

# Child Abuse Prevention Month



## How to Protect Kids from Bullying

Bullying is behavior that is intentionally hurtful and repetitive. It usually involves a child with greater physical or social power dominating a child with less. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or psychological (e.g., rumors, humiliation, social exclusion). Bullying can cause serious and lasting harm. Bullying in 2012 is not the same as it might have been decades ago: social networking and smart phones provide bullies with unprecedented power to spread their toxin. Because of this, children and youth who are victims can't get away from their perpetrators. It is not a phase children have to go through, it is not "just messing around," and it is not something to ignore. Prevention of bullying requires the vigilant efforts of parents, teachers, administrators, clergy, youth leaders, and employers.

### **Understand the scope of the problem.**

Bullying is a serious problem linked to teen and preteen suicide as well as school shootings. Research shows that 15-25% of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency. A reported 15-20% of U.S. students admit they bully others. Only 25-50% of children talk to an adult about being bullied.

### **Know who is affected.**

Common targets of bullying are shy and anxious youth with few or no friends. The most likely kids to be bullied are those who are gay or believed to be gay. However, bullying affects nearly all children. Research shows that 85% of youth witness school bullying incidents. This cause fear, sadness, powerlessness, and guilt for the bystanders, or may influence them to bully others.

### **Understand the effect of technology.**

Cyber-bullying is when someone uses computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices to send abusive or threatening messages, spread rumors, or post embarrassing images. Bullying online is very different from face-to-face bullying because messages and images can be sent 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; they are disseminated to a very wide audience and sent anonymously. Victims can't get away from bullying: no place is safe when language goes viral.

### **Plan ahead.**

Role-play bullying scenarios. Teach your kids how to stay calm and walk away from bad situations. Children can also avoid bullies by sitting near the bus driver on the bus, walking to and from school with a buddy, staying in areas with other students and adults, and not using the locker room or bathroom alone.

### **Be informed and get involved.**

Find out if your schools have bully-prevention programs and/or procedures – ask for a copy or check the student handbook to see whether your school has standards in place that will help resolve the situation. Advocate for appropriate anti-bullying and harassment policies in schools and other institutions.

### **Develop and enforce rules.**

Work with your children and come to a clear understanding about when, where, and for what purpose phones and computers can be used. Develop clear rules about what is and what is not appropriate online. Decide on fair consequences and follow through consistently.