

## Counselor's Corner

Bully Prevention-September 2009

The National Association of School Psychologists is a resource that I often use to address areas of concern for children to today. The following information looks at bully basics, warning signs, and strategies to help children maneuver through their elementary and secondary years successfully.

### **Bullying: Basic Facts**

- Research concludes that 75% of children will be affected by bullying at some point during their school years, and many of these children miss significant number of school days each year owing to fear of being bullied.
- Bullies are typically physically, psychologically, or socially stronger than the children they bully.
- Bullying may present itself in different forms, including, but not limited to, physical assaults or aggressions, verbal and/or physical threats, intentional exclusion from a group, spreading rumors, menacing gestures or faces, or repeated name calling.
- Both boys and girls engage in bullying behavior, but some differences are evident. Boys typically engage in direct, overt bullying behaviors. Girls often use more indirect, discreet mean to bully others such as intentionally leaving someone out of activities or spreading rumors.
- Bullying can create a climate of fear and anxiety, not only for the victims, but for the bystanders as well. This negative climate may limit students' opportunity for a safe, healthy learning environment.

### **Warning Signs of Victimization**

- Does your child fear going to school? Is your child anxious about school, been out sick a lot, often complain about not feeling well as a way of avoiding school?
- Does your child have friends? Who are the friends? Have you seen the way your child interacts? Is your child overly withdrawn or submissive? Does your child have difficulty being assertive?
- Does your child seem unhappy or insecure? Does your child talk about "nobody liking him/her" or "not having any friends?" Does your child talk about wanting to hurt someone or get back at someone?

### **Warning Signs of Your Child Being a Bully**

- Has your child ever been accused of being a bully at school or elsewhere?
- Has your child gotten into trouble for fighting with other children at school?
- Does your child become easily frustrated when he does not get his way? Is your child defiant?

- How does your child interact with others? Is he/she dominant or aggressive?
- Does your child speak about other children as “stupid” or use other negative terms to describe others?

### **What Parents Can Do if You Suspect Your Child Is Being Bullied**

- Do not confront the suspected bully on your own. This may only serve to escalate the situation, and ultimately make things worse.
- Talk the classroom teacher, school counselor, or administrator about the situation. The school is responsible for providing your child with a safe learning environment.
- Role play with your child and discuss ways they can respond to a bully. Some possibilities might include walking away, telling an adult, or asking for help from your peers.
- Teach your child that reporting a bully is not tattling. Alerting adults will allow the victims and the bully to get the help they need.
- Encourage your child to play in a group. Bullies rarely target kids in groups, so maintaining a peer group that is unified may be helpful in avoiding being the target of bully behavior.

Guidance lessons in the next few months will address conflict resolution strategies and bully prevention. Keep an eye out for the lessons in your child’s take home papers. Discussing the information at home will reinforce your child’s coping strategies.

Montgomery County School System has developed a documentation system for students who are victimized by bullies. Parents are given the option to officially report the bully situation. The school then follows up with an investigation. The families and school staff work together to ensure that all students feel safe and are able to learn in the school environment. If you have questions, please contact the school counselor or school administrator.