

Bullying in Cyberspace

Bullying has followed all the new means of social communication. Bullying in cyberspace has become common, particularly in the middle-school years with threats, insults, and even explicit sexual messages aimed at children by other children. Very often, the school has little authority to step in on these cases if the cyberbullying comes from home computers, and parents find themselves on their own.

The school should be contacted so that authorities are aware of the cyberbullying. As cyberbullying is often interconnected with bullying elsewhere, it is likely that this is not isolated and is going on at school as well. The Internet Service Providers (ISP) should be contacted and informed of the cyberbullying. This can often bring the problem to a halt.

In most cases, your child will know exactly who the perpetrator is and why he or she has targeted your child. Contacting the parents or guardians of the cyberbully is a necessary step.

Make printed and electronic copies of all examples of cyberbullying.

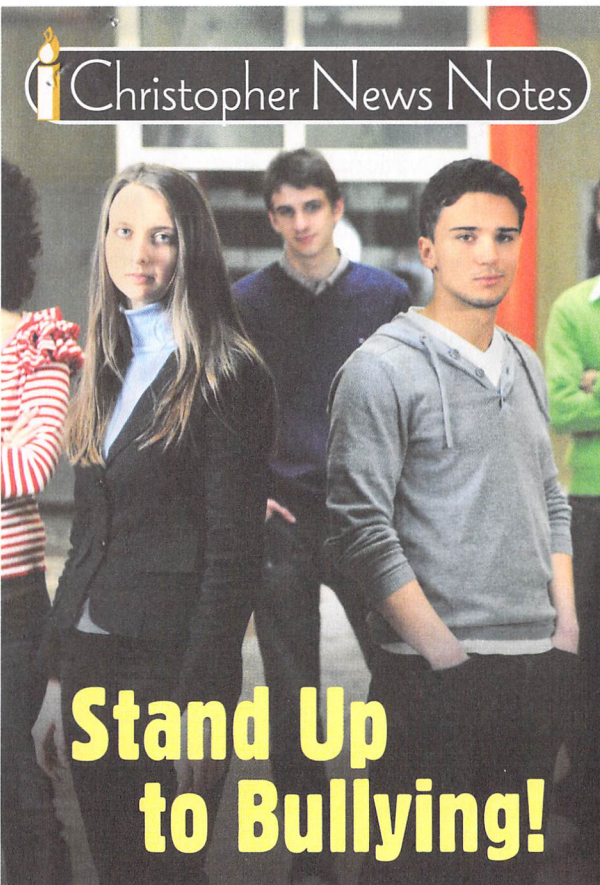
1. Tell a trusted adult about the bullying—a parent, relative, teacher, counselor or principal. Hiding the bullying never ends it. In many states, bullying is against the law. Reporting it can end it.
2. Do not blame yourself. Bullying is caused by the bully, not the bullied.
3. The first time bullying happens, do not attempt to personally retaliate against the bully. The best response is to stay calm, maintain your cool, say nothing and walk away if at all possible. Reacting directly to the bully often only increases the level of bullying and guarantees repeat performances.
4. If there is a repeat performance of the bullying, it is absolutely essential to inform an adult. A second time means that it is not going to stop.

5. If bullying takes place at school, avoid being alone or in isolated places without adult supervision.
6. Avoid anything to do with weapons to defend yourself. Most likely it is illegal, and more than likely someone will be seriously hurt. A weapon makes you the guilty party no matter the cause.
7. Friends are the best defense against bullies. Bullies are like wolves—they hunt out the loners. Bullies are far less likely to go after you when you are in a group of your own buddies.
8. Maintain your self-confidence. Bullies have the problem, not you.

THE CHRISTOPHER PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.



Everybody's problem —right now

CHANCES ARE THAT YOU WERE BULLIED. It might have happened decades ago. It could have happened in school, on the playground, in the neighborhood, at the movies or on the ball field. It might have happened just once. Or it might have happened 20, 30, 40 times over the course of a couple of years. But one thing is certain—you can still remember it clearly, the bullying and the bullies. You want to do whatever you can so that it doesn't happen to a loved one. Or to any child. Because the problem is right now.


