

Helping your child deal with bullying

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

Your child comes home from school with unexplained scratches and is acting withdrawn. Your protective instincts immediately kick in. Could that kid on the school bus be at it again, you wonder? Although it's hard, you need to be a wise parent and consider your next steps carefully.

Studies show that between 15 percent and 25 percent of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency, with verbal bullying the most frequent form reported by both boys and girls.

"Bullying peaks right around the time of middle school," says Capt. Stephanie Bryn, MPH, director of injury and violence prevention at the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, who oversees the Stop Bullying Now campaign. "There are still people who don't take it as seriously as we think they should, and as a result, children are getting bullied everyday."

Bullying can be physical, involving hitting or punching, or verbal, taking the form of teasing, name calling, intimidation or social exclusion. Either way, it's important that adults recognize the signs because many children, especially boys, are reluctant to talk about it.



Signs that a child is being bullied include unexplained bruises, scratches, loss of appetite, headaches, stomachaches and sleeplessness. Self-esteem can plummet and the child can become depressed, lonely, anxious or afraid to go to school.

It takes courage for kids to tell parents they're being bullied. Children are reluctant to talk about it because they're ashamed, or even worse, afraid of the kid who is bullying them. They also don't want to be seen as tattletales.

Bullying can happen in a variety of settings, not just on school grounds, so daily conversations between parents and children are crucial for helping kids who are being bullied. Parents should ask probing questions, such as "Did anything happen today at school

or camp that you want to talk about?"

If your child is being bullied, tell her or him you want to help and don't assume she or he did something to provoke it. Don't tell the child to ignore it — she or he will think you don't care, and the problem could grow worse. Ask your child what she or he thinks should be done and assure that you will keep her or him posted on what you plan to do. Refrain from contacting the parents of the child who did the bullying. Instead, gather information and consult with teachers, guidance counselors, principals, camp counselors and other adult leaders, and let them do the leg work. Reinforce to your child that retaliation is never the right answer.

"What is really critical is that adults need to take the lead, because bullying needs an adult intervention or an intervention of an older teen, for example," Bryn says. "It takes more than just a child fending for themselves. We don't expect bullying will stop if we tell a child to laugh or walk away. We want adults to know about the problem. Adults are part of the solution."

>> For more tips on stopping bullying, visit www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov



RU there? Online world creates new danger of cyberbullying

Technology is a great thing, but it has given rise to a new form of bullying called cyberbullying. Sending or receiving threatening, hurtful or obscene text messages and e-mail, or posting private information or lies about another person on a social networking site such as Facebook is on the rise among teens, especially girls. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, teens may be more likely to cyberbully because it's easier to type mean words than to say them.

Susan Limber, co-author of the book "Cyber Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age," surveyed about 3,800 middle-school students and found that 18 percent had been cyberbullied at least once in the previous two months. Equally alarming, 11 percent said they had cyberbullied others at least



once in the prior two months.

If your children receive a threatening e-mail or text message, tell them not to respond and to show it to a trusted adult.

For extra protection, tell your children not to give out personal information online, and make sure they don't share their e-mail or passwords with anyone.

"Parents should talk frequently with their children about the do's and don'ts of

each new piece of technology that enters the home, discuss appropriate and inappropriate uses for this technology and discuss cyberbullying specifically — what it is, and what to do if kids should experience or witness cyberbullying," Limber says.



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What if my child is the bully?

If you're the parent of a child who bullies, take the matter seriously and talk to your child as well as to teachers, school counselors and the pediatrician. Studies show that 15 percent to 20 percent of U.S. students report that they bully other children.

Children who bully may be depressed, angry, impulsive or unempathetic. They may think they're superior to other kids, or they might be victims of physical abuse. Other risk factors for bullying include a lack of parental involvement and supervision.

Your child needs to know that such behavior is unacceptable and can land them in serious trouble at home, at school and in the community. If the behavior continues, a mental health professional can evaluate your child and create a plan to stop the behavior.

