

We Can Stop Bullies!

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Colten Boyle, 10, knows how badly it hurts to be teased, called nasty names and left out by other kids. "I used to get bullied a lot at my old school," he says. Classmates used words to hurt Colten. But bullies pick on others in many ways. Sometimes the abuse is physical, like kicking, shoving and hitting. Sometimes it takes the form of mean online or text messages.

No matter how it's done, bullying is damaging. It can cause victims and bullies to feel badly about themselves, and can lead to other problems. Experts say that as many as one in 10 children is bullied at school. Each day, about 160,000 U.S. students miss school because they are afraid of being harassed. Preventing bullying is an important issue for kids, parents and teachers. Last week, almost 800 people from 42 states and eight countries attended an International Bullying Prevention Association meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana. They discussed the latest research and ways to prevent aggressive behavior in schools.

A Bully's Bulls-Eye

Why are some kids singled out as targets for bullies? A new study suggests it has to do with how kids act early in life. Researchers studied 1,970 children in Canada from when they were 4 months old until they turned 7. The research team found that toddlers who regularly pushed and hit other children did not become bullies. Instead, they were more likely to be picked on. The researchers recommend that parents and teachers start early to stop children from acting aggressively toward others.

Some experts are not yet convinced that angry toddlers are more likely to become bully magnets. Nancy Mullin, the director of Bullying Prevention Inc., in Natick, Massachusetts, believes the subject needs more study. But she agrees that, as early as possible, children should be taught how to get along with others.

Let The Bully Beware

Communities across the globe are fighting back against bullies. "Bullying has been found in every country that has been studied," Edward Barker, an author of the Canadian study, told TFK. He believes schools should promote kindness, communication and conflict-resolution skills.

In the U.S., at least 39 states have laws that address bullying in schools. A variety of prevention programs are available. But for a program to work best, "youth must be a part of the solution," says Stephanie Bryn, head of the Stop Bullying Now! campaign (see "How to Handle Bullies").

Kids are tackling the issue together at Rosa Parks Middle School in Olney, Maryland. Through a program called You Have the Power!, high school students are working with 20 Rosa Parks students to spread anti-bullying messages. "When I see someone being bullied, I sometimes don't know what to do," admits middle schooler Haley Nachlas. "I feel this program will give me answers."

Colten rarely sees bullying at his new school, Elrod Elementary, in Kalispell, Montana. For the past three years, his school has participated in the Olweus (ol-vey-us) Bullying Prevention Program. Olweus is active in schools in more than a dozen countries. It aims to get everyone involved: teachers, administrators, students, parents, bus drivers and cafeteria workers. Everybody works to make the school a welcoming place. "It makes the bullies think twice," says Colten, "and the people who are getting bullied feel supported."