Talking with children about bullying
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Most of us engage with children in one capacity or another. They are our own children, nieces/nephews, grandchildren, neighbors, children of our friends, children we care for at work, and others. We have the privilege of being a part of their lives and with this privilege comes responsibilities. This article is going to focus on how we can identify, intervene and prevent bullying. Empowering us to help create a more perfect world for our children in a time that can feel not perfect.

Bullying is more common than we want to believe. Currently, 1:4 children report being bullied, and 1:5 children admit to bullying someone. 85% of bullying occurs in front of others (bystanders). We are seeing an increase in cyberbullying with 24% of Middle School students and 15.5% of High School students report experiencing this. Research shows that vulnerable children are bullied more often with:

- 74.1% of LGBT students were verbally bullied in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 55.2% because of their gender expression.
- 1/3 of students of color reporting biased-based bullying.
- 33% of girls and 25% of boys report weight-based teasing from peers, but prevalence rates increase to approximately 60% among the heaviest students.
- Students with disabilities or special education needs are 2x more likely to be identified as bullied targets and as bullies when compared to peers without disabilities.

Bullying is an intentional, aggressive and repeated behavior that involves an imbalance of power or strength. This can involve humiliation, domination, intimidation, victimization and all forms of harassment including that based on sex, race, disability, perceived sexuality or gender.

There are 4 main types of bullying:

1. Social Bullying: Using the peer group to bully. Spreading rumors, purposefully excluding, encouraging others to bully, and intentionally doing something to damage someone’s reputation.
2. Verbal Bullying: Name calling, teasing, putdowns, insults, and threats.
3. Physical Bullying: Aggressive action towards someone’s body.
4. Cyberbullying: Bullying that occurs on-line. This can occur via text message, on social media, and during gaming activities. It can also include sending, requesting and sharing sexual, or otherwise inappropriate pictures or videos.
What can I do? How can I help my child?

One of the most powerful things you can do is use active listening. **Paraphrasing** is a great tool used in active listening. Using the last few words in context helps the person sharing know you are hearing and understanding or seeking to understand their concerns – “After the argument, you feel worried about your friendship now?” “You’re wondering how to handle things now.”

Avoid common listening mistakes such as:

- **Making it about you:** “I had disagreements with my friends in middle school all the time.”
- **Problem-Solving:** “Did you talk to the teacher about it?” “What about telling your friend you don’t like what they did?” “I’ll talk to their parents, they shouldn’t treat you like that.”
- **Dismissing:** “Just ignore it.” “It’s not so bad,” “That’s just the way it is in Middle School.”
- **Minimizing Their Feelings:** “You shouldn’t be so upset over a little thing.”
- **Giving Advice:** “Just ignore it.”, “Let go of the friendship.”

Using these skills will invite your child to share enough so that you can determine how serious the situation is. Most of the time, your child will feel better after you listen to them. However, seek support or guidance from a mental health professional if your child tells you they are considering hurting themselves or expressing suicidal intent. If they resist going to school, speak with the school counselor.

Things we have learned about what youth say helps them

- **Helpful Adult Actions:** Listen to me, check in with me afterwards, give me encouragement, and hold the bully accountable.
- **Unhelpful Adult Actions:** Told me to stop tattling, told me to solve it myself, told me that if I acted differently, it would change, and ignored it. Actions aimed at changing the behavior of the bullying youth (fighting, getting back at them, telling them to stop, etc.) were rated as more likely to make things worse.

What can I do if I’m concerned that my child is bullying others? Great question. You can do a few things.

- **Talk With Your Child:** Inform them that others are concerned about their aggressive behavior, their behavior needs to change because bullying (in all forms) hurts others, discuss the different types of bullying;
• **Express Support:** Tell them that you love them, and you will help them;
• **Help Them Feel Good About Themselves:** This can range from developing hobbies and skills, learning and practicing coping skills, alternatives to bullying, and many other things.

**In a perfect world we would prevent bullying from ever happening. Below are ideas for preventing bullying and creating this more perfect world:**

• Help youth help each other. Since most bullying happens in Middle School, and most bullying occurs in front of others, peers can have a strong positive impact.
• Help youth support the person who is experiencing bullying by expressing empathy, offering to spend time with them, distracting them, encouraging, and helping them get support.
• Help empower youth to identify statements they believe can help them stand-up to bullying. Examples could be; “Everyone deserves to be treated with respect,” “I’ll feel better if I do something,” “I value equality,” “If I don’t do something it could get worse,” and “I feel really bad just watching this.”
• Teach about appreciating differences. Most students get bullied about perceived differences. Begin early talking about the things that everyone has in common and how differences can be valued because they make us unique.
• Talk about Internet safety and on-line etiquette beginning in grade-school.
• Teach Empathy: Help your child learn about empathy throughout their childhood.

**References:**

Looking for more resources:

Bullying Websites:

1. [www.stompoutbullying.org](http://www.stompoutbullying.org) Geared more towards kids and teens.
5. [www.handinhandparenting.org](http://www.handinhandparenting.org): support for parents to provide them with the insights and skills they need to listen to and connect with their children

Books:

1. **Appreciating Differences:**
   - We're Different, We're the Same (Sesame Street Picture book), by Bobbi Kates
   - A Rainbow of Friends, by P. K. Hallinan.
   - Books by Jerry Spinelli, Stargirl, Love Stargirl.

2. **Empathy:**
   - Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning about Empathy, By Bob Sornson, Ph.D.
   - Learning to Listen, Learning to Care: A Workbook to Help Kids Learn Self-Control and Empathy, by Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD.
   - UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World, Dr. Michelle Borba.

3. **Bullying:**
   - Books by Erin Frankel: Weird!: A Story About Dealing with Bullying in Schools, Dare!: A Story about Standing Up to Bullying in Schools, Tough!: A story about How to Stop Bullying in Schools.
   - BULLYING: Helping A Bully Or Cyberbully Child (Parenting a Bully, Cyber Bullying, Bullying in Schools), by Elizabeth Clarke.