type of violence
- It is a conscious, intentional, hostile action that is meant to hurt and create fear/terror
- Bullying will always include three elements:
  - Imbalance of power
  - Intent is to harm either emotionally and/or physically and there is pleasure in witnessing the pain
  - Threat of additional aggression/harm

### Types of Bullying

There are three types of bullying: physical, verbal and relationship. While each one is harmful alone, they are often combined to be even more harmful and powerful.

#### **Physical:**

- This is the most obvious type of bullying, thus easier to identify
- Boys tend to use this type of bullying more than girls, however girls do engage in this behavior
- Physical bullying accounts for less than one-third of the bullying incidents
- Includes: scratching, slapping, hitting, shoving, tripping, choking, poking, punching, kicking, biting, pinching, destroying clothes and property
- People who regularly engage in this type of bullying are often the most troubled type of bullies and have a higher likelihood of moving on to more serious criminal type of behaviors.

#### **Verbal:**

- Verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying
- Usually accounts for 70% of the reported bullying
- Used equally by both boys and girls
- Verbal bullying is easier to hide because it can be whispered or done via phone, text, and/or computer

- Leaves no physical scars yet verbal bullying can affect an individual's self-esteem and feelings for years and even leave scars that last a lifetime
- Includes: spreading mean rumors, making accusations that are not true, gossip, lies, spreading embarrassing private truths, name-calling, taunting, belittling, and cruel criticism. It can also include threats of taking or extortion of personal items or money
- Verbal bullying is intended to hurt an individual as well as change how other people see that person
- Verbal bullying is also often the first step to more vicious or violent bullying.

### **Relationship:**

- Girls engage in this type of bullying the most however boys have begun to engage in this type because it is difficult to detect
- This type of bullying is most powerful (and most scarring) in the middle school years when there are many adolescent changes taking place
- Includes: ignoring, isolating, excluding, or shunning, preventing an individual from being part of their social group
- Relationship bullying can also be used to alienate or reject a peer or purposefully ruin friendships. This can include subtle gestures like mean stares, eye rolling, sighs, frowns, sneers, laughing at someone with someone else, snickers, turning head/shoulders away from a person, pointing and other hostile body language

### Teasing Versus Bullying

- Verbal bullying is NOT teasing
- Teasing is:
  - Teasing is when both parties are laughing
  - There is no intent to hurt anyone's feelings on purpose
  - Teasing is stopped if someone's feelings are hurt
- Verbal bullying is:
  - The jokes are used to hurt someone
  - The jokes cannot be returned without initiators getting mad
  - Insults continue in spite of requests to stop or there is a clear indication that feelings are being hurt

## What Makes A Bully – The Bully Profile

- Seeks to intimidate others by making them feel less than
- Enjoy taking advantage of others
- Like to dominate others
- Feel they a right to bully because they are “special”
- Like to use others to get what they want
- They are unable to see another person’s perspective and/or feelings
- Self-centered – only concerned with their wants and pleasures
- Do not accept differences
- Tend to hurt others when no one is around (especially kids)
- Can’t see how their behavior might affect someone over time
- Use blame, criticism and lies to project their own inadequacies/anger/sadness
- Crave attention\*\*\*\*
- Refuse to accept responsibility – they deny they do anything wrong\*\*\*

## How Do You Know If Your Child Is A Bully?

- Does your child express contempt (powerful dislike) towards any one person or group of people?
- Does your child lack tolerance for differences?
- Does your child exhibit an attitude of entitlement?
- Does your child believe they are more “special” or better than others?
- Does your child lack empathy, compassion or shame?
- Does your child show a lack of remorse if they have hurt someone?
- Have other parents/adults reported events when your child was involved in some type of bullying behavior?

If your child exhibits any of these points, as a parent it is critical that you not make light of this behavior and dismiss it. It is also important not to minimize it by rationalizing their behavior. Finally, it is important to understand the underlying causes for their behavior.

### If My Child Is A Bully, Is There Something I Can Do?

- Do not punish your child rather you should discipline your child. Discipline should involve the following:
  - Describe exactly what was done that was wrong and do not minimize the behavior.
  - Make the bully take ownership with no excuses, no blaming others or making justifications.
  - Give the bully a means of solving the problem that includes fixing what he/she did, a way to keep it from happening again, and how to heal the person they hurt.
  - This process then allows the bully to keep their dignity intact.
- Teach friendship skills.
- Create opportunities to serve others and foster empathy.
- Closely monitor your child's social relationships and activities including TV viewing, music, video games, and computer activities.
- Develop other more constructive activities.
- Teach your child the concept of "willing good" which is developing a moral code of conduct that chooses to do what is right even if the burden is heavy or difficult (Stephen L. Carter's book *Integrity*).

### How to Identify If Your Child Is Being Bullied

- Your child suddenly does not want to go to school.
- No longer wants to ride the bus or wants to go to school a different route.
- Grades suffer.
- Complains of headaches, stomachaches and other pains
- Experiences sleep difficulty either a hard time falling asleep, staying asleep or exhaustion.
- Withdraws from family and school activities and wants to be alone.
- Comes home famished, saying he/she lost their lunch money or wasn't hungry at school.
- Your child runs to the bathroom the minute they get home from school.
- Appears sad, sullen, angry or irritable.
- Appears distressed after a phone call or email.
- Stops talking about peers and school activities.
- Your child's clothing appears disheveled, torn or missing.
- He/she has physical injuries and/or bruises that are not consistent with explanation.

## If My Child Is Bullied, What Can I Do To Help?

- Encourage your child to share everything with you. Make sure you listen and validate your child's feelings. Communicate you believe him/her.
- Communicate that the blame belongs to the bully and it is not your child's fault.
- Help your child develop an effective plan to stop the bullying.
- Report the bullying to school personnel. This should include all the facts including the date, time, place, kids involved and specifics.
- Don't rationalize or minimize the bully's behavior.
- Don't tell your child to avoid the bully or fight back.
- Don't confront the bully or the bully's parents alone.
- Enlist other supports by encouraging friends or groups of friends to stand up and support one another (the bystander effect).
- Help your child develop a strong sense of self.
- Teach your child how not to give away their emotional control.

## Bullying Bibliography

*Bullyproof Your Child for Life* by Joel Haber

*Protect Your Child from Bullying: Expert Advice to Help You Recognize, Prevent, and Stop Bullying Before Your Child Gets Hurt* by Allan Beane

*Safe Kids, Safe Families* by Samantha Wilson

*And Words Can Hurt Forever: How to Protect Adolescents from Bullying, Harassment and Emotional Violence* by James Garbarino and Ellen deLara

*Bullies, Targets & Witnesses: Helping Children Break the Pain Chain* by SuEllen Fried and Paula Fried

*Don't Pick On Me: Help for Kids to Stand Up to & Deal with Bullies* by Susan Eikov Green

*Push & Shove: Bully & Victim Activity Book* by Jim and Joan Boulden

*Why Is Everybody Always Picking on Me?* by Terence Webster-Doyle

Teaching Module on Bullying – [www.apa.org/education/k12/bullying.aspx](http://www.apa.org/education/k12/bullying.aspx)

Lisa M. Elliott, Ph.D.

Licensed Psychologist and Clinic Manager

Cook Childrens Medical Center

