

MIND MATTERS: PARENTS PROMOTING ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING PREVENTING AND STOPPING BULLYING

As a parent, it is important to be aware of the prevalence of bullying both in schools and in the community. Simply put, bullying is defined as a pattern of behavior in which one or more children (bully) single out a child (victim) with intent to harm, embarrass and frighten. Be alert to the possibility that your adolescent may be a victim of a bully, or possibly the individual bullying another adolescent.

Typically, this type of behavior occurs in the absence of an adult and is likely to go unreported. Examples of bullying behavior may include verbal threats, physical attack, being excluded from a social group, spreading rumors, name calling, or making embarrassing comments about the adolescent or the adolescent's family.

If you think that your adolescent may be a victim of bullying, here are some suggestions:

- Be alert to abrupt changes in behavior (dislike of school, missing personal belongings).
- Listen to your adolescent's concerns without overreacting or asking a million questions. Whatever the concern, your adolescent needs to feel your support; this perceived support may be critical if the bullying behavior becomes more dangerous.
- Assure your adolescent that they can talk with you about any incident. This assurance of your willingness to listen may empower them to walk away from the bully. Bullies want to hurt their victim. If the bullying behavior does not get the desired reaction, the behavior is likely to decrease and eventually stop.
- Involve your adolescent in the plan to address the bullying behavior. This is critical in establishing their sense of personal control.
- Encourage your adolescent to report any incidents of bullying they may observe.
- Reinforce the strengths and goodness of your adolescent. Strengthening their self-confidence and self-esteem will build internal resources for dealing with the bullying and may make your adolescent a less likely target.

If you think that your adolescent may be a bully:

- Talk with your adolescent and *listen* to what they say about the situation and the logic supporting their behavior.
- Remember: Bullying can be physical or verbal, and adolescent girls especially can be cruel in their words without realizing how deep their words may cut.
- Provide consistent expectations and consequences for negative and positive behavior exhibited by your adolescent.
- Connect with school personnel, community resources or other mental health providers to address bullying behaviors.

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(continued)**

Adolescents typically need parental communication, support and assistance in navigating complex social situations. Adolescents who perceive strong, positive parental support and connections report greater happiness, enhanced well-being and generally do better in school and in the community. To provide this support and promote healthy social interactions, parents can:

- Communicate with your adolescent about their friendships. Be an available listener.
- Know your adolescent's friends and something about the activities they enjoy and do together.
- Provide support and encouragement for healthy friendships.
- Model effective problem solving when problems with friends or others occur.
- Support your adolescent's efforts to make new friends and develop new interests.



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