

# HANDS-ON Health

Health Wave Newsletter, April 2011

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## Cyberbullying takes hurt to new level

*Facebook bullying leads 16-year-old girl to throw herself off bridge*

## Connecticut Girl Allegedly Bullied by Classmates Posts Plight on YouTube

*Parents of bullied teen speak out*

Bullying continues to be a major concern in our public schools and, most recently has been the focus of widespread public attention as a result of several high-profile incidents. Bullying is the most common form of victimization experienced by school-aged children and is an increasing national concern.

**(Effective Strategies in Combating Bullying. Catherine P. Bradshaw & Tracy E. Waasdorp; White House Conference on Bullying)**

At one time, school bullying may have been viewed as a "rite of passage" that built "character." Today, however, it is no longer regarded as just something that happens during playground routines. Educators, health and mental health practitioners, parents, and community members are realizing that it is a serious problem that can lead to more severe long-term problems for individuals and communities

**Bullying can be:**

**PHYSICAL**, such as hitting, kicking, or pushing; stealing, hiding, or ruining others' belongings; or making someone do things against his or her will

**VERBAL**, such as name calling, teasing, or insulting; threatening someone with physical harm; or spreading rumors or untruths

**RELATIONAL**, such as refusal to talk to someone; making someone feel left out or rejected; or encouraging others to bully in some way

**Cyber bullying**, also called "electronic aggression," has also increased with the rise in use of the Internet, mobile devices, social media sites and video-sharing websites, such as YouTube. Unlike more traditional bullying, cyber bullying can be more anonymous and nearly constant. When texting, checking Facebook or other social network sites, or using a mobile phone, day or night, a person can be cyber bullied.

### In This Newsletter:

April's newsletter is dedicated to the topic of bullying. Bullying is a serious problem experienced by school-aged children and is an increasing national concern. View the latest **Statistics (pages 1-2)**. Read some of the most common **Myths and Facts about Bullying (see page 2)** and learn to identify the **Warning Signs of Bullying (see page 3)**.

### Considerations for Parents/Caregivers

See what steps you can take to help your child and learn how to use interactive conversation starters from the **15+Make Time to Listen...Take Time to Talk** initiative developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (see **pages 4-5**)

### Health Wave Publishing Company

39 Davenport Street  
Stamford, CT 06902  
Tel: 203-975-7810 or  
800-374-7953  
Fax: 203-975-7946  
e-mail: [hpwinfo@healthwaveinc.com](mailto:hpwinfo@healthwaveinc.com)



### STATISTICS

#### NIH RESEARCHERS REPORT:

- 20.8 percent of U.S. adolescents in school having been bullied physically at least once in the last two months; 53.6 percent having been bullied verbally, and 51.4 percent bullied socially (excluded or ostracized), and 13.6 percent having been bullied electronically

(School bullying among adolescents in the United States: physical, verbal, relational, and cyber. Wang J, Iannotti RJ, Nansel TR. National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland)

#### YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEILLANCE SURVEY (YRBSS), 2009

Almost 20% of high school students were bullied on school property (during 12 months before the survey). The numbers were higher among 9th graders (24.5%) and lowest among 12th graders (13.5%); overall higher among females (21.2%) than males (18.7%), and higher among 9th grade females (26.0%) than 12th grade females (15.3); and higher among 9th grade males (23.3%) than 12th grade males (11.8%)

## STATISTICS (continued)

The 2009 Indicators of School Crime and Safety (**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS**) collected statistics from a variety of studies, which showed that:

- One third of teens reported being bullied while at school
- About 20 percent of teens had been made fun of by a bully, 18 percent of teens had rumors or gossip spread about them, 11 percent were physically bullied, such as being shoved, tripped, or spit on, 6 percent were threatened, 5 percent were excluded from activities they wanted to participate in, 4 percent were coerced into something they did not want to do, and 4 percent had their personal belongings destroyed by bullies
- 4 percent of teens in this study reported being the victims of cyber bullying
- Most bullying occurred inside the school, with smaller numbers of bullying incidents occurring outside on the school grounds, on the school bus, or on the way to school
- Only about a third of bully victims reported the bullying to someone at school
- About 2 of every 3 bully victims were bullied once or twice during the school year, 1 in 5 were bullied once or twice a month, and about 1 in 10 were bullied daily or several times a week
- In this study, females and white students reported the most incidents of being the victims of bullying
- 44 percent of middle schools reported bullying problems, compared to just over 20 percent of both elementary and high schools

## Bullying: Myths and Facts

### 1 Only boys bully.

*Myth:* People think that physical bullying by boys is the most common form of bullying. However, verbal, social, and physical bullying happens among both boys and girls, especially as they grow older.

