

Beating Bullies

Professor Matt Sanders

IF YOUR CHILD IS THE VICTIM OF A SCHOOL BULLY, YOU'RE FAR FROM ALONE. ONE IN SIX CHILDREN IS BULLIED AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK.

There are many ways children bully other children. There may be teasing, threats, verbal abuse, harassment, pushing, pinching, tripping or extortion. Sometimes one child is excluded from playing with other children. All this can lead to a significant loss of self-esteem. Children may become anxious and shy around other children. They may feel sick, suffer stomach pains, nightmares and sleep problems, or refuse to go to school.

Bullying should never be ignored or left to be sorted out by the young victims themselves, however it is difficult to know exactly what to do.

Start by listening to your child's description of how the bullying occurs, asking specific questions so you clearly understand what happens — what the bully does, what your child does, how they feel about it, what they have tried to do about it so far. Any strategy you adopt to tackle the bully will be more effective if you enlist your child's aid when working it out.

And make sure you don't immediately assume it's all the bully's fault. Your child may have teased or provoked the bully.

If the bullying is occurring at school, talk with your child's teacher. Many schools have anti-bullying programs in place.

To help your child deal effectively with a bully, encourage them to figure out reasons it might be happening. You might say: "It sounds like when they tease you they're getting attention from the other kids, so maybe they do this to show everyone how tough they are."

You and your child can then decide on strategies for dealing with the bully. These could include ignoring the bully and walking away; making friends with other children and playing with them during lunch breaks; or being assertive. If necessary, practise these strategies with your child by acting out the roles so they become confident with their behaviour.

Parenting Tip: Teaching your child to fight back when they're being physically bullied isn't helpful. In fact, it can lead to more bullying. Your child may not be as physically strong as his or her tormentor so the fear of losing a fight can be quite real. That doesn't mean however that you don't encourage your child to be assertive and self-confident in the face of teasing.

Find more parenting tips at: manitoba.ca/triplep or call 945-4777 in Winnipeg or toll-free 1-877-945-4777.

Professor Matt Sanders is founder of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program.

