



As we either begin or get ready to start the 2012/2013 school year, this issue of SecurAlert discusses bullying behavior – what it is, who’s at risk, how to recognize it and what to do about it.

## BULLYING BEHAVIOR

As our regular readers know, SecurAmerica, through our monthly SecurAlert Newsletters, tries to research and provide the latest information on current and emerging issues that address a wide range of topics related to workplace and home security and safety. This month is a particularly important and growing one for children and teens along with their families – Bullying.

### What is “Bullying?”

Bullying is defined as any unwanted, aggressive and repeated behavior over time using force or coercion against another to intimidate and/or dominate (either verbally or physically) their intended target who is perceived as weaker and more vulnerable than the aggressor.

Although any person can be bullied as we recently saw on the news where a 68 year old grandmother working as a bus monitor was subjected to disgusting profanity, hurtful insults and physical threats by a group of middle school students, this month’s SecurAlert will address bullying involving children and teens.

Kids and teens who bully use their power or perceived power (physical, age, popularity, etc.) to control, intimidate or harm other kids (and as noted above even against adults). Consequences to the victims include low self-esteem, isolation, a feeling of hopelessness and lack of self-worth, physical/medical problems, serious injury and even suicide. In addition, the victims of bullying are more inclined to use alcohol, tobacco, drugs and engage in reckless sexual behavior.

Although bullying was once considered a rite of passage and “just a part of growing up”, bullying has now been characterized as a devastating form of abuse and harassment.







## Bullying can take the following forms:

- **Verbal:** teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, threats.
- **Physical:** fighting, hitting, kicking, pinching; spitting; tripping, pushing; stealing or destroying possessions (such as text books, clothing, lunch money).
- **Emotional:** making a victim feel isolated, not wanted, alone; the motivation here is to get many kids to ostracize the person being bullied.
- **Cyber Bullying:** using the internet, social media sites and texting to harass, humiliate, embarrass, threaten or torment a person.
- **Gang or “Pack” Bullying:** where more than one bully is involved and, in some cases, there are secondary bullies who assist the primary bully in tormenting the victim; this form of bullying is more prevalent in high school.



## Bullying seems to be growing and becoming an insidious problem for kids, teens, parents and school officials. The statistics are sobering:

- *According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly 1/3 of all kids and teenagers aged 12 to 18 in the US have been involved in bullying, either as a bully or as a victim, some almost daily.*
- *The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reported that close to half of all children will experience some form of school bullying at some point during their school years with 10% of these kids bullied repeatedly.*
- *In a 2010 study conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, 50% of high school kids aged 15 to 18 have admitted to being bullied or engaging in bullying behavior.*
- *20% of students in grades 9 through 12 admitted to being bullied sometime during their academic year (2011 research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control).*
- *24% of those surveyed feared school and perceived school as a unsafe and unhappy place to be.*
- *Some research also indicates that as many as 16% of students come to school under the influence of drugs or alcohol at least once per year and 10% of high school aged kids admitted to bringing some form of weapon to school, which, needless to say, can exacerbate the problem.*





Bullying behavior may be motivated as a way to be popular or seem tough, to get attention, to act out of the bully's own insecurity, to join a group where bullying is part of its culture, jealousy of the victim or they, themselves, are or have been bullied.

## Who's at Risk?

Certainly, any school-aged child or teen can find themselves the victim of a bully. No single factor puts a child or teen at risk of being bullied but usually the bully will target anyone who is perceived as “different” from their peers, weak, less popular, quiet or someone who just seems like an easy target. Despite this general statement, there are certain children that are at higher risk:

- Teenage bullying is more common among younger teens than older teens (the National Center for Education Statistics reports that there is noticeably more bullying in middle school grades 6, 7 and 8 than in senior high school).
- Younger teens will employ physical bullying more often with older teens who use emotional and cyber bullying to torment their victims.
- Physical bullying is more common among boys; teenage girls often favor verbal, emotional and cyber bullying.
- Boys are more likely to be hit, slapped, pushed and exposed to other types of physical abuse where girls are victimized using social exclusion, rumors and the internet.
- Boys are usually only bullied by other boys; while girls report being bullied by both boys and girls.
- Kids who are obese, gay or have disabilities are 63% more likely to be bullied than other children; additionally, kids who are very shy, not very popular, “seem” different than the other kids or who are smaller for their age are also prime targets.
- In addition, children and teens may be bullied based on other factors, such as gender, race, religion, appearance, clothing, hair style, accent or any characteristic that the bully perceives as different, exploitable or easily targeted.



