



**Helping
our kids
live
violence
free**

A Parent's Guide

for students in grades 8 to 12



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

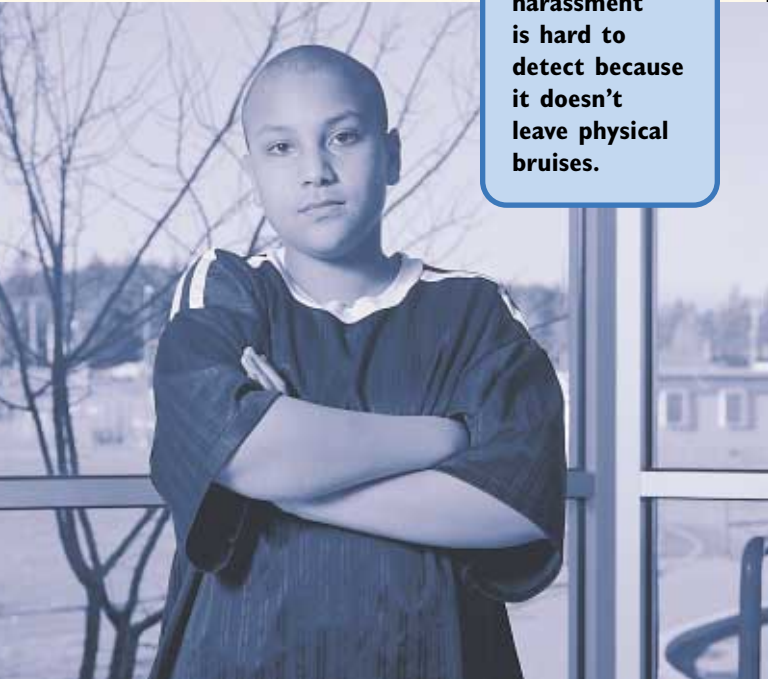
Ministry of Education

Protecting our youth

Were you ever harassed as an adolescent or teen? Then you can probably still recall the pain it caused.

As parents we all want to protect our teenage children and see them grow into healthy, well-adjusted adults. But harassment and youth violence can undermine this, weakening self-esteem and school performance, and scarring our children for years.

All harassment is painful. But some harassment is hard to detect because it doesn't leave physical bruises.



How do you spot harassment?

When a youth is continually put down, they're being harassed. But that doesn't mean it's easy to spot. Some harassment leaves bruises we can see, while other types of harassment leaves emotional scars.

Essentially, harassment falls into three categories: *physical*, *emotional* and *social*.

Sticks and stones may break your bones...

Just as the name implies, *physical harassment* harms a victim's physical self or personal property. It may start with threats but, like all types of harassment, unless someone intervenes it can escalate into pushing, shoving, and fighting. Other forms of physical harassment include extortion, so if your teen comes home missing a jacket or other valuables, there's a chance he or she is being physically harassed.

But names will never hurt you...

Forget the old idea that names will never hurt you. *Emotional harassment* can be devastating.

Insulting or degrading remarks, name calling, dirty looks, threats and destruction of personal property are all types of emotional harassment. Common among middle and high school students are homophobic and racist slurs. These insults and slurs can humiliate and isolate a teen. They can also be frightening – and for good reason. Emotional harassment often leads to physical or social harassment.

There are 3 types of harassment

Physical -

where a person or his or her property is physically harmed.

Emotional -

where a person's feelings are hurt through insults and name calling.

Social -

where a person is shunned and excluded from groups and events.

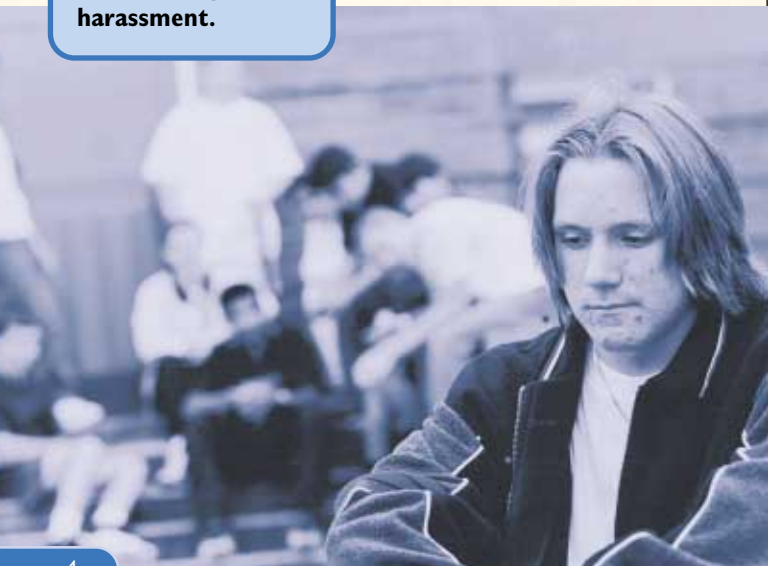
Who ever said gossip is harmless?

