

The Summer Bully

By Deb Landry

You may think that bullying and peer pressure is a school problem, but the fact is it is not about the school at all. Wherever you find a group of two or more children, you are at risk of a bullying situation. Bullying and harassment are a social failure of our society.

Summer programs, sports, camps, and neighborhood play can present situations that are actually worse than schoolyard bullying. Where there are no adults or supervision, there is an open venue for children and teens to be victimized.

The American Medical Association reports that fifty percent of all children in the U.S. are bullied at some time and one in ten are bullied on a regular basis.

In 1999, Georgia set the stage by passing the first character education legislation to put a stop to bullying and violence in schools. Since then over thirty-five states, including Maine, have followed with new or amended legislation.

Robin D'Antona, Ed. D., coauthor of *The Comfort Zone* and former president of the International Bullying Prevention Association states, "Bullying is now being recognized by parents and educators as a serious problem, this not only has a profound impact on young people but could be a prelude to other forms of violence."

To help prevent such behavior, parents must first understand the meaning, causes and effects of bullying. Bullying is intentional, repetitive and is always an imbalance of power. Bullying is not a rite of passage, especially when it can lead to other consequences such as loneliness, isolation, depression, and suicide. Seventy-six percent of bullying is non-physical and approximately sixty percent happens under adult supervision. Research supports that bullying and teasing create a fear and concern for safety that obstructs a child's growth intellectually and socially.

Whether your child is the target/victim, bystander or demonstrates bullying behavior, here are some essential tips to help guide them to be safe, confident and stress free.

- Teach character education. This involves teaching children about basic human values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, compassion and respect. Raising children to become morally responsible and self-disciplined citizens are important parts of developing moral character. Through on going conversations, children can see that their decisions affect other people and things.
- Teach kids valuable strategies to deal with negative behaviors, how to problem solve, make healthy choices, and understand conflict resolution.
- Get involved. When parents play an active role in their child's academic and social life, they are more likely to be successful and confident in their abilities to achieve and accomplish goals.
- Monitor and teach media and internet safety. With MySpace, IM, cell phones and Facebook, cyberbullying statistics have increased tremendously.

- If your child has never been bullied, there is a high chance they have been bystanders. Some of the most effective way children can help as bystanders is to walk away and take their friends with them, change the topic of conversation, invite the victim to join them, show support for the victim, face up to the bully and tell them to stop. Children should **ALWAYS tell an adult they can trust.**
- If your child is bullied, get the facts. Listen to them carefully and calmly. Reassure them that it isn't their fault.
- Contact the program director, teacher or if in school, the principal to discuss solutions. Stay calm and reasonable, the teachers want to help you and may not be aware of what is going on.

For more information on Maine's law and available resources, visit:

www.brysonatorpublishing.com or
www.maine.gov/education/bullyingprevention/index.shtml