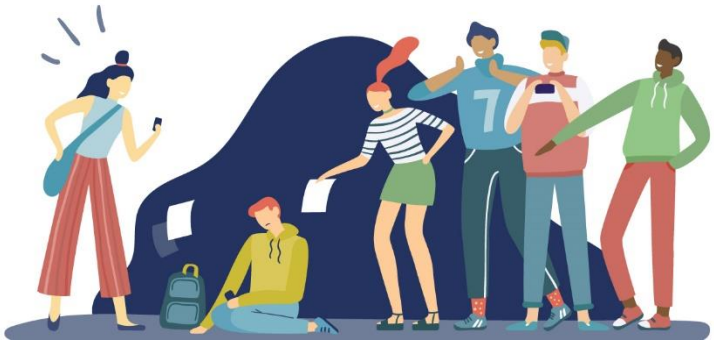
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Back to School Doesn't Need to Mean Back to Bullying
By: Truc Nguyen, M.S.

As the majority of students heading back to school next, there are some kids who may be anxiously hesitant about this event. After experiencing some perks that remote learning had to offer, such as doing school in their pajamas, having access to snacks, not having to wake up early to catch their ride, having shorter school days, not interacting with bullies, etc., it makes sense why.

Students have been through so much in the past year and half (as well as their parents), and we can all agree that all parents just want their child to have a smooth transition back to school. Therefore, this month's blog focuses on providing parents with ways to help your child against bullying because back to school shouldn't mean back to bullying.

Here are some ways to help child deal with bullying:



Tip #1: Educate your child about bullying
Knowledge is power. It is important to talk to your child about what bullying is and how to recognize the signs when they are getting bullied. Bullying may look differently in school versus online. Discuss whether it is already going on in their life. Discuss prior experiences and what could have done differently if it happened again. Discuss what to do should they experience bullying in future (i.e., who they can talk to, what to do with online information, etc.). Answer any of your child's questions about why bullying happens. Share with them your expectations for how they should handle bullying (whether if they are the direct recipient or a bystander).

Tip #2: Listen to and praise your child
If your child tells you about them being bullied in the past, it's important to not jump into the reactive "problem-solving" parent. Parents are encouraged to remain calm, listen, and offer comfort/support. There was likely a reason why your child may have been hesitant to talk to you and/or another adult about this experience. It may be due to fear for how you (a parent) may act, what will happen if the bully finds out, what will their peers think of them, etc. There are 3 R's to follows: 1) give your child RECOGNITION for going the right thing by coming to talk to you about it by praising them, 2) REMIND your child that they are not alone, and 3) REASSURE your child that you will figure out a plan about what to do about it.

Tip #3 Prepare your child with a plan (i.e., using scripts/responses, talking to supportive adults at school, etc.)
It's crucial to come up with a plan once your child comes to you about a bullying incident. Does the plan involve using pre-planned scripts/lines to disarm the bully? Does the plan involve getting a supportive adult to help? What is the plan if cyberbullying happens? Discuss steps that your child should take immediately. Discuss ways on how to avoid the bully or to confront the bully if they have a run-in face-to-face, such as being with a supportive peer, having confident body language, ignoring the bully, giving no reaction, not seeking revenge back, using humor, etc.

Tip #4 Encourage your child to find supportive peers and be a supportive peer



Research has shown that one of the most effective ways to stop bullying is for peers/bystanders to intervene on behalf of their peer (e.g., "Don't do that. They're my friend."). Help your child talk to their friends and make an agreement to stick together to help each other (e.g., "If you support me, I'll support you."). It is also important to teach your kid to resist joining in and to not feed into what is happening by laughing or chiming in.

Your child might conform and participate in bullying efforts out of fear of being bullied themselves. Remind your child that peers will more likely stand up and support others when they see at least one person speaking out against the bully. A bully thrives on receiving positive attention so if a couple of people show a lack of positive attention and disapproval, the bully loses their audience and will likely stop.

Tip #5 Educate yourself and your child about how the school and community can help

Most of the bullying incidences happens at school and/or with a fellow classmate/peer. It's important to let your child know there are people at their school who can help especially if the situation keeps escalating despite your child's attempts to stop bullying on their own. These staff members can observe and prevent further problems from occurring. It is also important for parents to get informed about the school's bullying policies and anti-bullying programs as well. If there are significant concerns about safety, learn about bullying laws and policies in your community/area. Do not hesitate to contact legal authorities in more serious instances (e.g., threats of violence, invasion of privacy, etc.).