For most adults, the idea of being bullied in school was nothing new. Many thought that bullying, although not a pleasant act was a part of growing up and basically harmless. Today, the problem of bullying continues to grow. According to recent figures, more than 15% of school age children are affected by bullying.

Bullying refers to deliberate, unprovoked actions by one or more children against another that are meant to cause harm and fear. Generally, boys will be more physical and direct in their bullying and girls will tend to use psychological bullying (excluding and ridiculing). Whether the bullying is physical or verbal the results can be devastating.

Children are not born bullies. They are taught to bully. Generally, children who bully are impulsive and have little concern for the feelings of others. They crave attention and like to dominate other children. Many young children who have little or no empathy and learn from their parents to always hit back can become bullies before entering kindergarten.

Warning signs that a child is being bullied are: sudden lack of interest in school or withdrawing from school and family activities. Unexplained bumps, bruises, or torn or missing clothing should be explored closely to determine the source. Changes in sleeping routines, complaining of stomachaches and headaches, or threatening to hurt self or others are also signs of being a victim of bullying.

When the pain of bullying continues unchecked the hurt and humiliation deepens and can bring tragic results. Sometimes the pain is directed inward and the bullied child hurts him/her self. Other children choose to strike back at those who bullied them and anyone connected to their torment and this can result in school shootings and other social violence.

Bullies come in all shapes and sizes. Bullies are also very good at hiding negative behavior from adults. It will take the combined efforts of parents, children, teachers, and the community to stop the problem of bullying. Open communication is the key.
If you think your child is being bullied make sure your child knows that being bullied is not his/her fault and they do not have to deal with it alone. Teach your child to be assertive, report the bullying to the school, and don’t minimize the bully’s behavior. Parents should not try to mediate the situation and they should not encourage their child to fight back.

Another important part of getting bullying under control is teaching your child NOT to be a victim. Work to instill confidence in your child and help them develop positive social skills. Teach them to speak up for themselves and to ask for help from a trusted adult.

If you think your child is the bully, make it clear that bullying is UNACCEPTABLE. Have fair and consistent consequences for bullying behavior and teach and reward positive behavior. Help your child learn positive ways to handle anger and frustration. Make sure your child understands the feelings of the targeted child and help them make amends for the bullying. Most importantly, work with your school to help your child if they are identified as a bully and get professional help if needed.

Also teach them NOT to be a bully by modeling assertive, but not aggressive behavior. Say it loud and clear that violence is NOT acceptable. Help your child find non-violent ways to deal with anger and frustration. Our children most often learn how to handle situations from watching the adults in their lives. Remember to be a positive role model as you interact with others. Our children are watching!

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