



What Every Parent Should Know About

# BULLYING



MUENCH ORTHODONTICS

# Bullying is **not** a new issue.

Most parents can say that even when they were growing up, there was some teasing that went on. Whether on the playground or during class, kids were teased here and there and the issue wasn't discussed much at all.

A generation ago there weren't anti-bullying programs in schools and parents begging for schools to help bring an end to the bullying that is taking place today. In today's world, bullying has been taken to a whole new level, and that new level is one that is wreaking havoc on our youth and will most certainly leave scars well into adulthood.



## Different Today

Today's bullying rises above the level of idle teasing that most parents grew up with. It's more on the level of torment, and sadly it is pushing some kids to the brink. One quick search of news headlines regarding the bullying issue around the country and it's clear to see that the country has a major problem on its hands. The consequences of being relentlessly bullied in childhood range from becoming depressed and contemplating suicide to growing up to be an adult who has low self-esteem and lacks the confidence to blaze their way through life successfully.

The more parents, educators, health professionals, and communities at large know and understand about bullying, the better off children will be. The best way to eradicate bullying is to understand what it is, where it comes from, and what can be done about it. Some parents may find they are already at the point where they

need immediate help to address a specific bullying situation, while others may have time to take preventative measures. Either way, there's never a wrong time to get started learning more about bullying, its consequences, and what can be done about it.

Actress Eva Mendes was bullied. She told reporters, "I became a victim of bullying. I was a gawky, skinny girl with big teeth and that made me an easy target." Likewise, actress Jessica Alba has told reporters that she was bullied so badly growing up that her dad had to walk her to school so she didn't get attacked, and that she would eat her lunch in the nurse's office each day.

Some people are able to overcome bullying and even become stronger as a result, but not everyone is so lucky. Experiencing bullying can have devastating and long-lasting consequences.



## The Facts About Bullying

One look at the facts and statistics surrounding bullying shows what a huge problem it has become with today's youth. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, nearly 25 percent of all students have been bullied at school. Sadly, they also report that 64 percent of the students did *not* report it.

They also report that the single biggest reason that someone is a victim of being bullied is their looks. Kids tend to pick out something about a child that they can make fun of and then end up using the issue to torment them with it. For some kids it may be that they have crooked teeth, while for others it may be that they have a big nose or big ears. If there is something about a child's looks that stands out, there is a good chance that is what will become the focus of a bully.

Along with the statistics that have been gathered regarding bullying, researchers have also been studying bullying itself to learn more about it. Here is some of what they have found in recent studies:

- In the 2014 issue of the *European Journal of Dentistry*, researchers reported that facial esthetics, including oral appearance, can severely affect children's quality of life, causing physical, social, and psychological impairment. They also reported that children and adolescents with esthetic-related dental malformations are potential targets for bullies. They further go on to advise that providing an adequate esthetic dental treatment is an important step, and that after dental treatment they noted a significant improvement in self-esteem, self-confidence, socialization, and academic performance of all patients.
- In a study published in the September 2016 issue of the journal *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, researchers reported that children who have attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may go on to develop secondary social anxiety disorder. They report that kids with ADHD behaviors in social settings are insulted, humiliated, and bullied, which leads them to



feel shame and guilt, and then they have social anxiety, thus creating a vicious circle that leads to them becoming withdrawn.

- A December 2014 study published in the *American Journal of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics* reported the results of research that was conducted on 920 children in order to see if there was a relationship between bullying and dental issues. What researchers found was that there was a significant relationship between bullying because of dentofacial features and there was a negative effect on oral health-related quality of life.
- In the May 2016 issue of the journal *Crisis*, researchers shared the results of a study that was conducted to examine whether experiences of verbal abuse, physical abuse, and cyberbullying were uniquely associated with a general suicide risk. Their results showed that *all* types of bullying were associated with a suicide risk.

Bullying is not only real in today's generation of children and adolescents, but it also has some serious implications. Adding to the problem is that it is no longer limited to the playground or classroom. The technology-driven world we live in today has opened up a whole new realm of ways for

people to bully others. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. This can include such things as cellphones, computers, and tablets. It can take place on popular social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram, or it can include receiving harassing text messages, or being bullied in an online chat room.

Another way people cyberbully others today is by posting embarrassing photos and videos of others, or by creating fake profiles using their name. While kids were once limited to being bullied while they were at school, cyberbullying gives people 24/7 access to engage in it. It is estimated that 15 percent of high school students have been the victim of cyberbullying. They also report that children who are the victims of cyberbullying are more likely to use alcohol and drugs, skip school, receive poor grades, have lower self-esteem, and have more health problems.

Cyberbullying has become popular and will continue to grow in popularity as more pre-teens and teens join social media networks. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry reports that 60 percent of kids between the ages of 13-17 have at least one social media profile, with many of them spending more than two hours per day on the social networking sites.

