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News Release

## **Wrangling Youth Bullying**

Statistics and media stories are waving red flags at a proverbial raging *bull* pervading throughout the nation. Wreaking havoc on youth as well as families and communities, the issue of bullying has evolved in perplexity with potential damaging and sometimes fatal consequences. Parents and the public, alike, have a stake in understanding and seeking positive solutions before this growing crisis runs rampant.

### **The Running of the Bulls**

The U.S. Department of Justice says that this month 1 out of every 4 kids will be abused by another youth. Twenty three (23%) percent of elementary students have reported being bullied one to three times in the last month. Thirty percent (30%; over 5.7 million) of U.S. students in grades six through ten are involved in moderate or frequent bullying either as bullies, as victims, or as both. These among other statistics suggest that bullying is not a *bottled* issue, but one that has the propensity to *run* or progress and perpetuate into further issues. Bullying is often viewed as an indicator that children and teens are prone for future delinquent behaviors, including risk for serious violence. Teens who bully reportedly are more likely to engage in other antisocial behavior such as vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and drug use into adulthood. Statistically, they are four times more likely than non-bullies to be convicted of crimes by age 24, with 60 percent of bullies having at least one criminal conviction.

Bullying is no longer confined to school hallways and neighborhood playgrounds. This abuse and harassment encompasses physical and verbal, and due to technological advancements have expanded to email and social networks via the internet. Equally venomous, all forms of bullying have been associated with not only physical and psychological bruises, but recently have been linked to hate crimes, suicides and homicides, thus, catapulting its nationwide alert status. As families and communities began to tackle this issue, it is imperative to recognize its often vivid as well as inconspicuous signs.

### **Know/NO Red Flags**

Dissecting a bully is no easy feat as a universal prototype does not exist. Similarly, a youth that is being bullied may not be forthcoming, but instead might remain quiet out of fear, shame or embarrassment. Research does offer parents some potential red flags to watch out for regarding their child.

***The Bullied: Is my child being bullied?*** Parents, be aware of the following commonly associated signs:

- Damaged or missing clothing, or other personal belongings
- Unexplained bruises or other injuries
- Few friends or close contacts
- Reluctance to go to school or ride the school bus
- Poor school performance
- Headaches, stomachaches or other physical complaints
- Trouble sleeping or eating

- Becoming withdrawn or lacking confidence
- Beginning to bully other children, siblings
- Giving improbable excuses for any of the above

***The Bully: Could my child be a bully?*** Parents, beware of these red flags:

- Positive views towards violence
- Often aggressive towards adults – including teachers or parents
- Marked need to control and dominate others and situations
- Boy bullies tend to be physically stronger than their peers
- Hot tempered, impulsive, easily frustrated
- Often test limits or break rules
- Good at talking their way out of difficult situations
- Show little sympathy toward others who are bullied

### **Taking the Bull By The Horns:**

If you suspect that your child is either a bully or being bullied, it is imperative to take the situation seriously. Parents, if your child is being bullied, the Mayo Clinic recommends...

- Encouraging your child to share his or her concerns.
- Learning as much as you can about the situation.
- Teaching your child how to respond to the bullying (i.e., maintain composure; suggest pairing with a friend or group in places where the bullying typically occurs; remind your child that he can ask teachers or other school officials for help).
  - Contacting school officials. Talk to your child's teacher, the school counselor and the school principal. If your child has been physically attacked or otherwise threatened with harm, talk to school officials immediately to determine if the police should be involved. Don't contact the bully's parents yourself. You might also want to encourage school officials to address bullying, including cyber bullying, as part of the curriculum.
- Following up. Keep in contact with school officials. If the bullying seems to continue, be persistent.
- Boosting your child's self-confidence. Help your child get involved in activities that can raise self-esteem as well as encourage your child to build friendships and develop his social skills.
- Knowing when to seek professional help. Consider professional or school counseling for your child if his fear or anxiety becomes overwhelming. If your child is being bullied, remember that early intervention can help prevent lasting problems such as depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

If your child is being a bully, it is important to communicate that this bad behavior will not be tolerated and to engage them in solution finding and redirection. Parents may consider the following ...

- Try to figure out the reason your child has turned to bullying in social situations. Be mindful that listening carefully to the explanation leads to understanding which can lead to change.
- If your child is physically violent towards other children, try to figure out where your child learned that this is acceptable behavior. Consider whether violence is exhibited or exists in your home (i.e., sibling violence, inappropriate violent television programs, movies, video games, and/or music). Violence in the home can be a major problem to be addressed appropriately by the family unit.
- Tell your child to reflect on his or her actions, including being on the receiving end of bullying and possible redemption behaviors for actions.
- Try to nurture your child's talents and dreams and expose or encourage them in activities that build social skills. This is especially key as some bullies have issues with low self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Communicate to your child that you are available at any time for discussion of issues. Ensuring that you are a place that they can be heard and be given sound advice and support is signature to healthy parent-child relationships and behaviors.

In the long term, the consequences of bullying may be even more severe. Parental awareness coupled with early intervention can reduce many of the negative ills associated with bullying; thus, potentially cutting the power of rage before it begins to charge.

*For more information on this or related topics, contact Synithia Williams, Regional Extension Agent in Family and Child Development for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or [willisl@aces.edu](mailto:willisl@aces.edu).*

Sources: Mayo Clinic Staff. *Bullying: Help your child handle a school bully*. (2010, April 24). Retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/bullying/MH00126>; U.S. Department of Education (2010). *Preventing Bullying: A Manual for Schools and Communities*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.