**Bullying**

**The Facts**:

* Definition of Bullying: Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves one child having more power over another. Both kids who are bullied, and those who bully others, may have serious, lasting problems. Bullying includes making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and/or excluding someone from a group on purpose.
* In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:
  + An imbalance of power (i.e. one child having power over another): Kids who bully use their power, such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity, to control or harm others.
  + Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.
* Types of Bullying:
  + Verbal Bullying: Teasing, name calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, threatening to cause harm, etc.
  + Social Bullying: Leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, embarrassing someone in public, etc.
  + Physical Bullying: Hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking someone’s things, making mean or rude hand gestures, etc.

**Who is at Risk?**

No single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or bullying others. Bullying can happen anywhere (cities, suburbs or rural towns). Depending on the environment, some groups, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) youth, youth with disabilities and socially isolated youth (those with few friends or who prefer to be alone), may be at an increased risk of being bullied.

Generally, children who are bullied have one or more of the following risk factors:

* Are perceived as different from their peers, such as being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to a school, or being unable to afford what kids consider “cool.”
* Are perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves
* Are depressed, anxious or have low self-esteem
* Are less popular than others and have few friends
* Do not get along well with others, seen as annoying or provoking, or purposely annoying or angering others for attention.

However, even if a child has these risk factors, it doesn’t mean that they will be bullied.

There are two types of kids who are more likely to bully others:

* Some are well-connected to their peers, have social power, are overly concerned about their popularity, and like to dominate or be in charge of others.
* Others are more isolated from their peers and may be depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others.

Children who have these factors are also more likely to bully others:

* Are aggressive or easily frustrated
* Have less parental involvement or are having issues at home
* Think badly of others
* Have difficulty following rules
* View violence in a positive way
* Have friends who bully others

Remember, those who bully others do not need to be stronger or bigger than those they bully. The power imbalance can come from a number of sources – popularity, strength, cognitive ability – and children who bully may have more than one of these characteristics.

**Signs that a Child is Being Bullied or Bullying Others:**

There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied, or are bullying, ask for help. It is important to talk with children who show signs of being bullied or bullying others. These warning signs can also point to other issues or problems, such as depression or substance abuse. Talking to the child can help identify the root of the problem.

* Signs a Child is Being Bullied:
  + Unexplainable injuries
  + Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics or jewelry
  + Frequent headaches or stomachaches, feeling sick or faking illness
  + Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch, or starve themselves in order to be thinner (if they are being teased about being overweight).
  + Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
  + Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
  + Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of school situations
  + Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem
  + Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves or talking about suicide.
* Signs a Child is Bullying Others:
  + Getting into verbal or physical fights
  + Have friends who bully others
  + Are increasingly aggressive
  + Get sent to the principal’s office or detention frequently
  + Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
  + Blame others for their problems
  + Don’t accept responsibility for their actions
  + Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity



**Talking to Children about Bullying:**

* Help kids understand bullying. Talk about what bullying is and how to stand up to it safely. Tell kids bullying is unacceptable and make sure kids know how to get help if they see bullying or are being bullied themselves. Ask them questions like:
  + What does “bullying” mean to you?
  + Why do you think people bully?
  + Who would you tell if you were being bullied?
  + What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?
  + Have you ever tried to help someone who was being bullied? What happened? What would you do if it happened again?
* Keep the lines of communication open. Check in with kids often, know their friends, ask about school and understand their concerns.
  + Have you ever felt scared to go to school because you were afraid of bullying?
  + What do you think parents can do to help stop bullying?
  + Have you or your friends ever left other kids out on purpose? Do you think that was bullying? Why or why not?
  + What was one good thing that happened today? Any bad things?
  + What is lunchtime like at your school? Who do you sit with? What do you talk about?
  + What is it like to ride the school bus?
* Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities, interests and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends and protect them from bullying behavior.
  + What do you feel like you are you good at?
  + What do you like best about yourself?
* Model how to treat others with kindness and respect.

