

KID'S Corner

CHILDREN AND WEIGHT-BASED BULLYING

by Eliza Kingsford, MA, LPC

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive, forceful, coercive or threatening behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying is NOT a “normal part of growing up,” these behaviors are deliberate and **repeated**, with the intent to harm the recipient.

Studies report that 86 percent of children between the ages of 12-15 report being bullied or teased at school. This can lead to serious consequences for children who fear coming to school because they don't want to face their bully. A drop in grades, withdrawal from social activities and even acting out are just some of the results often seen from a bullied child. Sometimes bullying can lead to the child being so terrified of the bully that they don't tell anyone what is happening for fear of retribution or ‘payback’ from the bully.

If you are being bullied, it's important to understand the ways to get help. If you are the parent of a bullied child, it's just as important for you to watch for the signs of your child being bullied and understand the ways to help.

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WHAT KINDS OF BULLYING ARE THERE?

There are several different kinds of bullying; PHYSICAL, RELATIONAL OR SOCIAL, VERBAL AND CYBER



PHYSICAL BULLYING

INVOLVES HURTING A PERSON'S BODY OR POSSESSIONS.

Examples of physical bullying are:

- Hitting/kicking/pinching
- Spitting
- Tripping/pushing
- Taking or breaking someone's things
- Making mean or rude hand gestures



SOCIAL BULLYING

SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS RELATIONAL BULLYING, INVOLVES HURTING SOMEONE'S REPUTATION OR RELATIONSHIPS.

Social bullying includes:

- Leaving someone out on purpose
- Telling other children not to be friends with someone
- Spreading rumors about someone
- Embarrassing someone in public



VERBAL BULLYING

SAYING OR WRITING MEAN THINGS. VERBAL BULLYING IS THE MOST COMMON FORM OF BULLYING FOR BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS.

Verbal bullying includes:

- Teasing
- Name-calling
- Inappropriate sexual comments
- Taunting
- Threatening to cause harm
- Racial slurs
- Excessive criticism



CYBER BULLYING

TAKES PLACE USING ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY.

Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and Web sites. Cyberbullying is often most feared because it can reach a child 24 hours a day, seven days a week, even when that child is alone and not in school.

Examples of cyberbullying include:

- Mean text messages or emails
- Rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites
- Embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles



HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

If you are a parent of a child who is being bullied, don't expect that your child is going to outright tell you what is happening. Younger children are more likely to tell their parents, but as a child gets older there are many reasons they feel telling a parent won't do any good:

1. They are ashamed of being bullied. Boys, more so than girls, have gotten the message they "should" be able to handle it. "Toughen up," "Be strong," these are all harmful messages children have heard that can get in the way of telling you what is happening.
2. They are afraid of retaliation if they "tell" on their bully. Bullies will often threaten their victims for telling on them.
3. They don't feel like there is anything you can do to help. Often the child sees the bully as too smart, manipulative and sneaky. If they tell someone, no one will be able to help and it will make the situation worse.
4. They have been told to "just get along" with the bully and don't feel like anyone will help them.

Your child may not outright tell you they are being bullied, but they will likely give you some clues. The best thing you can do is pay attention. If your gut tells you something is wrong, it likely is. Here are some other warning signs:

1. Shows a sudden resistance to going to school or riding the bus
2. Sudden drop in grades
3. Withdraws from social or family activities and wants to be left alone
4. Starts doing things out of character (skipping school, acting out)
5. Begins talking about peers in a derogatory or negative manner (reflecting the anger your child is holding inside)
6. Has stomach aches, headaches or panic attacks, or can't sleep (anxiety manifesting in somatic issues)

MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you are worried your child is being bullied, the best thing you can do is create a relationship with them that promotes open communication. If your children know they can come to you when they are struggling with something (good or bad), and that you will actively listen to them and offer your support and guidance, they are more likely to give you the clues you need to be aware of what's going on. The more you know your children and their friends, the more likely it is that you'll be aware of the signs. Here are some Do's and Don'ts:



- Allow your child to talk to you about it. Ask a simple question such as "Tell me about it?" and let your child have the time to respond. Ask your child to talk about it without asking a lot of questions.
- Tell the child, "It is not your fault." No matter what quirks or differences a child has, no child **deserves** to be bullied, and they need to hear that from their parents.
- Let your child know you will help them. You can come up with a plan together and you can help your child strategize ways to handle the situation. Don't do it **for** them, be a guide for your child to come up with ways to confront the bully, avoid dangerous situations and take her power back. Let them know they have an ally in you.
- Report the bullying to school personnel and **follow-up** to make sure it is being addressed. More and more schools are creating bullying policies and plans. Parents and school administrators need to work together to make sure these are being implemented.



- Minimize, rationalize or explain away the bully's behavior. **Validate** your child's experience with the bully. You may not understand what your child is going through, but invalidating your child's feelings about the experience will make it much worse.
- Don't rush to solve the problem for your child. Unless your child is in physical danger, of course. It is better to **help** your child develop the tools necessary to advocate for themselves in the situation. Help them to understand their strengths and their options. Then follow through with the necessary avenues for you to help them.
- Don't tell your child to just avoid the bully. You are inadvertently telling your child he/she is helpless, or that it's not that big a deal. Help your child **work through scenarios** and situations that might remove them from being at risk, but validate their vulnerable feelings.

I AM BEING BULLIED. WHAT DO I DO?

- **SPEAK UP** – It can be hard to feel like you want to tell someone what is going on, especially if you've told someone in the past and nothing has happened. But the truth is, silence only makes the bully stronger. And no one can help you if you don't tell someone (even if it's over and over again) how you feel. It's very important that you DON'T keep quiet. Talking takes the power away from the bully and starts to put it back in you.

- **FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE** – When a few, or even one person, is being mean, it's easy to start to feel like no one cares about us. It's easy to start to focus on the negative and start to believe all of the mean words people are using to bring us down. Take a moment each day to think about the people you love and care about, and who love and care about you. Think about a nice thing someone said to you or the things that you are thankful for.

- **ROLE MODEL BEING A GOOD FRIEND AND CLASSMATE** – Just because a bully is acting inappropriately and hurting other people doesn't mean you have to act that way as well. It feels good to be nice to others. Try giving someone a compliment or being nice to someone in class today. It will make you feel better about yourself and others.

CONCLUSION

Remember, **NO ONE** deserves to be bullied. Nothing you did makes it ok for someone to treat you like a bully treats you. If you are feeling sad and have ever thought about hurting yourself or someone else, **SPEAK UP!** There are people here to help you.

About the Author:

Eliza Kingsford, MA, LPC, is Clinical Director of Wellspring. She is a Licensed Psychotherapist specializing in weight management, eating disorders and body image. An experienced speaker and presenter, Eliza has appeared on various television shows (Dr. Phil, Dr. Drew and Dr. Oz), at national conferences and workshops, and in various publications. A member of the Obesity Action Coalition, Eliza is passionate about changing health reform to include better treatment options for obesity and serves on various OAC committees.



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ONLINE RESOURCES:

- www.thebullyproject.com
- www.stopbullying.gov
- www.stopbullyingnowfoundation.org/main



Obesity Action Coalition

ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



PUBLIC EDUCATION



ADVOCACY



ANNUAL CONVENTION



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



VIBRANT COMMUNITY

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

**Through the OAC Community,
you can get access to:**

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
- Community Discussion Forum
- Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE

JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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