

Preventing Childhood Bullying

Know the Signs of Bullying and How to Help Your Katy Kid

Written by Kelly Isenberger and Mary Hogan

Issues surrounding childhood bullying have recently made the headlines all over the nation. Asher Brown, an eighth-grade boy in Cy-Fair, recently took his life after allegedly being bullied to death. Teen suicide rates have increased, and some have turned to violence in order to seek relief. Communities and school districts around the U.S. have taken notice and have implemented bullying prevention programs, training, and procedures to address this issue and protect our kids.

A Far-Reaching Problem

Bullying not only occurs in our schools, but everywhere else, as well, including the playground and the neighborhood. Louis Geigerman is a local anti-bullying and special needs advocate with National ARD/IEP Advocates. As an advocate for Asher Brown's family, as well as many other cases around the area, he has seen the ugly effects of bullying played out in the lives of children. "The U.S. Department of Justice has talked about how most bullying cases never get reported, because the child thinks that nothing is ever going to change, the bullying will get worse if they do report it, or they're going to be looked upon as a snitch," he says.

It's important for Katy parents and community leaders to understand how bullying takes place and what we can do to protect our children here in Katy. It's also important, says Geigerman, that children who report incidents of bullying are rewarded for coming forward, rather than labeled as tattletales. Parents and educators play a vital role in teaching children that bullying is unacceptable and hurtful behavior. Of children who report being bullied, many of them may be either special needs students or gay, according to Geigerman, so it's equally important to teach children about ac-

ceptance of others and their differences. "Parents need to be trained along with students, because they may be holding stereotypes and feelings of intolerance, as well," says Geigerman.

Bullying Takes Many Forms

Bullying is generally an intentional aggressive behavior, repeated over time and usually occurs with an imbalance of power, but can take place in many different forms. Amy McGown, LMSW-ACP, is a licensed therapist in Katy. She explains, "Bullying can be emotional or verbal, such as name calling, making fun of, ganging up on, cursing at, threatening, or leaving a child out intentionally to hurt their feelings. It can also be physical, such as causing physical harm in order to intimidate or beat down the child. In some occasions, bullying can also take the form of sexual harassment and even sexual assault by using their size, position, and power to intimidate and beat down the child."

Katrina Greene, a Katy mom, is familiar with most of these types of bullying. When she was in fifth grade, the kids on the bus started making fun of her. "I guess I just didn't fit in," she recounts. "I knew that I wasn't the prettiest girl, but I was far from the ugliest. I wasn't outgoing, but I wasn't really shy, either. I guess I was just different somehow." She endured years of their teasing, threatening, and sometimes physical attacks. She asks herself now why she didn't stand up for herself. She reasons, "I didn't even try, so it must have been because I believed they were right. I must be ugly, I must be stupid, I must be worthless. That is the way I used to think for many years. I couldn't trust anyone's love. I didn't deserve it." Thankfully, Greene no longer believes this about herself and has a healthy marriage and family.



As a child, Katvite, Katrina Greene endured years of bullying



Bullying

is more common than many adults realize. Most studies show that 15% to 25% of American students are bullied with some frequency.
—stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov



Today, Greene is a happy and healthy Katy mom

It's important for Katy parents to recognize the signs of bullying, so they can better protect their children

Cy-Fair student, Asher Brown, 13, tragically committed suicide after being allegedly bullied at school



Unexplained bruises and scratches, torn clothing, and being afraid to go to school are all signs a child may be being bullied



Severe and Long-Lasting Effects

The effects of bullying can be long-term, severe, and difficult to foresee. "Bullying can significantly affect a child's self-esteem or the way they view themselves," explains McGown. "It can also cause children to go to great lengths, which are often unhealthy, to try to fit in or gain power in order to stop the bullying. It can affect their friendships and relationships if the child is depressed, angry, or withdrawn, because those close to them often do not know what is going on. Kids don't always tell if they are embarrassed or ashamed. Bullying can also cause a child to become suicidal, if they see no way out or [don't believe] that the bullying will ever stop."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services cites that victims of bullying have higher rates of anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem, even as adults, and that bullying has been linked with serious school violence, shootings, and hazing incidents.

Deanna Hamilton has an eighth-grade son who began being bullied in sixth grade. She understands the anxiety and depression that can result from such harassment. Her son would cry often and beg her to not send him to school. At first, she did not understand what was going on with him, but he finally began to explain that he was being bullied. Her son would be deliberately bumped, causing him to drop his books everywhere. Girls would giggle at him and call him "gay." He has had ketchup spilled on him and his backpack painted with whiteout. "Eighth grade seems to be better," his mom, Deanna shares. "He seems to have more of an attitude about him now that tends to keep him from being picked on less. He knows that there is nothing wrong with him and that the other kids are not any better than he is."

Talk to Your Children

You can not help your child if you do not know that they are being bullied, but there are some common behaviors that you can watch out for, says McGown. "Your child may be being bullied if they begin to be withdrawn or depressed," she says. "Depression can be evidenced by an overall sadness, crying over things that never before made the child cry, or crying easily and excessively compared to how they had been before. It can be evidenced by a change in eating or sleeping patterns. Depression can also be evidenced by irritability

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Warning signs

**your child
is being
bullied**



- Has few, if any friends, with whom he or she spends time.
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers.
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school.
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home.
- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings.
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, or scratches.
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments.
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams.
- Experiences a loss of appetite.
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem.

Source: stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov

in older children and teens. Another sign can be if the child begins being aggressive towards younger or “weaker” children or animals. This is their attempt to have power since they are feeling powerless.”

If you think your child exhibits these behaviors, talk to them about it. As a child who was bullied growing up, Greene advises parents to talk to their children about bullying. “I ask my children if they ever get bullied,” she says. “They know what has happened to me. We are honest and open to them. If they find out that something’s going on with another child, they know they should do something about it.”

McGown adds, “Keep open lines of communication going with your child and teach them to always come to you if anyone is hurting them or making them feel uncomfortable. When they do, help them! As a parent, you are your child’s greatest advocate. It is our job to protect our children and equip our children to get help if they are being harmed.”

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Katrina and Scott Green teach their sons, Nathan and Brandon about the importance of treating everyone with respect and kindness



If you notice signs that your child is being bullied, there are also steps you can take to ensure they feel safe at school, too, according to Geigerman, who cites the state's anti-bullying law. It's important to give written notice to the principal that your child is a victim of bullying, explaining the scenario as clearly as possible. The school principal then has a responsibility to conduct an investigation, talking to other students and staff members. "Then, after it is determined that they were bullied, under the present statute, the child would be given the option of being moved to another class or another school within the district," says Geigerman. In most school districts, there is an appeals process, where parents may appeal to either the district's superintendent or school board in the event the principal does not feel action needs to be taken. "The idea originally was to protect the victim by allowing the victim to move to another school," he says.

Katy Can Stop Bullying

It has become increasingly more imperative that community leaders realize the impact that bullying has on our children and community. Adults that see bullying take place should not remain silent. Teachers, school administrators, neighbors, coaches, and church leaders are shaping the next generation. It is true that kids have always picked on other kids, but we can stand up for those who are being bullied, train ourselves on what to look for, and teach our children to stand up for other children, as well. As a community, Katy can lead the way in putting a stop to harmful and destructive bullying. KM

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy mom of two daughters. Thankfully, they have not experienced any bullying, but she talks to her children often about the way people are to be treated.



It's important to listen to kids when they report instances of bullying and not look on them as snitches or complainers

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The issues which impact my clients' lives are important to me, and I work hard to promote their positions. I have been practicing law since 1980 and served as a family/probate judge for 12 years



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