Social harassment is the most difficult type of harassment to detect. After all, there are no scars, no destroyed or stolen property to help a parent discover that their child is being harassed. Social harassment may start with ignoring and grow from there. Gossiping and spreading rumours usually follow, then teens may find that their peers have shunned them, or that they're no longer invited to parties or other social functions. And if it's not addressed, social harassment can lead to kids being publicly humiliated, and totally alienated and isolated.

Social harassment is very sophisticated, and nearly impossible to detect. It's most common in the middle and senior high school years. Of course all types of harassment or bullying contain elements of all three behaviours: physical, emotional and social, and all three of these categories can contain elements of sexual

harassment. All types of harassment can be obvious or very secretive and, if adults do nothing, it will escalate.

Teens who are suddenly shunned by their peer group are probably experiencing social harassment.





Differences between girls and boys...

Studies show that both girls and boys bully. Boys generally tend to rely more on verbal and physical intimidation. Girls generally use tactics like teasing, gossiping, insulting, or excluding their victims from social events. Harassment can be extremely painful and needs to be taken very seriously by both the parents and the school.

How much harm can it really cause?

The issue of harassment has to be taken seriously. Victims of harassment can develop severe depression and even commit suicide. And studies reveal that harassers are four times more likely to become adult criminals.

And harassing grows. What starts out as name calling and gossip can lead to severe brutality, sexual harassment, and even murder. It's time for everyone to take action against harassment and youth violence.

Harassment is serious stuff. Studies show that the majority of harassers end up in jail by their mid 20s. And victims tend to suffer from low self-esteem and depression throughout their entire adult lives.

How violence grows

In Grade 1, Kim began excluding other children on the playground. In time she started gossiping and telling her friends who they could or could not play with. Since no adults intervened, her behaviour continued so that by the time she reached middle school, Kim had become very adept at social harassment. She would invite others into her social group, then turn the tables and exclude those same children. This gave Kim a sense of power and control.

And so the stories go. Teens who are harassers generally have a history of bullying others.

In other words, it didn't happen overnight.

As elementary school children they may have learned early how to take unfair advantage of

a weaker child through minor acts such as a mean look or whispers. Without intervention harassment can grow into fighting, alienation, even weapon use.

Harassment and bullying grow. They may start as a mean look or insulting remark. But without intervention it can grow into fighting, alienation, extortion, and weapon use.

Why do some kids harass?

Everywhere in our society we witness the imbalance of power. Having it infiltrate our children's lives should

really come as no surprise. The imbalance of power is at the very root of a harasser/victim conflict. This power gives a teen control over others, leading to social stature and even financial gain through behaviours such as extortion.

However, it's important to note that many harassers may have been victims of bullying themselves. They have learned that life is a game of survival, and that in order to "win" they have to "beat" someone else.

Where does a harasser get his or her power?

A harasser's power comes from many sources. It may be that the harasser is physically stronger, or has superior intelligence, especially in the form of "street smarts". And then there's the power that comes from group affiliation, and even weapon use.

Harassers are poor students... and other myths.

At one time harassers were thought to have a low sense of self-esteem. Now studies show that harassing others builds their self-esteem. Youth who harass others are not loners; most have a small, close group of friends who witness and support their behaviour. Bullies need an audience.

Harassers are found in all economic, social and racial groups. Harassers aren't poor students; most achieve average grades. "Once a harasser always a harasser" is another myth. Harassing is learned behaviour that can be unlearned.



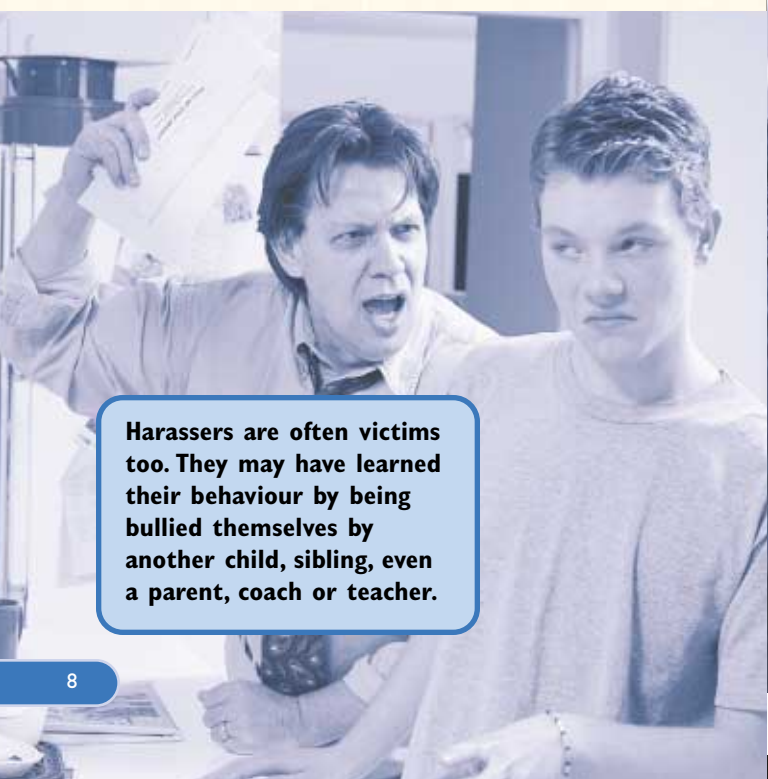
So where do kids learn to harass?

