



Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I learn”

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A PARENTING TEENS DIGEST BOONE COUNTY STEP AHEAD COUNCIL
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Early Identification and Intervention **BULLYING PREVENTION**

Information from:

North Dakota State University Extension Service Web site and
The Indiana Department of Education Web site...Legislative Watch

In the last few years, incidents of violent retribution by victims of bullying have led to an increased awareness of the problem of bullying. A student is being bullied or victimized when exposed, repeatedly over time, to intentional injury or discomfort inflicted by one or more other students. This may include physical contact, verbal assault, making obscene gestures or facial expressions, and being intentionally excluded. Bullying implies an imbalance in power or strength in which others victimize one child. Surprisingly large proportions of students are bullied. In the United States approximately 20% of students have reported being bullied. Most incidents occur in places with little adult supervision, such as playgrounds and hallways.

Bullying has serious consequences, not only for victims and perpetrators, but the entire school. Victims report feelings of vengefulness, anger, and self-pity after a bullying incident. Left untreated, the short term effects of being a victim may include a strong dislike of going to school, distrust all their peers at school, and problems making friends. Extreme victims can develop depression, become physically ill or suicidal.

The long-term consequences, however, may vary a great deal. As they grow older, most victims do well in school and are able to make friends. Victims, especially if they receive support from adults who are important in their lives, survive the experience of being bullied without long-term effects.

In contrast however, even though their peers sometimes view them positively, bullies rarely are capable of maintaining close friendships. They are usually not doing well in school and are not well liked by their teachers. Bullying is a behavior that is very often one of the first steps to more serious problems. Unless some kind of intervention takes place, the aggression of bullying often leads to more serious acts of delinquency and criminal activity. Bullies are also more likely to use drugs and alcohol as adolescents.

Unfortunately, bullying is often tolerated and ignored by adults. Teachers rarely detect bullying and when they do, intervene in only 4% of all incidents. Many parents and school officials are likely to blame victims being bullied for being weak and not able to stand up for themselves. This, coupled with the fact that victims are usually warned by bullies not to tell anyone, makes it difficult for them to talk with teachers or parents. Students who report bullying believe that nothing will be done.

Some of the symptoms that a child might be a victim of bullying include:

- ❖ Acts moody, sullen, or withdraws from family interaction
- ❖ Becomes depressed
- ❖ Loses interest in school work, or grades drop
- ❖ Loses appetite or has difficulty getting to sleep
- ❖ Waits to use the bathroom at home
- ❖ Arrives home with torn clothes, unexplained bruises
- ❖ Asks for extra money for school lunch or supplies, extra allowance
- ❖ Refuses to go to school (15 percent of all school absenteeism is directly related to fears of being bullied at school)
- ❖ Wants to carry a protection item, such as a knife

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO:

- ❖ Create a safe environment for your children to tell you about being bullied. Many times kids are embarrassed to tell their parents what happened, thinking that their parents will blame them. Say *sometimes kids at school pick on other kids or say mean things to them. Does this ever happen to you?*
- ❖ Reinforce the idea that if they are being bullied, it is not their fault. Don't make your child feel like a wimp. *The person that is picking on you is the one with a problem, not you. Bullies pick on people for no real reason, but it is just because they have problems of their own, not because of anything you have done.*
- ❖ Don't teach your kids to hit or fight back: it will only make things worse. Most schools do not condone fighting, even if it is in self-defense. Practice with kids some strategies of ways they can respond when being bullied. Help them identify times when they are likely to be harassed, and see if there are ways to avoid those situations. Determine the exact nature of the bullying behavior, and help them practice some things to say or do. Here are some specific strategies: *1. Laugh or ignore comments or teasing. Bullies delight in you being scared and getting a big reaction. Eventually they will leave you alone. 2. Tell them to buzz off or shout "GO AWAY!!" Say it as angrily as you can and walk away immediately. Practice in the mirror. 3. Stay with a crowd. Bullies usually pick on kids who are alone. Suggest that children walk to school or sit on the bus with someone who can protect them. 4. If you are alone with a crowd that picks on you, ask him or her why they are mean to you.*
- ❖ Notify teachers whenever an incident happens; be prepared to be persistent until some action is taken! Ask the teacher: *Would it be possible to have the class get involved in a discussion about bullies, or to separate my child from those who are bothering them?*
- ❖ If your child is unwilling to report another child's behavior to a teacher, offer to make the complaint yourself. Stress that it can be done in a way that is confidential.

INDIANA LEGISLATURE

On the 2005 Legislative agenda, the Indiana Department of Education supports the introduction of legislation consistent with Senate Bill 231 (this year known as SB0285) authored by Senator Tom Wyss in 2004. During the 2004 session, this bill passed out of the Senate, but stalled in the House Way and Means Committee. The National Conference of State Legislatures recognized the 2004 proposal as model legislation for providing statewide guidance while maintaining local control. Senate Bill 231 incorporated the strengths of anti-bullying laws from other states (at least 18 states now have such laws with Iowa and Vermont recently passing laws during the summer of 2004), but was drafted to be compatible with previous school safety initiatives in Indiana. The proposal calls for the creation of:

- 1.) a statutory definition of bullying;
- 2.) an education outreach and training initiative under the Indiana Safe School Fund;
- 3.) a prohibition of the act of bullying in the discipline policies and procedures guidelines issued by school corporations; and
- 4.) Safe School Committees in all public schools (these can be established as a subcommittee of the L. 221 school improvement committee; or, it would suffice if a committee already exists that addresses this issue at the building level.)

Hopefully this year can make a difference with bullying being identified in schools and programs put in place to deal with this increasing and serious problem. Both the victim and the bully need intervention.

The Indiana Department of Education web site looks not only at the consequences of bullying for both the victim and the bully himself/herself, but also addresses the financial (and psychological) costs of bullying and violence to victims:

- ❖ Sixty percent of boys classified as bullies in Grades 6-9 were convicted of a least one crime by age 24; 40 percent have three or more convictions by age 24.
- ❖ For each bully prevented from adopting a life of crime, the nation could save between \$1.7 million and \$2.3 million (Vanderbilt University Study, 1998)
- ❖ Approximately 160,000 students miss school every day across the country due to fear of attack or intimidation by a bully (Fried & Fried, 1996)