Recognizing the signs of bullying

Source: Isaac Hilpp, senior extension special, 4-H youth development

While we have come a long way in raising bullying awareness with prevention campaigns, it unfortunately continues to occur among youth. Recognizing signs of bullying in your young person can help you become the advocate they need.

Bullying can have long-lasting and traumatic effects to victims, perpetrators and even witnesses. Victims may experience depression, anxiety and other physical and mental health issues, that can last into adulthood. Victims can also have poor academic performance. Bullies can go down a path that leads to unhealthy relationships, abuse and criminal charges. Witnesses are at an increased risk of using tobacco, alcohol or drugs and have a greater chance of developing depression and anxiety.

Youth may be apprehensive about talking about bullying to adults for many different reasons. Young people may think they can handle the situation themselves. They do not want to be known as a tattletale, which could potentially subject them to more bullying or they may not want to tarnish their image among their peers.

On the flip side, bullies may feel pressure from their peers to harass another person. They have a certain image to maintain. Bullies may come from homes with no support and/or rules for acceptable behavior.

Sometimes, the signs of bullying can be fairly obvious. If your young person comes home missing clothing, jewelry, money or electronics, have unexplainable injuries, or if they have new items and cannot explain where they got them, bullying may have occurred.

Other signs of bullying may be more subtle. Young people’s eating habits may change, and they may become more withdrawn from their family and friends. They may have trouble sleeping or more frequent nightmares. Victims of bullying can also have poor academic performance, low self-esteem and self-destructive behaviors.

Bullies can display aggressive behaviors and get into trouble during school. They often do not accept responsibility for their actions and choose to blame others instead.

Depending on where the bullying occurred, make the proper authorities aware of it. For example, if bullying is happening in school, talk to a school counselor or administrator. If bullying occurs on the bus, talk to the bus driver. If bullying occurs outside of school hours, you may have to contact a bully’s parent.

4-H offers an inclusive environment for all young people and does not tolerate bullying. For more information on bullying, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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