### 2 Children who bully are loners.

*Myth:* Research shows bullies tend to have a following of peers who approve of their behavior or at least go along with it.

### 3 Bullying usually occurs when there are no other students around.

*Myth:* Students see about four out of every five bullying incidents at school. In fact, when they witness bullying, they give the student who is bullying positive attention or even join in about three-quarters of the time. Although 9 out of 10 students say there is bullying in their schools, adults rarely see bullying, even if they are looking for it.

### 4 Spreading rumors is a form of bullying.

*Fact:* Spreading rumors, name-calling, excluding others, and embarrassing them are all forms of social bullying that can cause serious and lasting harm.

### 5 All children can get bullied, even if they look "normal."

*Fact:* The reasons why a child may become a victim of bullying are endless. That doesn't mean children who are "different" do not get bullied. They do.

### 6 Parents are usually aware that their children are bullying others.

*Myth:* Parents play a critical role in bullying prevention, but they often do not know if their

children bully or are bullied by others. To help prevent bullying, parents need to talk with their children about what is happening at school and in the community.

### 7 People who bully have power over those they bully.

*Fact:* People who bully others usually pick on those who have less social power (peer status), psychological power (know how to harm others), or physical power (size, strength). However, some people who bully also have been bullied by others. People who both bully and are bullied by others are at the highest risk for problems (such as depression and anxiety) and are more likely to become involved in risky or delinquent behavior.

### 8 Bullying often resolves itself when you ignore it.

*Myth:* Bullying reflects an imbalance of power that happens again and again. Ignoring the bullying teaches students who bully that they can bully others without consequences. Adults and other students need to stand up for children who are bullied, and to ensure they are protected and safe.

### 9 "Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can never hurt you."

*Myth:* Verbal and emotional bullying, both direct and indirect, does hurt children. Physical bullying is easier to recognize.

**(CLICK HERE to view the video of a very brave girl, a victim of bullying, pulled straight from the headlines: 'Words Are Worse Than Sticks and Stones: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37\\_ncv79fLA&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37_ncv79fLA&feature=related))**

### CONSEQUENCES OF BULLYING:

- Depressed, lonely, anxious;
- Have low self-esteem;
- Have higher rates of substance abuse
- Experience headaches, stomachaches, tiredness, and poor eating;
- Absent from school, dislike school, and have poorer school performance;
- Think about suicide or try to commit suicide.



### Warning Signs of Being Bullied

- Comes home with damaged or missing clothing or other belongings
- Reports losing items such as books, electronics, clothing, or jewelry
- Has unexplained injuries
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or feeling sick
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Has a change or changes in eating habits
- Hurts themselves
- Are very hungry after school from not eating their lunch
- Runs away from home
- Loses interest in visiting or talking with friends
- Is afraid of going to school or other activities with peers
- Loses interest in school work or begins to do poorly in school
- Avoids certain places

- Appears sad, moody, angry, anxious or depressed when they come home
- Talks about suicide
- Feels helpless
- Often feels like they are not good enough
- Blames themselves for their problems
- Suddenly has fewer friends
- Acts differently than usual

### Warning Signs of Bullying Others

- Becomes violent with others
- Gets into physical or verbal fights with others
- Gets sent to the principal's office or detention a lot
- Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained
- Is quick to blame others
- Will not accept responsibility for their actions
- Has a friend or friends who bully others
- Needs to win or be best at everything



**GOLDEN RULE:** Treat Others the Way You Would Like To Be Treated

# Considerations for Parents/Caregivers

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Young people spend a good portion of their day in school, but the most influential people in their lives are their caregivers; peers are a very close second, but caregivers are still first.

**1. Talk to your child.** One of the expert panelists insightfully described the challenge facing adults who are trying to communicate with young people about technology: “The problem is that adults view the internet as a mechanism to find information. Young people view the Internet as a place. Caregivers are encouraged to ask their children where they are going and who they are going with whenever they leave the house. They should take the same approach when their child goes on the Internet—where are they going and who are they with?” Young people are sometimes reluctant to disclose victimization for fear of having their internet and cellular phone privileges revoked. Parents/ caregivers should talk with their teens to come up with a solution to prevent or address victimization that does not punish the teen for his or her victimization.

**2. Develop rules.** Together with your child, develop rules about acceptable and safe behavior for all the electronic media they use and what they should do if they become a victim of electronic aggression or they witness or know about another teen being victimized.

**3. Explore the internet.** Once you have talked to your child and discovered which websites he/she frequents, visit them yourself. This will help you understand where your child has “been” when he/she visits the website and will help you understand the pros and cons of the various websites. Remember that most websites and online activities are beneficial. They help young people learn new information, interact with and learn about people from diverse backgrounds, and express themselves to others who may have similar thoughts and experiences. Technology is not going away, so forbidding young people to access electronic media may not be a good long-term solution. Together, parents and youth can come up with ways to maximize the benefits of technology and decrease its risks.



