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Teasing and Bullying

Teasing and bullying are commonplace in today's society. Children and adolescents endure teasing and bullying at school, playgrounds, home, after-school activities, sports events and any place where youth interact with one another.

What is Bullying? (Pepler & Craig, 1997)

- Physical violence and attacks
- Verbal taunts
- Threats and intimidation
- Extortion or stealing of money or possessions
- Exclusion from the peer group

What is Teasing?

- Name calling
- Put downs
- Negative comments
- Jokes intended to be hurtful
- Withholding important possessions

Approximately 50% of children are bullied at school at some time or another. Between 3% and 32% of students are bullied once a week or more often. 81% of the children who stutter reported that they were bullied at school at some time, with 56% of those children being bullied about their stuttering once a week or more often. Name calling and having one's stutter imitated were the most frequently reported types of bullying experienced (Langevin, 2003).

Research regarding the mental health outcomes of bullying and victimization indicate that both the bully and the victim of the bullying are at high risk for a wide range of mental health problems later in life if they do not receive support during their childhood (Pepler & Craig, 2000).

Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Bullying (Pepler & Craig, 2000)

- Externalizing Problems (i.e Conduct Disorder)
- Aggression
- Delinquency
- Early dating experience
- Sexual harassment
- Academic problems and school dropout
- Internalizing problems (i.e Anxiety)

- Victimization
- Negative peer reputation
- Continued problems throughout adulthood

Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Victimization (Pepler & Craig, 2000)

- Peer reputation as someone who can be victimized
- School Problems (i.e. school refusal, poor concentration, dropout)
- Internalizing problems
- Anxiety
- Somatization Problems
- Withdrawn Behaviors
- Victimization by Sexual Harassment
- Aggression

Boys report more physical forms of bullying whereas girls report more indirect bullying such as gossiping and excluding (Pepler & Craig, 1997). Teasing and bullying occurs most frequently for children in grades 1-3, 26%, as compared to 15% of grades 4-6 and 12% of grades 7-8 (Pepler & Craig, 1997). It is evident that intervention for teasing and bullying must begin as early as 1st grade in order to prevent lasting mental health issues for both the victims and the bullies.

Victims often keep the fact that they are being bullied and teased by peers secret from their parents and teachers. Victims often feel that reporting the bullying/teasing will make the situation worse or cause other students to disapprove of them (Olweus, 1991).

It is important that parents, teachers and therapists provide children who stutter the opportunity to discuss their experiences with teasing and bullying and help them identify solutions to situations that they may have encountered. Also by focusing on the child's area of strength and downplaying the stuttering aspect of their lives, the child who stutters can learn that they are more than just a stutterer (Roth & Beal, 1999). Good self esteem can go a long way in helping a child who stutters in dealing with teasing and bullying that they may experience in the community.

What can we do? (Langevin, 2003, Murphy, 1998)

- Help the child who stutters learn conflict resolutions strategies, and if they are being teased or bullied, specific strategies they can use are identified.
- Help parents learn to facilitate problem solving and make decisions about levels of intervention.
- Make visits to the classrooms of children who stutter. Help the students understand stuttering and learn how they can support their classmates who stutter.
- Help the child role play teasing and bullying situations and possible solutions.
- Help the child develop a list of responses that they can use in response to negative comments about their speech.

- Help the child understand the difference between “tattling” and “responsible reporting.” “Tattling” is when you tell to get someone in trouble in front of others. “Responsible reporting” is when you talk to an adult in private about a difficult situation.”
- Help the child differentiate between teasing and bullying and appropriate responses to both.

What can the child who stutters do? (Langeman, 2003, www.bullying.org, Elanor Roosevelt)

- Don't fight back
- Don't act scared
- Think of things to say ahead of time
- Don't bring expensive stuff or money to school
- Stay with friends
- Stay in the sight of teachers or other adults
- Avoid bad situations
- Ignore the bully/teaser and walk away
- Take responsible actions
- Use humor in an appropriate way to diffuse the situation
- Be assertive
- Say something unexpected
- Tell someone---get an adult involved

Suggestions for parents (Langeman, 2003)

- Enroll your child in a leadership course
- Strengthen your child's friendships
- Get help from school authorities
- Enroll your child in something s/he is good at such as a sport, music, etc.

Siblings

Teasing between siblings is common in anyone's home. When a sibling teases a child who stutters it can be particularly hurtful. It is important that parents sit down with the whole family and educate all family members about stuttering. Parents need to make other children in the family understand how unkind it is to tease a sibling who stutters about something over which they have little control (Lew, 2004). The Speech Language Pathologist can also play an integral role in educating siblings about stuttering. Including siblings in therapy sessions can help siblings, especially younger children understand more about stuttering and how hard it is to change one's speech.

Books about Teasing and Bullying for Children

Children, especially young children, often respond favorably to the use of books as a learning tool. There are several books on the market that relate to teasing and bullying that parents, teachers and clinicians may find useful when discussing teasing and bullying with a child.

King of the Playground *by Phyllis Reynolds*
Making a friend of the bully

Bully on the Bus *by Carl Bosch*
Asking for help from an adult
Standing up to the bully

Ada Potato *by Judith Caseley*
Getting other kids on your side

The Meanest Thing to Say *by Bill Cosby*
Saying "So what"

Parents, teachers, therapists and other adults in the community can work together to reduce teasing and bullying from occurring. However, it is unlikely to be completely extinguished. Therefore, it is important that Speech-Language Pathologist provide an environment where children who stutter feel comfortable sharing their experiences with teasing and bullying. The SLP must then help the child develop strategies to stop the teasing and bullying from occurring again. In addition, it is important that the SLP help the child learn to discuss his stuttering openly so that s/he can feel less shame.

References

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