

BULLYING

By: Kathleen M. Bambrick, LICSW
Aspire Health Alliance



Question: What do Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, Christina Aguilera, Tom Cruise, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Denzel Washington have in common?

Answer: They were all bullied.

Did you know that today 90 percent of 4th through 8th grade students report being victims of bullying? Or, that kids of this age call teasing and bullying “big problems” that rank higher than the pressure to try alcohol or drugs? We know that this type of harassment can not only interfere a child’s learning, but also impede a child’s self-confidence. Impacts are also seen in the form of increased anxiety: fears, sleeplessness, headaches and stomach pains are among some things we hear. When we think of bullying we may think of physical assault. However of the six various types of bullies, physical bullies, or actual injury towards the target are the least common type. The more common complaints take the form of: verbal humiliation, social exclusion, and peer pressure. Kids may bully others for various reasons. In working to improve a bully’s behaviors, it is important to ask this child if they are targets of bullying or harassment themselves. Other dynamics we see include this child needing skills in being able to think how their behavior impacts others, potential improvement to their own self-esteem, needing coping skills to address their own frustrations instead of misdirecting them at others or possibly assisting them in understanding more appropriate ways to look “big” or “cool” in front of others.

The following are some suggestions for helping out in a bullying situation:

- Towards the bully: send a direct message that bullying will not be tolerated, tell the bully you will be watching for future incidents, be specific about consequences, help them understand what it is like for their target, and be sure to notice and praise them when the behavior stops.
- Towards the bystanders: empower kids with rewards and praise if they report bullying, empower older kids to step in with the younger ones, teach kids “advice for someone being teased or bullied” so they can step in and help.
- Advice for someone being bullied or teased:
 - ✓ Tell a friend what is happening. It is harder for the bully to pick on a child when there is a friend there.
 - ✓ In a bullying situation, turn and walk away. Don’t stand and listen!
 - ✓ Look directly at a bystander for help.
 - ✓ Try not to show upset or anger as this may be a reaction desired by the bully. If the bully gets bored they may leave you alone.
 - ✓ You may want to think up a clever reply in advance. Or ask the bully to repeat what he or she said, as they may not be brave enough to do so.
 - ✓ Report the incident to a parent, school, or another adult.

If you are a parent or guardian who may have concerns about bullying, and would like to make an appointment to speak to a mental health professional, please call (617) 847-1914 or for online resources visit www.safeyouth.org.