

Dear Parents

Most parents would be hopeful that the observation that, “Children will be a great comfort to you in your old age,” is true for them when the time comes; that time might come sooner than expected, if the second part of the observation is true, “and they help you reach it faster, too!” Lionel Kauffman. Parents are in constant demand from their children but, thankfully, those demands are mostly about food, shelter and pocket money. When demands of a more serious nature arise, such as bullying, we parents need to be immediately available to avoid the prospect of real damage being done to the self-image and self-confidence of our children.

However, parents need to be sure that bullying is what actually occurred and that it wasn't taunting or teasing. Bullying is not accidental but intentional and, whatever its form, its intention is to hurt the other person. Bullying is an aggressive and negative behaviour and can occur regularly over a lengthy period of time.

Taunting does not contain a physical component but makes fun of a person with the intention of hurting their feelings. Taunting tends to cause embarrassment to the other person by making them become red-faced or teary or visibly frightened. Teasing is somewhat harmless and occurs when a person pokes fun at another person and usually receives a return serve. Neither person feels hurt, because hurt is not intended nor directed at something distinguishing about the other person, such as their speech or appearance.

As parents, we need to be careful that we don't protect our children too much for, if we do, we aren't empowering them to deal with conflict and challenges that life pops up with. If we want our children to be resilient and able to develop a healthy self-image and positive relationships, even through disagreement and conflict, then, we have to allow them some practice at

facing their physical, emotional and social challenges with minimal interference from us and other adults. If we are always there for every minor incident, our children will run the risk of growing up unable to look after themselves in adult social situations.

Sometimes children are reluctant to tell adults about bullying, because they feel embarrassed and ashamed that it's happening; they might worry that their parents will be disappointed. They might even feel that it's their own fault and that if they looked and acted differently, it wouldn't be happening. When a child does seek help, they need to be praised for being courageous enough to talk about what's happening to them. They need to be reassured that it's the bully who's behaving badly, not them, and that together you can work out a plan of action.

Bullying has many styles and motives and devising a strategy to eliminate it will depend on the individual circumstance. However, there are some basic principles that will suit most circumstances and these principles might include:

- Advise your child not to respond to bullying by fighting or bullying back. This can easily escalate into violence, trouble and someone getting injured.
- Advise that it's natural to be upset by the bully, because that's what bullies thrive on. Practise not reacting, or looking upset or becoming teary.
- Advise telling the bully very firmly to stop what they are doing and then calmly walk away. By ignoring the bully you show you don't care.
- Encourage your child to get with friends that help their confidence; find activities that help your child feel confident and strong.
- Be a good example of kindness and leadership. Our children learn a lot about power relationships from watching us.

Peace and Best Wishes.