**The truth about bullying**

Despite the recent increase in awareness about bullying, many people are unsure of how to prevent and address bullying in schools, workplaces and even places of worship.

Many people associate bullying with schools and playgrounds, assuming that this is a problem that affects children only. In fact, both adults and children can bully and be bullied. Some adults face bullying in the workplace, and today everyone is vulnerable to cyber bullying.

Someone who is being bullied may have a hard time asking for help, in part because of misunderstandings such as these:

- **Verbal bullying is harmless.** Bullying can cause significant harm. Recent studies show that children and adults who experience verbal bullying can develop long-term psychological and neurological symptoms.

- **Victims need to learn to stand up for themselves.** Sometimes victims can stand up to their bullies, but doing so may result in physical injury, further social ostracizing or, in the case of workplace bullying, job loss.

- **Victims bring bullying upon themselves.** While a victim may be socially awkward or “different,” this is no excuse for abusing someone.

The teachings of all major faith traditions reinforce the essential dignity of all people. Bullying denies and attacks human dignity. Faith communities can have a significant impact on bullying by shedding light on the subject itself, being a safe haven to talk about bullying, and providing support and education to both the bully and the person being bullied.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help me to see others as you see them. Help me to treat others with kindness always. Help me to speak up when I see someone treated badly. Amen

**Resources:** Advocatehealth.com • Stopbullying.gov • National Bullying Prevention Month – pacer.org/bullying/nbpm • workplacebullying.org

**The signs and effects of childhood bullying**

Bullying is bad for a child on either side of the bullying fence. The effects of bullying on the target are often profound and can cause significant damage to physical and mental health, as well as academic performance. Children who bully others can likewise develop long-term mental health issues.

If a child is being bullied, here are some things you may see:

- A change in eating habits, such as overeating or skipping meals. If a child is avoiding the lunch room for fear of bullying or bullies taking his/her lunch money, the child may be very hungry when returning home from school.

- Trying to avoid school or other activities. A bullied child may complain of headaches and stomachaches or want to drop out of certain activities.

- Changes in friendships. A vanishing social circle may be a sign that a bully has turned the child’s friends against him/her.

- Decline of academic performance. It’s not unusual for a child’s grades to drop if he or she is being bullied.

Early intervention by teachers, parents, faith leaders and other authority figures is important for the well-being of both the targets and perpetrators.

Keep in mind that children who are the victims of bullying or who have witnessed the bullying of others may not speak out. Let your children know that it is okay to come to you with any of their concerns. Assure them that you will always listen and you will work with them to find solutions to life’s problems.

Encourage your child to speak up when he or she sees bullying. Explain the difference between “telling” and “tattling” by noting that the latter is about getting someone in trouble while the former is about getting help for someone who needs it.

When bullying is an issue, parents can and should talk with those in authority at school and their faith community about support and back-up. Bullying can be changed.