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**Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.**

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

**Stop Bullying: Teach Your Child Empathy and Limit Their Intake of Violence**

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Your child has been known to bully. You, as a parent, may be struggling with how to stop this behavior. I have two suggestions that go hand-in-hand: Teach empathy and try to eliminate the violence that they take in on a daily basis through videos, the Internet, movies and games.

To my first point, teaching empathy is regularly recommended as a way to help stop bullying. Empathy is the ability to identify and understand another person's feelings. It's putting yourself in someone else's shoes and then extending kindness based on that understanding. Empathy is needed to express care, love and concern, as well as to share times of sadness and despair.

Children who bully often do not understand the impact of their actions, or seem to be immune to the suffering of others. So, helping them develop an empathic capacity should lessen bullying behaviors.

So, how exactly do you teach empathy to your child? Here are a few suggestions:

- Use everyday activities to model empathy. Show your sympathetic feelings towards those who are less fortunate than you, or have recently experienced hardship. If there is a story on the news about someone who lost their home in a fire, or who lost family in a car accident, speak about how sorry you feel and about how that person on the news must feel.
- If a friend or neighbor lost their job, discuss how difficult that will be for that person and the sadness or anxiety they may feel.

- If you see a homeless person, have a conversation with your child about the tragedy and causes of homelessness and why helping at a shelter, donating clothing or money is important.
- Use examples to show your child what they have in common with others. If they can picture the similarities, it's easier for them to understand others' feelings. For example, discuss the local impact and devastation of a hurricane, tornado, flood or fire, and how fortunate they are that they are safe. Then, brainstorm about ways that they can help with those impacted.
- Use reports about bullying that appear on the news as discussion points. Too often, they are tragic cases of suicide by a teen who was plagued by bullies. Discuss how that child must have felt, how his/her parents feel now and the ramifications for all involved in the bullying process.
- Model positive, caring behavior. Acts of kindness or concern are a good way to teach your child empathy. Have your child come with you when you bring a meal to your friend who is ill or visit someone in the hospital.
- Praise your child when they display empathic behavior. Give them immediate feedback. "It was so nice of you to help Ms. Smith (an elderly neighbor) with her groceries, she really appreciated it," or "Thank you so much for hugging your brother when he fell down and cried; you made him feel better."

Now, to my second point about eliminating the intake of violence from your child's life, I believe that there is a connection to the increase in bullying behaviors among school-aged children and their constant intake of violence.

Children are constantly exposed to violence on TV, movies the Internet and video games. Often, the perpetrator is viewed as the victor. This constant feed of violence may also make them numb to the suffering of others. It stands to reason that if they are constantly watching movies or playing games whereby those who inflict suffering or death "win" -- it works in direct contrast with building empathy.

Be aware of the types of video games, TV shows and movies that your children view; screen them. Remember that besides sending out negative messages about how others should be treated or disputes resolved, these violent images are in their minds forever. You can't "unsee" something. Shield them from this unnecessary violence, even if they complain and protest. Have a list of other games, videos, movies, comedies and sports programs that they can enjoy instead. My guess is that they will thank you for it when they are older.

So, here's to a happy, healthy and bully-free 2014!

For more information about bullying and other child safety issues please visit [www.nyspcc.org](http://www.nyspcc.org).