## Signs Your Child May Be Being Bullied

- A decrease in self-esteem
- Not wanting to go to school
- Skipping school
- Injuries they can't explain
- Self-destructive behaviors (e.g. harming themselves)
- Declining school grades
- Sleep difficulties
- Loss of interest in schoolwork or activities
- Sudden loss of friends or avoiding social groups
- Changes in eating habits

## What Parents Can Do

It's important for parents to realize what an important topic bullying is and how far-reaching the problem can be. Many parents may not even be aware that their child is being bullied because kids often don't say anything to anyone about it. They may withhold that information out of embarrassment, because they don't want their parent knocking on the bully's door, or for a variety of other reasons. Many children never report bullying that takes place during school hours because they believe nothing will be done about it anyway, so they suffer in silence.

Parents who are armed with the knowledge that bullying is an important issue can keep an eye out to see if their child exhibits any of the symptoms that may point to the fact that they are being bullied. Some of these include self-destructive behaviors such as harming themselves, talking about suicide, a decrease in self esteem, declining grades or a loss of interest in school or activities they once enjoyed, not wanting to go to school, sleep difficulties, feeling sick or faking illness, and unexplained injuries.

Here are some things that parents can do to help if their child is being bullied:

- **Document everything.** Keep all information on the bullying, including what was taking place, the dates, actions, and even print-outs of messages, posts, texts, etc. if it involves cyberbullying.
- **Contact the school** to set up a meeting to discuss the bullying. Obtain a copy of their anti-bullying policy and find out what actions they will take to help put a stop to the bullying.
- As challenging as it may be, **stick to the facts**, and try to leave emotions out of the discussions about the bullying. Make notes about what the school plans to do about the bullying, and follow up to ensure actions are being taken and progress is being made.
- If the bullying involves your child being threatened at all, **call the police and report it**. Threats that involve harming someone should never be taken lightly and should always be reported.
- **Avoid blaming the child for being bullied.** It's important to remember that they didn't ask for it or bring it on, and they certainly don't want it. Be sympathetic, take it seriously, and help them find a solution.



## Self-Image Matters

- If your child feels they are being bullied because they don't fit in, **determine if there are ways that you can help** them to better fit in. While you understandably may not want to spend \$100 on a pair of jeans so they fit in with the popular crowd, you may want to address real issues that are leading to problems, such as if they have a problem with their teeth. Something as simple as braces, for example, can alleviate the problems associated with being bullied due to protruding teeth or other such issues, and that will help give your child more confidence.
- **Check out anti-bullying programs** in your local area that are often offered through police departments and martial arts centers. Learning how to defend themselves and how to respond to a bully is important at any age. Most martial arts centers today offer programs that are focused on helping kids learn to how to handle bullying.
- **Make bullying an issue in your community**, so that more people get on board with stomping it out. Encourage your school to have a seminar and implement an anti-bullying program. Studies show that when students stand up for others being bullied, it can greatly help reduce bullying within the school. Peers can make a world of difference when it comes to bullying in the school.

Adolescents are sensitive to what others think about their appearance. The years spent in middle and high school can be difficult for kids if they are not confident with their self-image. Unfortunately, a poor self-image can add to the problems with bullying by helping to create a vicious cycle. Kids with low self-esteem are often the ones being bullied, and then because they are bullied their self-esteem takes another blow. Those kids who have a healthy self-image are more likely to deflect bullying. They are more likely not to be bullied in the first place as well as recover quicker if someone does say something about their appearance.

From what we know about self-image and confidence, the years that people spend in middle and high school are going to have an impact on their adulthood. If they come out of those years feeling good about their self-image, they are more likely to become confident adults who are ready to take on everything life brings their way. The downside is that childhood bullying can have a lasting impact on one's mental health, even in adulthood. With the seriousness of an issue that bullying has become, it's important for adults to do all they can to help prevent it, as well as help kids overcome it. Parents want what is best for their kids, no matter what age they may be. Bullying is an issue that is front and center in today's world, but it is one that parents can help their child with in order to come out the other end smiling.

## Did you know...

### **The number one most common thing people get bullied about is their physical appearance?**

It's true! Research shows that what kids see as an undesirable physical feature, such as having crooked or protruding teeth or wearing glasses, is the most common thing people get bullied about. The unfortunate thing is that it comes during a time period when a child's self-esteem is being developed. Building a healthy self-esteem and having confidence is an important part of achieving success during childhood and into adulthood.

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**Muench Orthodontics**

**301 N Main St  
Vestal, NY 13850**

**Phone: (607) 341-7476**



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[www.MuenchOrthodontics.com](http://www.MuenchOrthodontics.com)