

Mistreatment In Schools Parental Prevention & Response Strategies

Adult action can improve school safety

Mistreatment in schools interferes with learning and with the sense of safety and well-being of all students. Parental attitudes opposing mistreatment, positive family relations, and parental involvement in schools play a significant part in developing in children a propensity not to mistreat others.

Adults can take action to help create a safer learning environment. They can:

1. Address Mistreatment — It's not harmless, nor is it to be ignored or dismissed

Mistreatment --whether it's through threatening words or gestures, physically hurting, name-calling, mimicking, harassing, or shunning (isolating someone)or bullying--is a destructive force in the lives of too many kids. Being the target of any form of mistreatment is an attack on a young person's self esteem and joy in life, as well as their ability to successfully achieve academically. Consistently acting as an aggressor allows a child to build behavior that will be destructive socially, personally, and professionally later in life. Witnessing mistreatment on campus creates an upsetting and distracting environment in which to play and work and learn. Mistreatment in schools affects students and staff, not just the targeted victims. Aggressors, targets, and bystanders can learn to be assertive rather than aggressive or passive in dealing with problems that they experience directly or that they see happening.

2. Make mistreatment of all forms against the rules

If it isn't already, mistreatment in schools needs to be clearly against the rules. Make sure that your child's school has a clear written Violence and Harassment Prevention Policy that everyone agrees to uphold. Inform yourself of school requirements (such as AB 537 & 2000 California Student Safety & Violence Prevention Act.) Inquire what programs, actions, and/or curricula the school is currently using to prevent and address acts of mistreatment (such as the Safe School Ambassadors Program.) Parents should be aware, tune in and not ignore when kids are acting upset with each other and help them learn skills for handling conflict. Set an example for your children by not allowing people to mistreat you and by exercising the self-control necessary not to mistreat others. Do not allow mistreatment to occur in the home, especially between siblings.

3. Teach kids to act aware and confident

Aggressors, and particularly bullies, pick on kids who act scared, oblivious, or defensive. An alert, assertive attitude can help possible targets and bystanders to stop most mistreatment when it is small or even before it starts.

4. Teach kids target denial skills

Target denial is an official martial arts technique that means, "Don't be there!" Target denial means not giving an aggressor a physical advantage by being too close. For

example, kids can move away from someone whom they know is a problem. Target denial means not giving an aggressor an emotional handle. One technique is to leave by smiling and waving and saying cheerfully, "No, thanks!" very calmly and sincerely instead of acting scared or angry.

5. Teach kids the power of words

In order to address mistreatment in schools, parents and teachers can teach children how to protect themselves from words and also by using words. Kids tell us that trying to "just ignore it when someone says something mean to you" doesn't really work. Stop serious name-calling with the same commitment that you would use to stop serious hitting. Teach kids not to let insults, rude behavior, or guilt trips trigger them into feeling intimidated or emotionally coerced by an aggressor. Kids need to learn how not to let what others say or do control their choices. They also need to learn how not to behave in emotionally damaging ways towards others. Teach kids how to set clear strong verbal boundaries in a respectful, assertive way with people they know (Be Creative - Role playing works very well with many young people!)

6. Teach kids to defend themselves physically

To be effective in using other prevention tactics, kids need to know that they can protect themselves physically. As a last resort, kids need to know if and when and how they can stop someone from hurting them.

7. Teach kids to get help

Be someone your kids can come to with their problems without fear of you overreacting or belittling them or lecturing or getting mad at them. Even if the issues they bring might seem trivial to you, these issues usually seem big to them. Most of the time, kids just need someone to listen so they won't feel alone. Being able to talk about problems can help a child figure out what to do and put things into perspective. Having our kids in the habit of talking to us can also alert us to more serious issues. Help your child to identify staff members who are most likely to listen and provide ongoing monitoring and support. Children who believe they have someone they can count on and discuss serious problems with are less likely to feel badly or unwell as a consequence of being mistreated.

8. Engage kids in activities that will boost their confidence and gain them a stronger social network.

Children who have little or no social support are particularly at risk. Get them involved in activities that they enjoy and are skilled at to increase their social base, confidence and support network.