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## *Information for You from Your Health Care Team*

### **Bullying: Children Hurting Children**

It seems there are more and more challenges for children growing up today. One of these challenges is bullying, which may affect one out of five children. Children of all ages may be affected by bullying. It is not just a problem for older children. The behavior often starts in elementary school. Although bullying happens with girls, boys are more likely to be both bullies and to be victims of bullying. Parents, teachers and other adults can help children stop this behavior.

There are many definitions of bullying. One that I like is “*Bullying is intentional, unprovoked, and continuing violence, either physical or psychological, which is conducted by a child or group of children and is directed against children who cannot defend themselves in the actual situation.*” Examples of this include verbal harassment such as teasing and name calling, physical violence or intimidation, stealing or extorting from other children, spreading hurtful rumors and purposeful exclusion from common activities or peer groups.

Studies in Europe show that both bullies and victims may suffer emotional problems as a result of this behavior. They are at a higher risk of depression and are more likely to consider suicide than their peers. Children who are involved in bullying may have difficulty with schoolwork, poor school attendance, difficulty with normal social interactions or other behavioral problems. Victims of bullying often do not tell anyone about their experience. However, they may suffer temporary or permanent physical and emotional problems if the bullying is not addressed. They are at especially high risk for having anxiety.

Active adult intervention is the key to minimizing physical and emotional problems related to bullying. This starts by asking children if they are being bullied or are acting as bullies. If a child is found to be a bully or a victim, the adult must address the problem with both the victim and the bully. Talking with teachers and the parents or caregivers of the children is essential to ending bullying.

One approach is to teach children to “*talk, walk and squawk.*” If faced with a bully, children should first *talk to the bully in a calm manner*, perhaps by saying “You don’t scare me and what you are doing to me is wrong.” The child should then *walk, not run, away from the bully* rather than hang around for more abuse. Finally, the child should be encouraged to “*squawk,*” or *go to an adult and report the bullying.* Parents, teachers and other involved adults, including the bully’s parents or caregivers, should talk to both the bully and the victim and emphasize that bullying is wrong and will not be tolerated.

If your child is a bully or a victim of bullying, seek advice from your child's doctor, teacher, school psychologist or counselor, or other parents. Because both bullies and victims can suffer long-term physical, emotional and behavioral consequences from bullying, continue to seek effective solutions until the problem is solved.

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