## How can you tell if your child is being bullied?

**Warning signs** that a child or teen may be experiencing bullying include:

- Becoming withdrawn, sullen, depressed, sad, moody, angry, anxious.
- Marked change in their personality
- Showing fear when it's time to go to school or avoiding the school bus.
- Going right to their room once they return from school
- Increased school absences with no explanation or feigning illness.
- Signs of stress including, nightmares, bed wetting, anxiety.
- Signs of depression, including unexplained crying, head aches, loss of sleep, worry or expressed feelings about their self-worth.
- Changes in eating habits.
- Significant decline in grades at school.
- Speaking about someone at school with fear.
- Unexplained physical signs of abuse, including bruises, scratches, limping, etc.
- Loss of or damage to books, electronics, clothing and other personal property or when a child reports mysteriously "losing" possessions, including homework.
- Fewer and fewer friends.
- Wants to stay home all the time.
- Begins bullying siblings or younger kids (this is a common phenomenon where the bullied can become the bully!)
- Talks about feeling helpless; that no one likes him/her; that he/she hates school.
- Threatens to run away or expresses suicidal thoughts.

If you observe any of these warning signs, you should talk to your child immediately

Ask direct questions such as, "Your cell phone is missing; did someone take that from you?" Or "Your jacket is ripped; did someone do that to you?" Watch your child's reaction. The non-verbal cues will be much "louder" than what your child says. Tune into their body language. If necessary, ask them if someone is bullying them in school or over the internet.

Tell your child or teen that you are worried about them and ask them if another kid is treating them in a mean or insulting way. Let them know it's OK to be a victim, that what they are going through is not their fault and they should not be ashamed but that you would like to know so the bullying can stop and other kids aren't treated the same way by the bully.

If you suspect a bullying situation is going on, call or set up an appointment with your child's teacher(s), school counselor or principal to alert them of your concerns and ask them if they have noticed or suspect that your child is a bully victim.

But even a meeting with your child's teachers may not determine with certainty if bullying has been





observed. As a general rule, bullying doesn't usually happen in school settings or in classrooms under the watchful eyes of the teaching staff. A lot of it occurs when kids are together or isolated from authority figures – on the playground, on the bus, in the bathroom, walking to and from school or when outside of the school. Find out from your child where the bullying is taking place.

And, of course, if your child's conditions or symptoms worsen or continue, get the help of a trained mental health professional.



## Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is when a child or teen is harassed, humiliated, embarrassed, threatened or tormented using computer technology, such as the internet, chat rooms, social media sites, instant messaging, texting, website postings and blogs.

Cyber-bullying has dramatically increased in recent years since most kids and teens now have computers and cell phones (did you know that 83% of kids and teenagers use cell phones?). One in five teens will become a victim of cyber-bullying. Research has indicated that cyber-bullying has become more common than traditional bullying, especially among girls. Many cyber-bullies take advantage of technology to harass their victims anonymously.

This form of harassment can be devastating for the victim due to the number of other kids and teens that can review and comment on the messages that have been sent. Unlike bullying at school, cyber-bullying can take place 24 hours a day, even at home, which is the one place kids used to find safe refuge from bullying behavior. And cyber-bullying messages and images can be distributed quickly to a wide audience. Cyber-bullying can have a serious psychological impact on a victim and carry over to the real world. Recently, several suicides were reported in the news motivated by cyber-bullying.



Be aware of what your kids are doing on-line; know the sites they visit and their on-line activities, including the messages they send and receive.