**4. Talk with other parents/caregivers.**

Talk to others about how they have discussed technology use with their teens, the rules they have developed, and how they stay informed about their child’s technology use. Others can comment on strategies they used effectively and those that did not work very well.

**5. Encourage your school or school district to conduct a class for caregivers about electronic aggression.**

The class should include a review of school or district policies on the topic, recent incidents in the community, and resources available to caregivers who have concerns.

**6. Keep current.** Technology changes rapidly, and so it is important to keep current on what new devices and features your child is using, and in what ways. Many developers of new products offer information and classes to keep people aware of advances. Additionally, existing internet websites change, and new internet websites develop all the time, so continually talk with your teen about “where they are going” and explore these websites yourself. Your adolescent may also be an important resource for information, and having your teen educate you may help strengthen parent-child communication and bonding, which is important for other adolescent health issues as well.

**Source: Youth Violence: Electronic Media and Youth Violence — A CDC Issue Brief for Educators and Caregivers**

# 15+ Make Time to Listen...Take Time to Talk

is an initiative developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to promote healthy child development and to prevent youth and school-based violence.

*Did you know that research has found that remarkable things can happen if parents and caregivers spent at least 15 minutes of undivided time a day listening and talking with their children?* Research also tells us that children really do look to their parents and caregivers for advice and help about difficult choices and decisions.

The initiative builds on both the value children place on the advice they get from important adults in their lives and the benefits of those special 15 minutes each day. The listening and talking theme, however, also can be adapted by teachers, counselors, and other adults who are involved in the lives and futures of children.

**"Make Time To Listen...Take Time To Talk...ABOUT BULLYING"** interactive conversation starters. Schools, adults and children can use these questions to start conversations about bullying and how to prevent it.

**There are no "right or wrong" answers**, just statements that make us think about the issue of bullying and ways to prevent and/or stop it. The questions are listed under different headings so that there is flexibility in how the questions can be asked to lead to meaningful dialogue about bullying prevention and interventions. The basis of the conversation starters is to help start meaningful dialogue about the critical issue of bullying and the prevention of bullying.

**There are no rules.** Everyone is a winner if we begin to talk and listen to one another, but you can't be a winner if you don't answer the questions honestly. No one is looking for problems, but if bullying is an issue at school, home, or in your community, then this is a safe way to start to understand and hopefully resolve the problem.

**Go ahead, get started** and remember that these are only conversation starters and you don't have to finish all the questions to continue talking. Use your own judgement on how many questions to ask, when, and for how long. If you or your child feels uncomfortable talking about the issue, you may choose to stop for a while and continue the discussion at a later time. If major problems do arise, please seek the help of a mental health professional.

## .....GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What does "bullying" mean to you?
- Do you ever feel lonely at school or left out of activities? Let's talk about what happens and what you feel.
- What is lunch time like at your school? Who do you sit with, what do you do, and what do you talk about?
- What's it like to ride the school bus? Tell me about it.
- Do kids ever call you mean names, or tease you?

Talk more about how you feel and what you do when this happens.

- Have you ever been scared to go to school because you were afraid of being bullied?
- What ways have you tried to change it?
- Have kids ever bullied you by hitting or pushing you, or other things like that? Let's talk about what you do when this happens.

## .....INDICATES THEY HAVE BEEN BULLIED

- Who usually does the bullying? (Boys/girls? Older kids or kids in your grade or class?) Why do you think they bully?
- Did you talk with an adult at school or a friend about being bullied? Did it help? If not, what would have helped?
- Talk about how you felt when you were being bullied. Take your time.
- Now that we're talking about bullying, what can I do to help?

## .....WITNESSED BULLYING

- What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?
- Describe what the bullies are like.
- Do you ever see kids at your school being bullied by other kids? How does it make you feel?
- Have you ever tried to help someone who was being bullied? What happened? What would you do if it happens again?

## .....BULLYING OTHER CHILDREN

- Have you ever called another person names? Do you think that was bullying? Talk more about that.
- Do you or your friends ever leave other kids out of activities? Talk more about this possible bullying behavior.

## .....BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAMS

- What do you think needs to happen at school to stop bullying?
- Would you be willing to tell someone if you had been bullied? Why? Why not?
- Is your school doing special things to try and prevent bullying? If so, tell me about the school's rules and programs against bullying.
- Would you feel like a "tattletale" if you told that someone was bullying you or a friend? Why?
- Let's talk about what your friends could do to help stop the bullying.
- What things do you think parents could/should do to help stop bullying?
- What are some good qualities about yourself? Let's talk about why it's so important to feel good about yourself. How would all this help to prevent bullying?