

Your Health Matters

STOP BULLYING BY TAKING ACTION

Every 7 minutes, a child is bullied on a playground in America. 6 out of 10 teens witness bullying every day. The average cyberbully starts at age 9. Just this morning, I saw a young girl on Facebook being bullied by someone. So, it made me think about all the students in Montgomery County. With the start of a new school year, some of those students may have a very real fear of being bullied.

Bullying goes beyond aggressive behavior or fist-fights. It can include any unwanted behavior that involves a power imbalance and is repeated over time. Bullying can include threats, rumors, physical attack, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, exclusion, cyber-attacks, or texting. Bullying can threaten a child's physical and emotional safety at school and can negatively impact their ability to learn.

Without the ability to be physically present, how can parents protect their children from being bullied? The best way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts. Many schools are proactively working to prevent bullying. They encourage students with character-building programs, and they physically monitor hallways and classrooms.

Parents also play an important role. Experts suggest three key ways parents can help prevent bullying.

1. **Pay attention.** Watch for warning signs of bullying, such as unexplained injuries, a change in appetite, missing personal items, or a reluctance to go to school. Be aware that some kids may make a great effort to hide the signs of bullying. Talk with your kids every day, using open-ended questions that encourage conversation.
2. **Don't ignore it.** Never assume a situation is harmless teasing. What one person considers harmless may be humiliating and devastating to another. Get involved if you think there may be a problem, don't just brush it off as kids being kids. Some children never recover from bullying. It affects them for a lifetime.
3. **Talk to your children.** Children can play an active role in preventing bullying. Encourage them to promote respect and inclusion at school by being a friend. Teach them to set a good example and to not give bullies an audience. Urge them to help kids get away from bullies and to talk with a trusted adult.

When parents and kids are involved in preventing and stopping bullying, students feel safer at school and can focus on learning. Parents will worry less. Teachers and school staff can focus on their work, and the school environment can be much healthier.

To learn more, visit www.montgomerycountyhealth.org, Facebook or Twitter, or call 573-564-2495. The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. ■



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