



## Parental Involvement in Reducing Bullying

by Ed Redalen, Iowa Statewide PIRC director

It has been determined that each day 160,000 students in the U.S. stay home from fear of being bullied. They are scared to go to school; thus, they lose out on opportunities to learn.

Another issue is the students who bully. They have a greater risk of getting in trouble with the law. Some estimates show that by age 25, one in four students who bully will have spent time in jail.

A child is taunted in the hallway, a child is pushed in the bathroom, and another child is punched on the bus. The latest numbers on bullying show that one in four students is bullied, one in five admits to being a bully, over a quarter of a million kids are physically attacked each month, and eight percent of students have missed school because they were afraid.

Bullying has been around since the days of the one-room schoolhouse, but kids say parents still don't understand.

Experts say it's vital that you learn about your child's school day...every day. And sometimes, specifically ask about bullying. "You can be sensitive, have empathy with them so they realize they are not alone. That's one of the most devastating feelings is that you feel, 'I'm all alone in this. Nobody understands, nobody cares,'" says Dr. Allen Carter, a psychologist.

Carter says parents should take their children's fears seriously. They must talk to teachers, the principal, the bully's parents ... do whatever it takes to stop the pain.

Parental involvement is the key to reducing and preventing bullying and the problems it brings. The National Crime Prevention Council offers the following tips to parents to help prevent bullying incidents in your child's school and community:

- Listen to your child. Encourage him or her to talk about school, social events, classmates and the walk or ride to and from school so you can identify any problems he or she may be experiencing.
- Take your child's complaints of bullying seriously. Probing a seemingly minor complaint may uncover more severe grievances.
- Watch for symptoms that your child may be a bullying victim. These symptoms include withdrawal, a drop in grades, torn clothes or the need for extra money or supplies.
- Tell the school or organization immediately if you think that your child is being bullied. Alerted caregivers can carefully monitor your child's actions and take steps to ensure his or her safety.
- Work with other parents in your neighborhood. This strategy can ensure that children are supervised closely on their way to and from school.
- Teach your child nonviolent ways to resolve arguments.
- Teach your child self-protection skills. These skills include how to walk confidently, staying alert to what's going on around him or her and standing up for himself or herself verbally.
- Help your child learn the social skills needed to make friends. A confident, resourceful child who has friends is less likely to be bullied or to bully others.
- Praise your child's kindness toward others. Let him or her know that kindness is valued.
- Don't bully your child yourself, physically or verbally. Use nonphysical, consistently enforced discipline measures as opposed to ridiculing, yelling or ignoring your child when he or she misbehaves.

Although anyone can be the target of a bully, victims are often singled out based on psychological traits more than physical traits. The National Resource Center for Safe Schools says that passive loners are the most frequent victims, especially if they cry easily or lack social self-defense skills. Many victims are unable to deflect a conflict with humor and don't think quickly on their feet. They are usually anxious, insecure and cautious and suffer from low self-esteem. In addition, they rarely defend themselves or retaliate and tend to lack friends, making them easy to isolate. Therefore, it is vital that you instill confidence in your child and empower him or her to become a healthy, socially adjusted adult.

The Pacer Center ([www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)) in Minnesota is also home to the National Center for Bullying Prevention. Iowa PIRC staff met with the Pacer Center staff and are partnering with them in providing information to Iowa schools. The following Web sites may be of value to you, parents, students and school staff:

Middle/High School – [www.pacer.org/bullying/mhs/index.asp](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/mhs/index.asp)

Elementary – [www.pacer.org/bullying/kab/index.asp](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/kab/index.asp)

Both sources are relevant, creative and of direct use by students. They are a resource to educate students against bullying and empower them to respond to bullying situations.

Note: In the next *SAI Report* we will provide information on how parents can prevent their children from bullying.

### References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - National Crime Prevention Council
  - National Institute of Child Health & Human Development
  - National Resource Center for Safe Schools