

# Back to School Stress

By Deb Landry

Back to school, I love those bittersweet words, school shopping, making new friends, soccer games and scents of the brisk New England air.

When I was a kid (a long, long time ago) I remember being stressed out about wearing the right clothes, homework and what the teachers would be like.

But today's youth are carrying a bigger load than we did. Bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, exclusion and school shootings have become major issues in today's culture. In fact, research shows that one out of four children become victims of bullying and harassment.

I spend most of the school year, visiting elementary schools and reading my books to children. The question I get asked the most by parents and teachers is how can these behaviors be controlled in our school and community?

The best way to decrease anxiety and the stress of peer pressure is prevention, awareness and education from parents and the school community.

When my son entered the sixth grade, he was a bystander of a repeated physical bullying incident on the bus. Secretly, he told the vice principal in fear for the victim and others. He didn't consider that he would be the next victim. Once the bully found out that my son was, so he called it, the "tattletale", he was targeted. The verbal bullying persisted until my son finally broke down and told me.

My son feared he would be physically abused by this boy and became depressed. Imagine the excitement of going into middle school only to have it crushed by fear, torment and a boy who was three times his size. Depression from fear set in quickly. He didn't want to go to school or be alone. He was literally looking over his shoulder in public, fearing attack and refused to participate in school activities for over a year. He got off the bus at the neighbors and waiting for the bus to leave and walked home through the woods so no one could tell the bully where he lived.

We spent three months dealing with his depression and a year lobbying for a law that was successfully amended. We were so proud of him the day he addressed the educational and culture legislative committee and told his story.

Let's give the kids a break. It's time for the adults to take a stand and stop this behavior. Stand up for *Safe Schools Everywhere!* Get involved in with your school, PTO and know the policies. If your child is experiencing a bullying or harassment problem, I personally invite you to contact me. I will do my best to guide you towards a resolution.

Most states have new or revised laws to protect students. To see how your state ranks visit [www.bullypolice.org](http://www.bullypolice.org). Or contact me at [www.deblandry.com](http://www.deblandry.com).