

Bullying: what to do for your child?

Your child comes home from school and looks sad and worried. For some time, he has been trying to avoid going to class and his grades have fallen inexplicably. Alert: he might be the victim of bullying. In such a situation, you have a crucial role to play. Here are some pointers to prepare you for reacting appropriately.

Understanding and detecting bullying

Bullying is "any aggressive, intentional and repeated behaviour associated with negative intentions". This generally applies to situations of unequal power where harmful acts, either physical or psychological, are made directly or indirectly. Far from being just a simple squabble, bullying can have a dramatic impact and be the cause of profound isolation, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, sadness, physical discomfort, aggressiveness, loss of concentration and a decline in academic performance. Some recent research even tends to show that the effects can last for several years after the bullying.

Whether it is with young children, communicating with whom can be more complex, or teenagers, who tend to want to solve their problems by themselves, bullying is not always easy to detect. However, several signs can raise a red flag: crying, repeated illness on school days, misplaced money or personal belongings, ruined clothes or unexplained injuries, aggressiveness or withdrawal, refusal to participate in extracurricular activities with other pupils, dropping out, etc.

However, you must look closely at the situation and distinguish bullying from simple loss of motivation or teasing among friends, which do not lead to the child feeling distressed. Finally, do not forget about cyberbullying, a growing phenomenon that occurs over the Internet and cell phones.

Parents' role

First, stay calm. Listen carefully to your child and encourage him to start the discussion while not blaming him. Ask him to describe what happened while showing that you are listening, open and willing to act. Strongly encourage him to expose the bullying and show that you are available to support him throughout the process.

Then contact the school to report the problem and ensure that an intervention takes place. Schools usually have a specific procedure to address this type of problem and should be able to apply it within 48 hours of you reporting it. After that period, you can contact the school board to try to stop the problem. During the process, if you believe that the safety of your child could be compromised, do not hesitate to contact the police.

Other resources

In addition to the school's cooperation, here are some other useful resources:

For Canadians:

-A free comprehensive brochure providing alternatives for parents

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/multi/english/BullyingEN.pdf>.

-Kids Help Phone

<http://org.kidshelpphone.ca/en/> - 1-800-668-6868

For residents of Quebec:

-Tel-jeunes

<http://en.teljeunes.com/home> - 1-800-263-2266

For residents of Alberta:

-Bully Free Alberta

<http://www.bullyfreealberta.ca> - 1-888-456-2323

A parent's role is not limited to protecting his child as a victim. If he is the bully or simply a witness, something must also be done.

Conclusion

Be lenient with yourself: being a parent does not mean that you have all the tools to help your child. The Health *InSight* support services offer you additional support and active listening. Do not hesitate to ask!

Note: To make the text easier to read, the masculine form is also used to designate the feminine.