

Bullying Part 1

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Boys will be boys and girls will be girls?!

All lank and bone, a boy stands at the corner waiting for the yellow bus that takes him to his school everyday. He is Dovid, seventh grader, struggling. Moments earlier he left his safe haven home, passing those framed photographs of himself as a carefree child, back when he was 5. Now he is at the bus stop, vulnerable at 13. A boy and his brother are seen walking toward the bus stop. The boy tells his brother beside him that he's going to beat up Dovid. While one records the assault with a cell phone camera, the other walks up to the oblivious Dovid and pushes him around until Dovid falls to the ground. The video shows Dovid staggering helplessly, then dropping his book bag to fight back, lanky arms waving in the air. The aggressor heads to school, to show friends the video of his "Dovid moment". Dovid's day has just begun...Bullying is everywhere!

Many people out there think that adults are making too much of a fuss about bullying, that we should leave kids to their own devices, "Boys will be boys and girls will be girls". I have spoken to grandparents who can remember the name of the person who teased and tormented them in elementary school 65 years ago. This is pain that can last a lifetime.

Either as a result of increased aggression and violence in the world, technology, stress in marital and family harmony in our society, and/or a lack of skills in conflict resolutions experienced by our children, bullying seems to be at an all-time high. We read of it as insoluble school problem. Empowering the parents of our communities, with the tools to know what to do when we suspect our children are being bullied or bullying, is the first important step we can make together to try to stop it.

What is bullying?

Teasing is normal! Despite our best wishes, teasing and bantering between friends is perfectly normal between children and a **part of growing up**. If the teasing or "horse playing" is not chronic, aimed toward a particular person, or causing harm, then it probably falls into the category of teasing. However, it is important to understand when teasing begins to fall into the category of bullying. The following are key elements of bullying:

- a power imbalance,
- an unjust use of power,
- the intent to harm,
- the victim's distress or feeling of being oppressed,

- (typically) repetition over time which results in a consolidation of reputations and the power differential, and
- evident enjoyment by the aggressor.

How can you tell if your child is being bullied?

There's a good chance our kid won't walk up to us and say, "I'm getting teased and bullied at school, the kids are calling me names." Instead, it's going to manifest itself by our child saying, "I don't want to go to school today." If this seems to be happening a lot, consider the possibility that bullying might be the reason behind the sick days.

There are many warning signs that could indicate that someone is involved in bullying. However, these warning signs may indicate other issues or problems that are affecting the child emotionally in their life. We must add "Bullying" to our radar when we are trying to figure out what's going on with a child, adding the possibility that our kid is getting tormented at school as something that may be affecting them emotionally. The injury is real when kids get teased on a regular basis—unchecked, it can be devastating.

Possible Red Flags

- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or feeling sick
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Acts differently than usual
- Has changes in eating habits
- Is afraid of going to school or other activities with peers
- Reports losing items such as books, electronics, clothing, or jewelry
- Has unexplained injuries
- Avoids certain places
- Are very hungry after school from not eating their lunch
- Runs away from home
- Loses interest in visiting or talking with friends
- Loses interest in school work or begins to do poorly in school
- Appears sad, moody, angry, anxious or depressed when they come home
- Feels helpless
- Not going to the bathroom at school
- Often feels like they are not good enough
- Hurts themselves
- Blames themselves for their problems
- Suddenly has fewer friends

