


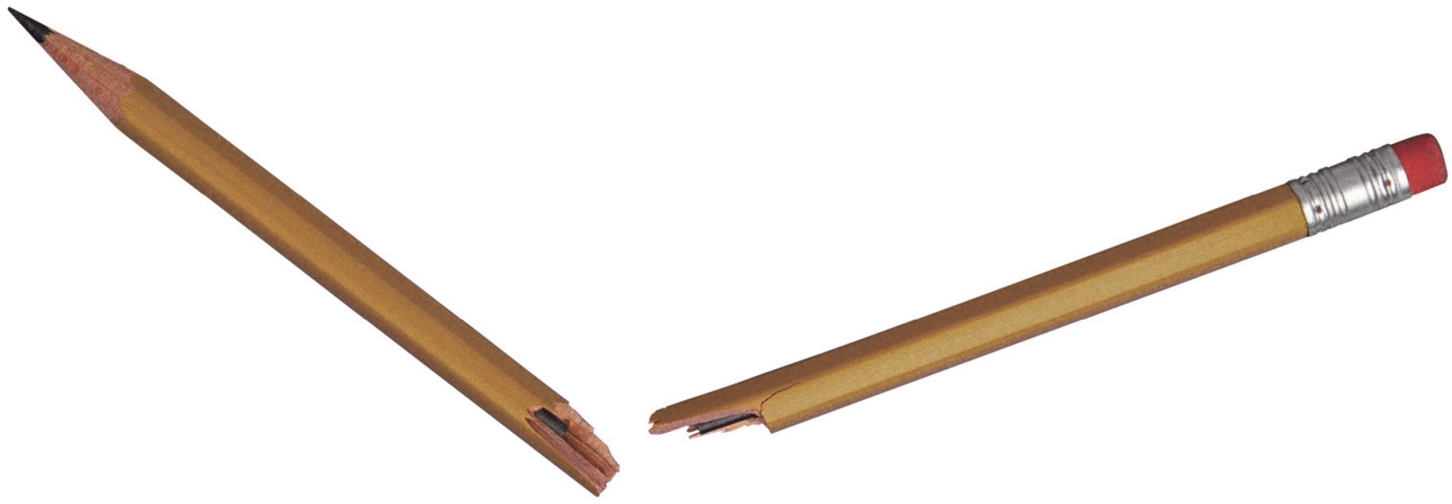
Is Your Child Being Bullied?

By Heidi Kiebler-Brogan, M.A.

A photograph of two young boys with freckles, looking at each other in profile. The boy on the left is smiling, while the boy on the right has a neutral expression. They are positioned on either side of the central text.

Every day in our schools, neighborhoods and communities children are being made fun of, teased, threatened and tormented by bullies. The US Department of Health and Human Services noted that, almost 30 percent of teens in the United States (over 5.7 million) are estimated to be involved in bullying, as either a bully, a target or both. Bullying involves repeated acts of physical, emotional, social, intentional, controlling and hurtful behaviors. It can be either direct or indirect (such as deliberate exclusion). It is often much more difficult to see the indirect bullying. Historically boys were known for direct bullying and girls engaged in more indirect forms of bullying. However, that trend has begun to change. According to the FBI, assault arrests for girls nationally jumped 40.9 percent between 1992-2003, while similar arrests for boys dropped by 16.4 percent. This may sound like something that only occurs in “inner city schools”, but please don’t be mistaken, serious and consequential bullying is happening to a significant amount of boys and girls in your schools today.

Bullying is a learned behavior and has been observed and documented as early as 2 years of age. Bullying is defined by a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. A bully’s power can be derived from physical size, strength, social status, popularity, wealth or gender. Overt bullying is more likely to be seen by authority figures and responded to, unfortunately the most devastating bully-the indirect bully, can persist for great lengths of time without adults observing it. The results of which can be horrible and sometimes fatal. Bullying interferes with learning and may lead to increasing absenteeism and drop out rates. The targets of bullies grow socially insecure and anxious with decreasing self-esteem and increasing rates of depression, even into adulthood. Children often do not tell their parents that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed, ashamed, and frightened of the children that are bullying them, or afraid of being viewed as a “tattle tail”.



How to listen to your child:

If your child tells you about being bullied, it has taken enormous courage to do so. Your child needs your help and support to stop the bullying. First and foremost focus on your child-be supportive and gather information. Never tell a child to ignore bullying! Your child may hear that you are going to ignore it and this would be devastating. Ignoring bullying usually enables it to continue and become more serious.

Don't blame the child who is being bullied. Don't ask what they did to deserve it, assume your child did not do anything.

Listen carefully; find out what tactics are being used and where and when it is happening. Ask if any other children or adults witness it.

Empathize with your child by telling them bullying is wrong and not their fault. Tell them how glad you are that he or she had the courage to tell you about it. Involve them in the problem solving process, ask what they think can be done to help.

Do not encourage physical retaliation as a solution. If you disagree with how your child handled it do not criticize them, but discuss alternatives.

Parents need to check their own emotions; often our protective instincts become a bit strong and can hamper our rational thinking and problem solving ability.

Things parents can do:

Bullying will likely not stop with out your help. You need to discuss the problem with your school officials-teachers, principal, counselors. Keep your emotions in check and share the facts-who, what, when where, how. Do not contact the parents of the bully, school officials should handle that. Expect the bullying to stop and speak regularly with your child about it, to ensure it has.

Help your child become more resilient by developing talents and attributes as doing so may help your child feel more confident among his peers. Encourage them to reach out to friendly children in their class. The teacher may be able to help guide you in this process. Provide opportunities for your child to socialize with these children. Help your child make friends outside of

school such as in religious groups or cultural activities. A new environment can offer a fresh start to a child who has been bullied repeatedly.

Teach your child how to seek help from adults such as teachers or bus drivers. Talk about whom he or she should go to and practice role-playing situations with them.

Ask yourself if your child is being bullied because of a learning disability or a lack of appropriate social skills. If your child is hyperactive, impulsive, or tends to easily irritate people seek help from a counselor so that your child can learn the informal social rules of his or her peer group. Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he/she can take shelter physically and emotionally. Research has found, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, that remarkable things can happen when parents and caregivers spend at least 15 minutes of undivided time per day listening and talking to their children.

A child who has been the victim of bullying often:

- Withdraws socially, has few friends
- Frequently complains of illness
- Doesn't want to go to school
- Brings home damaged possessions or reports them lost
- Have poor social skills
- Threatens violence to self and others
- Talks about running away; talks of suicide
- Displays victim body language-hangs head, hunches shoulders, and no eye contact
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits

If your child exhibits one or more of these warning signs he/she maybe the victim of bullying. Talk with them as much as you can. Get support and professional help as soon as possible, for you and your child. Children who are victims of bullying are at a much greater risk of long-term consequences. They often suffer from anxiety, depression, and social isolation and in severe cases, suicidal ideations or homicidal ideations.

The purpose of this column is to provide you with some "tools" that can be used in a variety of households and situations. I encourage you to adapt what you have learned to meet your needs and the needs of your individual family. If you have any questions about this topic, or have a suggestion for another article, please contact me: Heidi Kiebler-Brogan, M.A., Licensed Professional Counselor at I. E. Counseling 908-456-1871 or email me at hkbrogan@iecounseling.com

