



Learn the truth about bullying

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The truth is that our young people are exposed to bullying every day. It is a real problem in our schools and on our playgrounds, and it starts younger than you may think.

It is estimated that almost one-third of students in Ontario experience bullying at school, and one-quarter report having bullied someone else (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2009).

What is bullying? While most of us remember being teased at some point during our childhoods, bullying is never acceptable and should not be confused as a normal part of growing up.

Teasing crosses the line and turns into bullying when it becomes repeated, hurtful, and intentional. There are many different forms that bullying can take, and some are more subtle than others.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, emotional (social), and electronic (cyberbullying). Children can experience bullying by taking one of three roles: the bully, the bullied, or the bystander.

The Ministry of Education defines bullying as “a form of repeated and aggressive behaviour directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause (or should be known to cause) fear and distress and/or harm to another person's body, feelings, self-esteem, or reputation. Bullying occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.” (definition from Policy/Program Memorandum 144)

What are the Effects of Bullying? It is important to take all bullying behaviour seriously, as it can deeply affect one's sense of safety and self-confidence. Bullying can be associated with a number of social, physical and mental health conditions, like physical ailments, poor school attendance, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, suicide and substance use.

Parents should pay attention for signs of stress or changes in a child's behaviour. Some red flags that could signal a child is being bullied include: head/stomach aches, unexplained injuries or bruising, damaged clothing or possessions, withdrawal or lack of interest in activities, school refusal, sleep difficulties, isolation from peers.

What can you do? Bullying is not just a school problem. It is a larger social and community problem. We can all help stop bullying by getting involved and leading by example.

Children need to be given the clear message that bullying is wrong. As bullying is a relationship problem, it is important to teach children the skills they need to navigate their social world. Teaching young people about feelings, empathy, communication and how to solve problems can all help to prevent bullying and foster healthy relationships.

On June 5, 2012, the [Accepting Schools Act](#) passed third and final reading. The Act requires all school boards to take preventative measures against bullying, issue tougher consequences for bullying, and support students who want to promote understanding and respect for all.

November 17-23 2013 is Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week in Ontario.

For additional readings and resources, go to the Dufferin Parent Support Network website at www.dpsn.ca.

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