

Putting a Stop to Bullying

We're in the aftermath of an election that left our country feeling more divided than ever. And many parents are still reeling from bad campaign behavior that ran counter to the behaviors they try to teach their sons and daughters. Now we're seeing a surge of hate speech and bullying in schools and elsewhere, much of it focused on race, ethnicity or gender. But this long holiday weekend can be a time for a "reset," a time to reclaim respect and acceptance, to consider the example we set for our children and to be clear that bullying will not be tolerated. Here is Marti's practical guidance on how to begin:

I. Underlying issues

- Even the youngest school-age children have seen and heard hateful things in recent weeks – a Spanish-speaking child being told his family is going to be kicked out of the country, a girl in a hijab having it snatched off on the playground, a middle school girl having her body ridiculed in crude language. Some young people are testing limits, claiming they should be able to say and do these things if our leaders can.
- It's more important than ever that we are mindful of how we talk in front of our children, whatever our political position. We need to be clear that we expect peaceful, respectful behavior from our children. And we need to be peaceful and respectful in our own communications.

II. Start the conversation: Tips for parents and other caring adults

- Ask your children what's been happening at school since the campaign
Listen carefully to what your children tell you. Ask about how kids are talking and behaving on the bus, in the lunchroom, in the bathroom (places where bullying often occurs). Ask what they think it is like for the kids who are being bullied, and ask what students and school staff are doing about it.
- Find out what the school policy and procedures are about bullying
Many schools have these policies available online. If not, contact the school and ask.
- Talk about what your children should do if they see or experience bullying
Bullying experts usually recommend staying close to others, especially during transition times; moving quickly away from a bully; telling an adult; and, if you are a bystander, speaking up. (*Telling so that an adult can protect the victim is different from "tattling," which is done to get someone in trouble. Telling is important when someone is at risk of harm.)*
- Familiarize yourself and your children with groups that are being targeted
Read books together that help you understand the experiences of some of the different ethnic groups that make up our communities. Attend plays or cultural festivals to learn more about traditions and customs. Encourage the school to have events or activities where children and families can tell their stories and share traditions. Sponsor a refugee family through your faith community or a local nonprofit. Check out some of the shops and wonderful restaurants that are operated by immigrant families. See through others' eyes!