## Here are some tips to help prevent and manage cyber-bullying:

- Let your kids know that as a responsible parent, you will review their on-line communications on a regular basis.
- Consider installing parental control filtering software or monitoring programs on your child's computer.
- Ask to “friend” or “follow” your kids on social media sites or ask another trusted adult to do so.
- Establish rules about appropriate use of computers, cell phones and other technology and the consequences if they break the rules.
- Educate them on how to be smart about what they post or say.
- Encourage kids to think about who they want to see information and the pictures they post on-line. Should complete strangers see it? Think about how people who are not your friends can use it.
- Keep passwords safe and tell your child never to share these with friends.
- If text bullying takes place and it is serious, notify the cell phone company to get a new number and report the bullying.

## What Parents Can Do

In preparing for this important issue of SecurAlert, we have scoured dozens of sources to try to find the best advice for parents to help their child prepare for and cope with school bullying. Here's what we found:

- Talk to your child at an early age about bullying; what it means; why it's wrong and what your child should do if they become a victim.
- Get to know your child's friends and ask them every day how school went.
- Let them know it is not acceptable to be a bully and point this type of behavior out if you see it on TV or the





movies; discuss why it's wrong and ask how the child would feel if they were put in the same situation.

- Many bully's learn their behavior from their parents - so watch what you say and the actions you take with others.
- Teach your kids non-violent ways to respond to a bullies taunts.
- As we have mentioned earlier, it's important to stress with your child that if they are bullied, it is not their fault.
- Give your child a sustained feeling of self-worth; that they should be proud of being exactly who they are.
- Instruct your child that it's OK to stand up to a bully; many times a bully lacks self-esteem and will back-off if an intended "victim" does not submit to the bullying behavior.
- If a child is bullied, they need to tell you right away and not ignore it. Bullying is WRONG even if it occurs once and needs to be stopped immediately before it can get out of hand.
- Consider role-playing with the child – present a hypothetical bully situation and see how your child would respond; guide the child on the best way of handling so they are prepared.
- In the case of a cyber-bully attack, instruct your child to save the email, text or posting; if it is in any way sexual or threatening in nature, you should report it to the police, contact the social media site and immediately block the person who is cyber-bullying your child.

### **Avoid some common mistakes:**

- Never tell your child to ignore the bullying or just to "suck it up".
- Don't blame the child for being bullied.
- Don't force other kids to say publicly what they saw especially in front of other kids.
- Don't tell the child to physically fight back against the bully; this could lead to injuries, suspension and other consequences for your child.



Listen to your child and learn what's been going on, how they feel, what they want to do and how you can help them feel safe.



Make friends at school: bullies target isolated individuals and friends help insulate each other from bullying behavior

- Resist the urge to contact the other parents; it may make matters worse; use school officials to act as mediators between you and the parents of the bully.
- Talk to talk without walking it: by treating others with respect and kindness and not engaging in bullying behavior yourself, your kids will learn how to properly treat their peers and others – be their role model!

## What Can Your Child Do

- Walk away from a bullying situation: this shows the behavior is not OK or funny.
- When verbally bullied, they should try to shrug it off, provide no reaction or walk away; they shouldn't resort to rudeness or violence themselves – make sure they don't sink to the bully's level.
- Get involved with school activities, such as volunteering, playing sports, joining a club; this gives kids a chance to have fun, meet others and have a positive outlet.
- Speak up: tell the bully what they are doing is wrong.
- Be a friend: sometimes kids get picked on because they don't have any friends or anyone to stand up to them. When a kid befriends someone being bullied, the bully is less likely to pick on them; friendship breeds confidence.
- Tell someone: bullies get away with their behavior when they feel they can continue without consequences; children should immediately report bullying to their parents or teacher.

For more information visit the following websites:

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

[www.education.com](http://www.education.com)

[www.bullyingstatistics.org](http://www.bullyingstatistics.org)

[www.cyberbullyingstatistics.org](http://www.cyberbullyingstatistics.org)

[www.ncpc.org](http://www.ncpc.org)