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WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT BULLYING AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN?

From the ADL's Miller Early Childhood Initiative Question Corner

Research shows that bullying can begin in preschool and that adults play an important role in prevention and intervention (Barker, 2008). Bullying is the repeated actions or threats, by a person or persons who are perceived to have more power or status than the targeted individuals, with the intent to cause fear, distress or harm. Bullying occurs in various forms among young children including hitting or punching, teasing or name-calling, intimidation through gestures, social exclusion and damaging a person's belongings.

While some people may view bullying as "just a part of growing up," this behavior can have detrimental consequences. Bullying has the potential to escalate into more serious incidents of violence if left unchecked. The targets of bullying may be more likely than other children to have lower self-esteem and higher rates of loneliness, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Additionally, school attendance, academic achievement and emotional and physical health may suffer as a result of bullying. Research shows some of these emotional effects to be lasting and even carried over to adulthood.



The adults in young children's lives can do a lot to prevent and respond to bullying. To get you started, below are some tips:

- Take the issue of name-calling and teasing seriously. Rethink statements like, "Kids will be kids..." or "he didn't mean anything by that comment, he was just kidding."
- Be a role model. If children see that you gossip or engage in bullying behaviors, they will interpret it as permission to behave similarly.

- Use an anti-bias approach that promotes respect, fairness and cooperative learning and provide opportunities for children to develop anti-bias and conflict resolution skills.
- Work with children to develop ground rules and even a motto that communicates a commitment to address bullying, e.g., “All children should feel safe.”
- Help children learn to be effective allies and provide time for them to learn the range of behaviors practiced by good allies. Recognize and reward ally behaviors when you see them . Develop a system to reinforce pro-social behavior, e.g. “caught you caring” or “good deed stars.”
- When you see name-calling and teasing occurring, acknowledge it and point out that being the target of these incidents can be painful. Avoid downplaying what children say they are feeling or experiencing.
- Develop an action plan to ensure children know what to do when they observe an incident of name-calling or bullying. Help children move from being bystanders to taking action.
- Implement strategies to increase children’s reporting of bullying such as taking time to listen and letting children know you are available to talk to them and to discuss issues they want to raise. Encourage children who are involved or witness name-calling or bullying to talk to you or another adult.
- Avoid blaming the target of bullying. Reinforce that the incident is not the targeted child’s fault. Help other children offer words of kindness and support to targets of bullying.
- Provide children who engage in bullying behaviors with opportunities to discuss these behaviors and help them to develop more effective strategies for managing peer relationships such as cooperative learning and conflict resolution skills.

To find out more about ADL’s training and resources on this topic visit www.adl.org/education-outreach.

References