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Is your child being bullied?

Bullying has many forms. Bullying can take place when someone uses words to repeatedly belittle, criticize and hurt someone else. It can become physical when a child is hit, kicked or pushed around. A different form of bullying is when one person constantly teases another without letting up. When children tease one another, both parties find it funny and it usually happens in a playful manner. When, however, a child indicates that he or she has had enough and the other party continues to tease, it is seen as bullying. Technological changes allow bullying to happen through the internet and cellphones.

There are usually three parties involved in bullying:

The bully himself

The bully usually takes the lead and will pick on another person. A bully is not necessarily the bigger, stronger child in the group; he or she may be small and frail. The feeling of having power over someone else allows the bully to feel better about him or herself. Bullying attracts a response from onlookers, and this extra attention is very appealing. Both boys and girls can act as bullies.

The friends who get involved as spectators

Bullying is not an isolated event. There are usually many spectators who witness the event, sometimes utter words of encouragement and offer ideas on what to do. It is usually the spectators who will make remarks like: "Have you seen how she looks at you?" or "Have you noticed that he didn't greet you?" These comments usually galvanise the bully into action. Friends who are spectators may also make the same kind of remarks toward the one who is being bullied and so a vicious circle of "who-did-what-to-whom" starts. If we want to stop bullying in a group, we also have to recognize the part that the spectators play and deal with it.

The child who is being bullied

A child who is being bullied often feels so humiliated and overwhelmed by the situation, that he / she is afraid to talk about it. The child might even blame himself or herself and think that he or she did something to evoke the bullying. When the child tries to handle the bully himself, it may even aggravate the bullying, which might prevent the child who is being bullied from calling in the help of an adult.

Bullying must be taken seriously and not just be written off as something that is part of childhood. Bullying affects children's self esteem and future relationships. If bullying is suspected, adults should intervene and help the bully, the spectators and the child who is being bullied in order to stop the bullying.