"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."

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Right now: There are approximately 2.1 million bullies in American schools bullying 2.7 million victims.

Right now: The National Education Association estimates that on any school day 160,000 kids—15 percent of all school absenteeism—will purposefully miss school because they fear some form of bullying by other students.

Right now: Seventy one percent of students report that bullying is a problem at their schools, while 56 percent of students report that they personally stood by when someone was bullied.

There is no special target, no unique group that alone suffers from bullying. It can happen to any child—male or female, big or short, popular or a loner, athletic or artistic. Bullying knows no discrimination.

What is bullying?

Experts warn that the biggest mistake parents and caregivers can make is to assume that bullying is a natural part of childhood. Most kids are teased—and tease other kids. But bullying is distinct from teasing. Considered the leading international expert on bullying, psychology Professor Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen in Norway, defines it this way: “A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.”

Bullying is cruel and meant to be cruel. There is nothing playful or funny about it. Bullying is intentional, not accidental, it is meant to isolate the victims, it puts the victim in a position of powerlessness and it involves real emotional and—quite possibly—physical violence. The impact can last a lifetime. The cold fact about bullying is that experts have found that many who were bullied in their childhood suffer much higher levels of depression and social isolation as adults. At the same time, bullying behavior can lead to greater problems for the bully in adulthood as well. By the time they are 30, childhood bullies have a one-in-four chance of having a police record. As psychol-

ogy Professor Olweus states, “The victims don’t grow out of their problems. The bullies don’t grow out of their problems either.”

Bullying is serious and real. Parents need to know that it is behavior that cannot be ignored.

What’s a parent to do?

If you suspect that your child is a victim of bullying at school, the least adequate response is to do nothing about it, assuming that it is just a part of growing up. We know it is dangerously wrong to think that violence in a marriage is just a part of some relationships; our understanding of bullying has to be the same.

If you think your child is being bullied, the first step is to understand exactly what is going on. This involves some digging and some straight talk with your child. But you will need the facts—as much of the time, dates and descriptions as you can discover. The child has to understand that this is serious, likely against school rules if not against the law, and that bullying rarely ends until adults get involved.

Contact a teacher, principal or counselor at the school in a non-confrontational, non-emotional fashion. Present the facts, not your anger. Ask for a copy of the school policies on bullying as this will most likely contain the procedures for reporting bullying and the response you can expect.

Don’t accept that the school has anti-bullying posters or assemblies dealing with the issue and that somehow these represent an adequate response. You and your child have the right that this specific case be addressed directly.

Remember to avoid stereotypes. While it is possible that the bully might come from a broken

The Warning Signs

The direct signs that a child is being bullied are not difficult to spot. Unlike the subtle, indirect signs that can exist from bullying as well as other childhood problems—moodiness, anxiety, isolation from family, decline in grades—the direct and unique signs of bullying have not changed much over the years.

The common warning signals of bullying are:

- Recurring physical injuries such as cuts, scrapes or bruises without any clear explanation from the child;
- Clothing is often torn or stained, also without rational explanation;
- School supplies—such as books—appear damaged or have to be replaced;
- Money for school-related events or projects is “lost”;
- Takes different—and often out-of-the-way—routes home from school;
- Has less friends or no friends and avoids social events outside the home, particularly extracurricular school events or parties;
- Increased complaints of sickness and absenteeism from school.

home, has suffered abuse or been raised in any kind of dysfunctional atmosphere, it is just as likely, experts have found, that the bully can be the popular kid, the star athlete or the best student. In either case, the conditions surrounding the bully are not your responsibility or the responsibility of your child. You need to have the bully’s actions adequately addressed to protect your child.

Make it clear you expect a direct response from school authorities, to be informed of that response, and that the parents or guardians of the bully are informed and involved.

It is most important to note, however, that if the bullying involves violence—particularly at the middle school or high school level—the police should be informed directly.

What’s a child to do?

Children are the least equipped to handle bullying. They already feel isolated, inferior and powerless. But all kids need to know that they are not alone, their victimization is not unique, they have rights, and there are clear steps they can take: