



HUFF
POST PARENTS

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.

Executive Director, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

My Child is the Bully: Tips for Parents

Posted: 04/19/2012

Having just seen the powerful movie BULLY that depicts the horrific tragedies that befall innocent children by bullies teasing, humiliating and assaulting them, I felt compelled to ask “ What about the parents of the bullies?” How do they get support? What can they do to recognize and stop the harmful acts that their child is perpetrating on innocent children?

Bullies come in every shape and size. They are from every ethnic group, race, socio-economic class gender and religion. As a parent, you’ll probably be shocked to learn that your child is intentionally causing pain and humiliation to other children.

Research shows that children the resort to bullying often:

- Lack empathy and compassion for others’ feelings
- May be expressing anger about events in their lives
- Want to be in control
- Have low self esteem
- May be trying to impress their peers
- Come from families where parents or siblings bully
- Do not receive adequate parental attention or supervision
- Have parents that do not enforce discipline
- May be the victims of bullying and are trying to retaliate

The good news is that there **IS** a lot that a parent can do to help their child stop bullying. By taking immediate action; you can help your child learn new ways of handling their feelings, peer pressure and conflict with others.

Here are a few tips:

- Remain calm. You will probably have to deal with the school officials and the child's parents; no one wants to speak to an angry adult.
- Make sure that your child's behavior is not due to a disability; sometimes children with limited social skills or behavioral issues bully others. It still needs to be addressed, but perhaps in conjunction with his/her Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Listen to what others have to say about your child's behavior. Then, listen to your child's side of the story. Try to understand what is behind the behavior. Is your child being bullied? Are their friends bullies? Start the conversation.
- Explain to your child the harm caused by their behavior. Bullying causes physical, psychological and emotional harm to other children.
- Teach Empathy. Have your child think about how it must feel to be bullied. Talk about how they can apologize to the child that they have harmed.
- Help your child adopt alternative strategies to use instead of bullying. Remember, bullies aren't born; children can change. It's not necessarily "once a bully, always a bully" Role play how they will handle future conflicts with their peers. Change characters and have your child play the part of the child that is being bullied, it will help them understand why their behavior must change.
- Make your expectations clear. Let your child know that there will be consequences if the bullying continues and that you will not tolerate it.
- Set the example at home. Don't gossip or share rude stories about others in your home. Model nonviolent behavior.
- Praise your child when they show compassion for others.
- Finally, if the bullying does not stop, seek mental health counseling for your child.

It might be helpful for parents to think about bullying behaviors as falling along a continuum. At one end is the bully. A bit further down the line are the followers, those who encourage the bully, but take a back seat to the actual bullying, then come the children who do not actively bully, but enjoy watching the bullying activities. On the other side of the continuum are those who watch the bullying but try to ignore it and do not intervene, then come the children who do not like bullying but are fearful of trying to stop it. Finally at the other end of the continuum is the protector, who is the child or children, who stand up to the bully to protect the victim. Parents should discuss this continuum with their child and encourage them to befriend a child that has been bullied. A kind word goes a long way.

Finally, the best way to help your child is to prevent bullying in the first place. I encourage parents to be proactive about bullying prevention. Find out your school's policies on bullying prevention and actions taken if a child is bullied. Join the Parent Association and ask for training on signs and symptoms and how to start a prevention program with the students. Parents can play a significant role in stopping the behavior. Take a stand against bullying now.

For more information on bullying prevention and for keeping your child safe, visit NYSPCC.org.