

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Seeing Bullying In Schools For The Serious Problem It Is

from the American Counseling Association

As long as there have been schools, "schoolyard bullying" has been a problem. Bullying is when one person repeatedly acts in ways meant to hurt or intimidate someone else, usually someone physically, emotionally or psychologically weaker.

It can be physical aggression, verbal taunting, or even cyber-bullying where someone is attacked online through various social media.

Bullying at school used to be viewed simply as "kids being kids," but today school administrators, psychologists, counselors and parents are much more aware of the harmful consequences, from school shootings to student suicides, that bullying can produce.

Victims of bullying tend to be more quiet and shy than the average student. They are often anxious, insecure and unhappy, as well as suffering from low self-esteem. Such personality characteristics often lead to the bullied student becoming depressed and even more withdrawn. Studies find such students often have more thoughts of suicide than their peers.

Today, growing numbers of schools have undertaken anti-bullying programs to educate students and faculty about bullying and its effects. Such efforts have helped reduce reports of bullying by 30 to 50 percent in some schools. These programs have also helped make students, administrators and faculty more aware of what can be done to prevent and counter bullying, and of how to seriously address bullying incidents.

As a parent, it's important to take seriously any reports of bullying you hear from your child. In most cases, the victim did nothing to provoke the action of the bully and thus can feel hurt and confused about why he or she was picked on. It is important for a parent to listen carefully to what happened and to offer positive, non-judgmental support for their child.

Yes, there are times when what has happened is simply peer conflict, two students disagreeing, arguing or fighting over something. But in actual cases of bullying, the bully will almost always be stronger, bigger or more aggressive than the victim, and the bullying will occur repeatedly.

In such cases, don't dismiss what your child reports, but do go talk with your child's school counselor. A professional counselor is trained to help your child handle the consequences of being bullied, and to take action to minimize the chances that more

bullying will occur. He or she can also offer advice on what you can do as a parent, including pushing for an anti-bullying program if your child's school lacks one.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

###

words: 400