



All Families Need to Take a Stand Against Bullying

Bullying in schools is a long-standing, widespread problem, yet parents often overlook the harassment occurring in their own communities. Many adults imagine bullying to be the obvious intimidation of a child by a physically more powerful peer. While such harassment certainly occurs, the overwhelming majority of bullying involves a variety of behaviors that are not physical in nature, such as gossiping, spreading rumors, and name-calling. These antisocial behaviors are often dismissed as a normal part of growing up by many adults, but they have highly detrimental effects on students' well-being and academic performance.

Children in all grade levels use difference as a reason to discriminate, exclude, and make fun of their peers. When some acts of bullying (for example, physical confrontation) are punished, but others (such as racist slurs) are not, students learn that harassment is acceptable as long as it is not obvious. Therefore, prejudice and bias are more entrenched in school cultures than most adults realize.

According to findings of the Safe School Initiative conducted by the U.S. Secret Service in 2002, three-quarters of all school shootings have resulted from repeated bullying and harassment. Creating safe and welcoming classrooms must be the responsibility of lawmakers, school personnel, and the entire community.

The lessons children learn outside of the classroom—especially from their parents—about how to treat others are perhaps the greatest influence on their behavior. All parents and guardians can monitor and guide their own children's behavior, encouraging them to be more respectful toward their peers.