

Pediatricians Acknowledge Bullying and Dating Violence as Public Health Concerns

That bullying is a common rite of passage for nearly all children and adolescents is no longer an acceptable justification of the violence, fighting, and harassment that occur on and off school grounds. This position is emphasized in the [American Academy of Pediatrics'](#) updated [policy statement](#) on the role that pediatricians should play—as both clinicians and advocates—in relation to youth-violence prevention. The policy statement recommends ways for pediatricians to take up youth violence with patients, parents, and caregivers. The statement promotes the implementation of prevention strategies through advocacy, research, and education and outreach within the community.

In the past the academy's policy statement focused on the prevalence of homicide and suicide among teenagers, the short- and long-term physical and emotional effects of violence on victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, and eliminating corporal punishment in the home. For the first time, the academy's statement has a section on bullying and dating violence. The academy stresses that both are preventable and that prevention is key in combating youth violence. The academy acknowledges that youth bullying and dating violence must be viewed through the broad lens of youth violence as a societal problem linked to other forms of violence and psychosocial problems.

Bullying is a form of repeated aggression against persons perceived to be unable to defend themselves. Bullying generally takes the form of physical harm, verbal harassment or threats, and social exclusion or isolation. However, technological inventiveness and the abundance of hand-held devices have made it easier to engage in cyberbullying, or the use of cellphones and the Internet to harass and intimidate another person. Bullying has long-term effects not only on victims but also on perpetrators and witnesses. Such effects include physical injury, depression and suicidal ideation, and the development of serious assault behaviors.

Due to the serious health concerns that result from youth violence, the academy recognizes the pediatrician's unique position to engage youth, parents, and caregivers on the facts about youth violence and the resources available to them. These are some of the academy's recommendations for pediatricians:

- Engage in appropriate and timely treatment or referral for violence-related problems identified during patient visits, or engage in both treatment and referral.
- Tell parents to talk to their children about bullying, to teach their children how to resolve conflict, and to promote respectful relationships in dating.
- Anticipate guidance about adolescent cognitive and social development, relationship dynamics, and the risks of teen-dating violence.
- Learn about community resources for children and adolescents and maintain an accurate database of community-based counseling and treatment resources.
- Advocate bullying awareness by teachers, educational administrators, parents, and children, and advocate the adoption of evidence-based prevention programs.

The academy recommends that pediatricians become familiar with [Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure](#), the academy's primary care violence-prevention protocol on youth-violence prevention in the framework of routine child health care. In the same vein, the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently launched phase II of a major multiyear awareness campaign entitled "Take a Stand, Lend a Hand: Stop Bullying Now." For more information about bullying, including webisodes and other interactive material, visit: <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/>.

Students who are involved in all aspects of bullying and dating violence face enormous barriers to completing their education and need better policies and protocols and increased resources to ensure that they stay in school and stay safe while in school. In order to develop best practices and policies for Illinois public school districts, the Ensuring Success in School Task Force, established by the Illinois General Assembly, has documented the experiences (some of which include bullying) of elementary and secondary school students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of domestic or sexual violence. The task force will issue a report on its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly in December.

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