Bullying Prevention

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), bullying is a widespread problem for schools in the United States. About 20% of students ages 12-18 experience bullying nationwide (The National Bullying Prevention Center). Despite the increase in cyberbullying over the last decade, the majority of bullying happens in person. School classrooms and hallways are two of the most prevalent locations in which bullying occurs. When it comes to cyberbullying, there is often an offline component of harm that occurs alongside the online harm (Cyberbullying Research Center). As such, most youth who are targeted on social media or within online environments, are also the ones being bullied at school.

While many young people can be unkind to each other, especially during adolescence, there is a clear line between being mean or experiencing conflict with peers and bullying. Bullying behavior is defined by three core elements:

- Intentional—unwanted, aggressive behavior intended to cause harm
- Repeated—the unwanted behavior is repeated multiple times or has the likelihood to be repeated many times
- Power imbalance—involves an imbalance of power between the target and perpetrator(s) based on a student's real or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender, physical appearance, sex, or other distinguishing characteristics

Bullying has consistently been shown to produce negative outcomes in perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. As such, many experts consider bullying a public health concern. It is important to address the needs of all involved in bullying by being aware of the signs and symptoms of bullying, providing support for their mental and physical health, and teaching and reinforcing acceptable behaviors.

There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying—either being bullied or bullying others. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying.

Students who are being bullied may:

- Have unexplained cuts, bruises or scratches from fighting
- Have few, if any, friends
- Seem afraid of going to school, riding the bus, walking to/from school or participating in organized activities with peers
- Appear sad, moody, teary or depressed when he/she comes home
- Experience physical symptoms (trouble sleeping, changes in eating patterns, headaches/stomachaches)
- Appear anxious or have low-self-esteem
- Lose interest in doing school work or begin to do poorly in school

Students who bully others may:

- Have a positive attitude toward violence and the use of violent means
- Have a strong need to dominate (controlling rather than leading)
- Have little respect for authority
- Lack empathy toward students who are bullied

- Be impulsive, aggressive or easily angered
- Have difficulty following rules
- Be physically stronger than other children (common with boys who bully)
- Be perceived as popular (common with girls who bully)

Solutions to bullying are complex. Prevention and intervention initiatives that approach the issue from many angles show the most promise. Thus, efforts that support both victims and perpetrators as well as bystanders, are most successful at mitigating the negative effects of bullying. Schools, parents and the community can play a collaborative role. Promising strategies in bullying prevention and intervention include:

- Communicate policy and protocols for bullying behaviors to all staff, students and parents.
- Do not label a student as a "bully". Bullying is a behavior not an identity and labeling a student can limit their ability to change the behavior.
- Strategies that focus on holding students accountable for their behavior but also empowers them to change that behavior are more effective than punitive punishments and peer mediation in bullying situations.
- Empower students to be upstanders by teaching bystander intervention skills- when bystanders to bullying intervene, bullying stops within 10 seconds 57% of the time.
- Provide a means for safely reporting bullying behaviors and encourage youth to report incidences.
- Implement programs that emphasize prevention and early identification of students with behavioral concerns and provide social and emotional skills instruction.
- Create a safe and supportive school environment- a positive school climate is associated with less involvement in bullying, reduced peer rejection and increase academic achievement.
- Allow youth to be involved in bullying prevention efforts
- Model and teach respectful behavior systematically
- Teach responsible use of technology
- Build confidence in youth- encourage kids to spend time with friends who have a positive influence. Participation in clubs, sports or other organized activities can help build strengthen and build friendships.

References: Cyberbullying Research Center; National Association of School Psychologist; National Bullying Prevention Center; National Center for Educational Statistics; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Stopbullying.gov