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How to Recognize and Handle School Bullying

Just as kids find friendships in school hallways and lunchrooms, more than half of American children are also bullied at least once in those same spaces. Students of all ages from kindergarten through their senior year may be teased or harassed by a bully, whether it be physical, verbal, social or cyber in nature.

Whether a child is being pushed around, teased and called names, or harassed on social media, bullying in any form can be very challenging for children and adolescents alike. From poor performance in school, to physical reactions such as rashes and stomach pain, to depression and anxiety, the effects of bullying can have an impact on students' health.

Know the Signs

While children may not come forward about being teased, harassed or harmed, parents and teachers can watch for signs of bullying. Take note if you notice a child:

- Is consistently reluctant to go to school
- Becomes withdrawn or depressed
- Begins to struggle with school work
- Suddenly has fewer or a different group of friends
- Consistently reports lost or damaged belongings
- Has unexplained injuries
- Feels frequently ill, especially from head or stomach aches

- Has trouble sleeping
- Shows changes in eating patterns
- Harms themselves or mentions suicide

It is also important for parents and teachers alike to also watch for signs that a child may be acting as the bully. A bully may:

- Get into many physical or verbal altercations
- Not accept responsibility for their actions
- Quickly become violent or angry
- Have extra money or belongings that cannot be explained

While these signs may be apparent, bullying is often hidden well from adults. This is why it is so important to speak with your children openly about bullying. Explain that bullying is unacceptable and encourage your kids to take a stand if they witness bullying and update an adult. Most importantly, reassure the child that being bullied is not their fault.

How Can You Help?

If you suspect that your child is being bullied there are steps you can take to help them.

- First, open the lines of communication. Express your concern and make it clear that you only want to help and that you do not think it is their fault.
- Reassure them that the situation can be handled privately and that you will not do anything to embarrass them.

- Encourage your child to simply ignore the bullying, walk away and not show a reaction. Classic bullies are looking for a reaction from their victims. If they realize that they cannot upset or anger their subjects they may just move on once the thrill is gone.
- Resist the urge to contact the parents of the kids who are bullying your child. This could actually make matters much worse, but you should feel free to contact the school.

Even if you want to empower your child to stand their ground, never encourage your child to fight back, this will only fuel the bullying. Instead, help your child practice assertiveness. Bullies often pick on people they think are weak, shy, or lacking confidence. Acting assertive, confident, and unaffected will help deter bullying. Bullies often pick on others that they feel are weaker than them. Encourage your child to travel with groups of friends, especially if physical bullying is taking place as bullies are much more likely to pick on someone when they are alone.

Finally, encourage your child to develop their unique interests like art, music, science or sports and join clubs that focus on that interest. This will expose them to people with similar interests and encourage them to grow friendships.

To reach a Behavioral Health or Work/Life Expert, contact eni at:

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