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Q&A: Bullying in Schools: What Parents Can Do

In anticipation of her February 13 talk at Rush NeuroBehavioral Center, Dr. Anne Howard answered a few questions about the types and prevalence of bullying, the role of social development in bullying, and ways in which parents can help in prevention efforts.

Q: What are the main types of bullying that young people may experience?

Anne Howard: While there are many types, physical bullying is the most well-known, obvious, and easy to see. Typically, it consists of fighting, pushing, shoving, or any other repeated roughness. Relational bullying is more difficult to identify, however it is usually more common, especially among girls. Instead of physical aggression, relational bullying involves ignoring or purposefully excluding in an attempt to damage relationships and social standing. Two other common types are sexual harassment and cyber bullying, which involves the use of technology (i.e. Facebook) to assault someone.

Q: How common is bullying among young people?

AH: It's difficult to determine due to the fact that bullying is often covert. However, I conducted a study in 2005 that asked children to report how concerned they were about bullying, and 64% felt somewhat or very concerned. Additionally, studies show a range from 15% to 60%, with most reporting a minimum of 30% of young people being bullied.

Q: How does social development play a role in bullying?

AH: Social development is vital in the prevention of bullying in two ways –

- It can help prevent a child from becoming the target of bullying;
- It can help prevent a child from becoming a bully.

There are several goals to work towards that can aid in this prevention:

1. Regulating emotions;
2. Self-control and the inhibition of impulses;
3. Nonverbal awareness, or the ability to read social cues;
4. Empathy and perspective-taking, or being able to feel how others feel and think about what others are thinking; and
5. Social problem solving, or being able to manage social conflict.

If a child can develop those skills, they are much less likely to become a target of aggression or become aggressive towards others.

Q: How can parents help a child who is being bullied?

AH: I always tell parents that if their child is the victim of bullying, it's important to validate his/her experience. Even if a scenario is exaggerated, parents should never minimize the impact. Instead, be supportive and empathize, and ask how you can help. It may also be beneficial to gather information about the bullying (i.e. Where did it happen? When? How many times? Do you feel safe at school? Do you have anyone who you can go to for help?) and speak with faculty at the school about the incident.

Q: How can parents get involved in schools to improve moral climate and reduce bullying rates?

AH: Ask if your child's school is using a social-emotional curriculum, and ensure that the administration is enforcing state-mandated anti-bullying policies. Also, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) offers [A Framework for School-Wide Bullying Prevention and Safety](#). The most important factor to ensuring a school's success in combating bullying is a well-defined plan with specific goals and programs in place to support children.

Additional Resources:

Children's books -

http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/conference/files/ftp07nenide_books.pdf

Books for young children -

[*Stop Bullying Bobby! Helping Children Cope with Teasing and Bullying.* \(2004\). By Dana Smith-Mansell.](#)

Books for parents and teachers -

[*The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School, How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle.* \(2009\). By Barbara Coloroso.](#)

[*Bullyproof Your Child for Life: Protect Your Child from Teasing, Taunting, and Bullying for Good.* \(2007\). By Joel Haber and Jenna Glatzer.](#)

Internet -

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>