

## **Teens and Bullying**

### **Parent Information**

**PBMS Counseling Center**

As we explore the issue of bullying, we realize that children easily go in and out of all three roles – being a target/victim in one situation, a bystander in a different situation and then a bully in another. We need to identify these roles, understand them, recognize the child's behavior in the roles, and then help the child to make good choices to handle the role in an appropriate way. This may mean a change from the bully behavior, or building confidence and skills to handle when they are the target/victim or moving into action as a bystander to help make a difference.

### **How to Help When My Child is a Target/Victim of Bullying:**

Parenting is always a challenge. When our children are upset, our emotions seem to automatically “kick in;” therefore, it is important to first clam down and be in control of your own emotions. Caution yourself not to let your own personal bullying experiences from your past influence your ability to help. Be careful that you don't take over to try and “solve” the problem. This sends the message that he/she is not strong enough to handle the situation on their own. Be careful that you don't send a blaming message asking, “What did you do wrong? What are you doing to cause this?” This can add to their fear of low self-worth. The following provides some strategies for parents to support their child when they are upset:

- \* Be a good listener. Listen without distraction of the computer, newspaper, phone, etc.
- \* Ask questions that invite more information such as, “What happened next?” or “What did you do?”
- \* Listen to the whole story encouraging them to share details. Allowing your child to talk through the details to vent and get out the story can be therapeutic.
- \* Repeat back what you are hearing your child share. This can help clarify the situation. Ex. “So, you're saying that they wouldn't allow you to sit with them and they told you to not ever sit with them again.”
- \* Give a hug – hold them
- \* Don't over-empathize-empower them. Compliment their abilities. Ex. “I know that this is hard. You're amazing to be able to express yourself about this.”
- \* Ask if he/she can think of something to say or do that would be helpful. Encourage assertiveness. Role-play for practice. Help them rehearse the messages in their head to build confidence.
- \* When an isolated incident occurs, show your child support and encourage them to figure out their own solutions. If the behavior occurs a second or third time, they need to be encouraged to act on their own behalf. When bullying persists or is extreme, it's time to intervene. Don't take action behind their back. If you're going to make contact with the school, make sure your child knows ahead of time.

## **How to Help When My Child had Bullying Behaviors:**

Children will go in and out of all three roles of bullying. At times, they may be the target, the bystander, or they may be the aggressor of bullying behavior. When you see your child displaying bully behavior, consider the following to help:

- \* When a child does something wrong, intervene immediately with discipline not punishment. Discipline involves taking ownership of the problem (no excuses) and the child solving the problem or “fixing” the problem.
- \* Create opportunities to “do good.” Provide opportunities for him/her to help a neighbor with yard work, help a brother/sister with homework, or volunteer at a church activity.
- \* Nurture empathy. It is important to be able to look at others’ perspectives and to understand their feelings. This can be done by “putting ourselves in their place,” processing their nonverbal and verbal cues and understanding their life experiences. This skill can be developed by asking questions on how you think someone might be feeling and why – discuss how to respond to them, or use a TV show to discuss the feelings.
- \* Teach friendship skills. It is important to help children learn to be assertive, respectful and to relate to others in peaceful ways. Ask your son/daughter what they value in a friend, make a list and then encourage them to be living up to their list in being a good friend to others.
- \* Closely monitor TV, computer activities and music. Be aware of all of the influences in our society for some may not be in agreement with your value system.
- \* Engage in more constructive activities. Needs can be met in a healthier, more appropriate way. Encourage participating in a fun activity rather than the hurt of bullying someone.

## **How to Help When My Child is a Bystander:**

When your child is the bystander or the “one in the middle” and is aware of hurtful things that friends are saying or doing to others, consider the following:

- \* Help your child eliminate excuses for not getting involved.
- \* Review different ways they can help”
  - \* Refuse to join in on the hurtful behavior
  - \* Change the subject
  - \* Tell the person doing the bullying to stop, they have that power.
  - \* Be a friend to the target/victim
  - \* Tell an adult.
- \* Compliment your child when they have helped a friend in a difficult situation
- \* Be a role model.