

The School Bully Can Take a Toll on Your Child's Mental Health

Ask any child what a bully looks like, and he or she is likely to describe someone who is bigger and stronger. Yet, while bullies certainly are known for their ability to overpower others physically, mental bullying can be just as damaging to children.

When children are picked on by bullies, whether physically or mentally, many feel the need to suffer in silence for fear that speaking up will provoke further torture. But bullying is not a problem that usually just takes care of itself. Action needs to be taken.

Parents and caregivers are sometimes reluctant to intervene in conflicts between children but they *can* teach children *not* to take part in—or become victims of—bullying. Children can be taught to assert themselves effectively. As a caring adult, you can:

- **Demonstrate assertive behavior.** Teach children to ask for things directly and respond directly to each other. It is OK to say “no” to an unacceptable demand. Let children role-play with puppets or dolls.
- **Teach social skills.** Suggest ways for children to compromise or to express their feelings in a positive way. Show children how to resolve problems firmly and fairly.
- **Identify potential friendship problems and correct them.** Teach children how to ignore routine teasing. Not all provocative behavior must be acknowledged. Teach children the value of making new friends.
- **Teach common courtesy skills.** Teach children to ask nicely and to respond appropriately to polite requests.
- **Identify ways to respond to bullies.** Help children identify acts



of aggression, bossiness or discrimination. Encourage children not to give up objects or territory to bullies. This discourages bullying behavior.

- **Demonstrate the rewards of personal achievement.** Teach children to trust and value their own feelings. They will be more likely to resist peer pressure, respect warm and caring adults, and be successful in achieving their personal goals.

Children who are victims or witnesses to acts of bullying often suffer from serious emotional problems including depression and anxiety. The *Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign* is part of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program of the federal Center for Mental Health Services. Parents and caregivers who wish to learn more about mental well-being in children, please call 1-800-789-2647 (toll-free) or visit the Web site at www.mentalhealth.org/child to download a free publications catalog (CA-0000). The federal Center for Mental Health Services is an agency of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.