

Bullying Prevention Starts in the Home

The VIRTUS® Programs

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published a report based on an anonymous Massachusetts Youth Health Survey of almost 6,000 public middle school and high school students. These are the findings:

- 43.9% of middle school respondents and 30.5% of high school respondents were affected by bullying.
- Based on responses, respondents were divided into four groups: bullies (perpetrators only); bully-victims (those who inflicted and received abuse); victims; and, “neither” (kids who weren’t involved with bullying at all)
- Risk factors such as drinking and mental health problems were significantly elevated for bullies, victims, and bully/victims.
- Bully/victims in middle school and high school were three times more likely to report seriously considering suicide, intentionally injuring themselves, physical abuse by a family member, and witnessing violence in their families.
- Bully/victims were more likely to have been exposed to family violence than bullies
- Bullies were more likely to have been exposed to family violence than victims
- Victims were more likely to have been exposed to family violence than kids who were neither bullies nor victims. Eryn Brown “Bullying: Massachusetts study links bullying, family violence,” *www.latimes.com* (Apr. 22, 2011).

David Finkelhor, Ph.D., Director of the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center, shared his hypothesis about higher levels of family violence for both bullies and kids who are bullied in an interview with Psychiatric News. Dr. Finkelhor explains, “One obvious reason is that when one grows up in violence and aggression, the individual comes to see coercion in relationships as standard behavior.”

According to Finkelhor, the individual internalizing the bullying behavior has difficulty avoiding similar situations. The cycle is what he refers to as “polyvictimization” or, the multiple victimizations of one person. Finkelhor adds that the report puts emphasis on the need to assess different kinds of victimization in order to develop methods for treating and equipping victims to avoid future victimization.

Bullying should never be accepted as a “normal” part of childhood. Watch out for signs that your child may be bullying others. Addressing the problem early may help prevent a bigger problem later on.

How do you know if a child is a bully? According to the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights Center, one or more of the following traits may indicate a child is bullying:

- The child does not want to accept responsibility for his or her actions and is quick to blame others
- The child lacks compassion, empathy for other people’s feelings
- The child has immature social and interpersonal skills
- The child always wants to be in control
- The child is constantly anxious and gets frustrated easily

- The child is trying to fit in with a peer group that encourages bullying
- The child is also a victim of a bully or a group of bullies
- The child comes from families where his or her parents and/or siblings bully
- The child's parents are unable to set limits, are not consistent with discipline, and they do not provide supervision or are not interested in what goes on in their child's life.

Brought to you through the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. and its VIRTUS® programs with the goal to help prevent, address, and mitigate wrongdoing in the community of faith and to help adults become protectors of children and to help communities become safe havens for children.