

Strategies for Addressing Bullying: Advice from Educators

Bullying remains a problem for school age children. According to 2015 data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, one out of every four students in the United States reports being bullied during the school year. In a 2015 report, the Center for Disease Control noted the increased likelihood of poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety and depression for students who are bullied. Of even graver concern is a 2014 statement by the CDC that “students who bully others, are bullied or witnesses bullying are more likely to report higher levels of suicide-related behavior than students who report no involvement in bullying.”

Schools, school grounds and school busses are venues that provide a myriad of opportunities for various types of bullying: name calling; teasing; spreading rumors or lies; pushing or shoving; hitting, slapping, or kicking; leaving out; threatening; stealing belongings; and sexual comments or gestures. Cyberbullying, which is conducted online or through cell phones, via e-mail, blogging and posts on Facebook, Snapchat or other social media sites, can happen anywhere.

Families and educators in Biddeford and surrounding communities can – and already do – make a difference by working together to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying occurrences for K-12 students in their towns' schools. Area educators' responses to the following key questions offer guidance and advice about actions families can take to be part of this team effort:

1. What can parents/families do to help – for both “regular” bullying and cyberbullying – in terms of monitoring and giving advice to their children?

“Regular” bullying:

“The biggest thing parents can do to help is to set up a trusting relationship with their child. Children need to know they can turn to a trusted adult (parent, teacher, relative, etc.) in times of difficulty. Also, parents need to assure their child that they will work with them to help them feel safe.” (John Goff, third-grade teacher, C.K. Burns School, Saco, and author of bullying-themed novels

for third to seventh graders).

“I think the best thing parents can do is listen and begin to help their children develop coping skills and an action plan. If the parent feels their child is not safe, then

a call to the school is in order.” (Denise D’Entremont, counselor and bullying prevention specialist, Biddeford Intermediate School)

“To help combat the bullying issue, parents can simply have a regular conversation with their children to maintain an open, supportive dialogue. This way, if children are having a problem, they will open up to their parents. Arming children with the language to stop the bullying is incredibly helpful. For example: “I don’t like it when you _____. Please stop.” It seems simple, but sometimes kids don’t realize that they are “bullying,” especially verbal bullying, until the victim tells them they don’t like it and to stop.” (High school teacher)

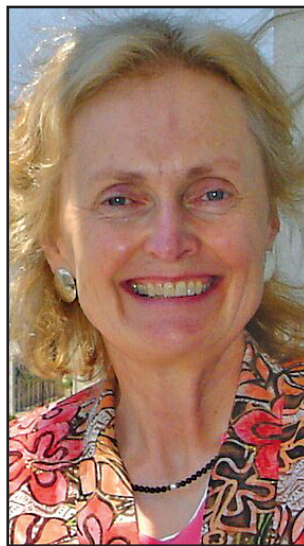
“Parents should report bullying to school officials anytime there is a concern.” (Elementary school principal).

Cyberbullying:

“Parents need to stay vigilant in regard to student access on the internet. Parents should know passwords and be able to check what their students are viewing and writing. This is not a matter of privacy, but safety.” (Elementary school principal)

“Parents should do routine check-ups on their child’s online behavior. Education around proper behavior on the internet is critical. Parents can have rules on ‘what to do if you are bullied on line’: tell a grown up; print it off; block the sending party.” (D’Entremont)

2. What actions do you wish parents/



families would take if they have (a) a child who is being bullied or (b) a child who is bullying another child?

A child who is being bullied:

“Communicating with the school is the vital first step.” (Elementary school principal)

“Open communication with school is important. At this level, we find that most situations are not one sided and both parties are contributing to the conflict. Being willing and able to listen to both sides is very important. A child who is being bullied often needs to develop some healthy coping skills and needs practice with role playing to internalize the skills.” (D’Entremont)

“As an educator, I wish parents would view the school as a partner in solving any bullying issue. Parents should contact the school administration and discuss ways to improve the situation.” (High school teacher)

“If parents believe that their child is a target of bullying, they should go directly to the teacher or administrator and discuss the situation with them. I am fond of saying that ‘I’m a good teacher but a bad mind reader.’ If I’m not told of a problem, I can’t solve it. I would also advise coming into the meeting as calm as possible. When a bullying situation occurs, parents are understandably upset. Coming in with as many specific facts as possible allows school administration to start to solve the problem. Schools will have policies in place to handle the situation. I would advise parents not to use social media to try and address the issue, as this tends to make the situation bigger and can cause even more difficulty for both of the parties involved.” (Goff)

A child who is bullying another child:

“The child who is bullying needs to work on why he/she has the need to hurt another child. Both the bully and the victim need help learning different skills.” (D’Entremont)

“If your child is the bully, talk to the guidance counselor about the situation and try to discover what the trigger is for the bullying behavior. Some children deliberately bully, others

are unaware of how their actions are being received. A serious conversation between parents and a guidance counselor could be helpful.” (Goff)

3. Any other information/advice about the issue you would like to “broadcast”

“All anti-social behaviors are not bullying behaviors.” (Elementary principal)

“While bullying is a major issue, it can also be overused at times. We need to inform parents and children about the difference between not getting along with a peer and a bullying situation. Sometimes children will say they are being bullied simply because they aren’t getting their way. Like the boy who cries wolf, we need to be clear when bullying is occurring. When it is happening, we need to have decisive actions to eliminate it.” (Goff)

“Overall, parents and educators need to work together to support the development of compassion and self-advocacy in our children. Being proactive is always more effective than being reactive to a situation.” (High school teacher)

“Teach children empathy from an early age. Model kindness and acceptance in the home, as children model what they see.” (D’Entremont)

Bullying also happens away from school, wherever kids get together, whether for organized activities or casual gatherings. Community members can join families and educators and learn to be allies, not just bystanders, when they witness bullying behaviors in these outside-of-school locations.

The research is clear: to ignore bullying is to condone the behavior. With no intervention from a bystander, the bully feels empowered and, research shows, his/her behavior toward the targeted individual will inevitably escalate from words to physical action.

Everyone shares the responsibility for creating and supporting schools and communities where all students feel accepted and safe.

— Heather Dwyer Sadlier is an associate professor of education at the University of New England in Biddeford.

A silent health risk every woman should know about

Silent strokes, ones that happen in your brain without you even knowing, can lead to full-blown

strokes as well as cognitive impairment and dementia.

The most common depiction of a stroke is a person

unable to move on one side of their body with slurred speech, but studies show that many stroke victims had silent

strokes previously, that, as the name indicates, went unnoticed. The damage caused by the silent stroke, however, can

be seen through advanced imaging techniques.

Since no one is suggesting