

BULLYING - an insight for parents

1. What is Bullying?

Bullying is an offence, a violation of a child's right to physical and psychological safety. Bullying is being teased, called names, having your money taken, being beaten up, being left out and ignored, and other behaviours.

Bullies are found in most schools and communities. Even in the most disciplined or positive schools there may be isolated incidents of bullying. Both girls and boys can be bullied and be bullies. Bullying has led to children committing suicide or dropping out of school because of the stress of being bullied.

2. Why are Children Bullied?

Any child can be bullied, but some are more vulnerable to bullying than others. Many children are bullied because of:

- Their age - younger children are often picked on by older ones;
- Their race (from a minority or ethnic group);
- How they look - fat, skinny, short, tall
- The colour of their skin;
- Their religion;
- Obvious physical characteristic such as spectacles;
- Ability - academically bright or struggling children are often teased;
- Early or late sexual development;
- The way they dress;
- How much money they have;
- Disability; and/or
- Factors relating to their parents, such as having a caretaker who is obese, or occupies a particular position in the community.

3. What is the Difference between Teasing and Bullying?

A bullying child will often claim that he or she is 'only teasing' but there is a big difference. Here are some definitions that *children* have come up with:

3.1. Teasing

- Teasing is being made fun of in a good-humoured way. It is not serious and one can sometimes laugh about it.
- Teasing is usually done by someone who cares about you, like a family member or friend.
- If you are a bit upset about being teased, it's not a strong feeling and it soon goes away.
- In teasing everyone has a turn - you will tease others, yourself, sometimes. You are not being picked on.
- If teasing really hurts someone, it is by mistake, as the person teasing does not mean to hurt, and he or she will stop.

3.2. Bullying

- Bullying is cruel and is meant to hurt.
- Bullying is one-sided. The same person is always being picked on, and the same person does the bullying.
- Bullies want to show how powerful they are by hurting others, taking their things or making them do things that they don't want to do.

4. The Role of Educators with regards to Bullying

Bullying gangs often become violent gangs that are involved in crime, so schools need to respond pro-actively to bullying to prevent it becoming gangsterism. Research shows that most children believe that when they report the bullying to an educator nothing is going to be done to stop the bullying.

Educators have to help eliminate bullying. Following are some ideas:

- **Set an example by treating all children with respect.** Never pick on a physical characteristic or a difference when disciplining a child. Teaching children to be assertive and boosting every child's self-confidence will help them deal with bullies.

- **All schools should have an anti-bullying policy that seeks to protect all children.** It is very important that learners know that all forms of bullying are totally unacceptable within the school.
- **It is also important to be aware of the needs of a child who is a bully.** Bullying behavior is sometimes a sign that the bully is experiencing problems at home.
- **Indicate to a bully, that their behaviour is unacceptable.** In addition, be prepared to work with the bully to help them find alternative ways of behaving.

5. Advice you can give your child if they are being bullied

Bullying hurts and sometimes it makes one want to hurt others. One may even blame oneself but it is the behavior of the bully that is wrong. Here are a few points to discuss with your child/children regarding bullying:

- **Tell someone.** Do not feel embarrassed, ashamed, afraid to tell someone that you are being hurt or teased, or that your lunch is being stolen. Don't be silent. Talk to your parents, teachers, big brother or another adult that you trust. Keep on talking until someone listens and you get help.
- **Ask the bully to stop.** Someone might not know that their behavior is hurting you.
- **Avoid being alone with the bully.** Try to make friends and hang out as a group. Bullies are more likely to trouble you if you are alone.
- **Believe in yourself.** Know that you are a special person.

6. Victims and Perpetrators Need Help

6.1. Assistance for Victims of Bullying

In spite of what most adults think, bullying should be taken seriously. Both physical and verbal attacks by one child on another, intending to hurt, are a form of violence and can cause permanent harm to the victim. Bullying can make the victim depressed, anxious and even fearful.

In coping with on-going violence like this, victims need help. Family members, educators and friends can help them by:

- preventing bullying, but be careful as intervention can just make bullying worse as the child is targeted as a 'mummy's baby';
- Discuss alternatives with the victim to prevent bullying;
- Help with recovery from the hurtful and often brutal experience; and
- Help a victimized child to gain confidence and inner power.

6.2. Assistance for Perpetrators of Bullying

Victims need help but so do bullies as their form of violence can escalate, as they grow older and stronger. Children who bully have often experienced bullying themselves, may feel inadequate and try and deal with this by exerting physical and psychological harm, and have poor self esteem and social skills. Parents and educators should plan a rehabilitative programme for bullies. They need help so that they:

- learn to understand themselves and their feelings;
- understand the consequences of their actions;
- find other rewarding outlets for their power-seeking drives; and
- practice self-discipline and empathy for others.

6.3. Responses to children who bully that may be helpful:

- Talk openly about the behaviour to the child who is bullying.
- Label the behaviour as clearly unacceptable and harmful to both the victim and the child who bullies.
- Try and help the child who bullies understand the impact on the child they are bullying as well as on themselves if the behaviour does not change.
- Notice and praise pro-social behaviour when it does occur.
- Avoid consequences that humiliate and belittle.