When Michael was a kid he would be punished for simple things like an untidy bedroom. As he grew the rules became more rigid and the punishment more severe. As a teen, Michael was expected to live by the rules of his parents with no negotiation. It was no surprise, then, that Michael eventually harassed and hurt others who didn't live by his rules.

Kids who harass aren't living in a vacuum... they learned their behaviour somewhere. Many harassers are victims themselves. For example, there may be a significant power imbalance at home where one parent or a sibling is consistently dominant over others.

Harassers lack empathy or compassion. They believe that their victims had it coming to them and feel very little guilt for hurting others.

There can be a connection between harassment and other behaviours such as gang involvement, drug and alcohol use, racism, homophobia, and sexual harassment or assault.



Harassers are often victims too. They may have learned their behaviour by being bullied themselves by another child, sibling, even a parent, coach or teacher.

Gang involvement


Youth involvement in organized criminal gangs is rare in British Columbia. A more likely scenario is preteens or teens who attempt to emulate gangs, sometimes known as “wannabe gangs”. These groups may be involved in extortion, intimidation, and acts of violence towards others. Group violence can be very dangerous. Although rare, it has led to serious injury and even death.

Intolerance and hate groups

An intense prejudice or intolerance of others can lead to violence. It may begin as a homophobic or racial slur, and grow from there. History has taught us that intolerance based on differences such as race, ethnic background, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, culture, colour, or physical or mental ability can lead to serious violence.

Drug and alcohol use

When we use drugs and alcohol our ability to reason drops. Although these substances may make us feel like we’re more in control, we actually lose self-control. Quite simply, substance abuse puts youth at risk both as victims and harassers. It can also put youth in situations where violent activity is more commonplace. So it’s important that as parents we take substance use and abuse seriously.

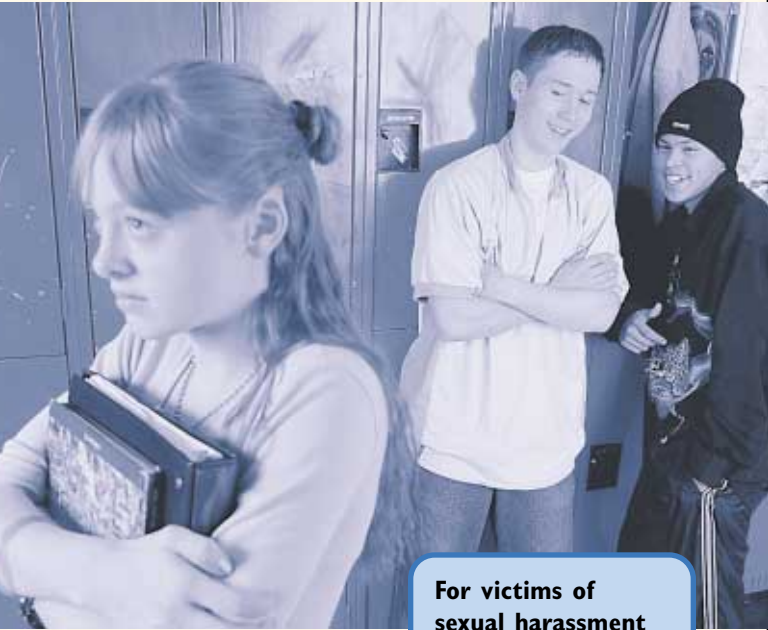


Parents of victims of homophobia can call Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) at (604) 689-3711

Parents of victims of racism can call the BC Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism & Immigration (604) 660-2203

Weapons and youth violence

A recent survey of BC youth shows that approximately 9% of youth admit to having carried a weapon to school, with the majority of those weapons being knives and razors. Weapons can quickly turn a fight into a deadly incident, so if you discover or hear of any type of weapon use at school report it to the school administrator.



Sexual assault & harassment

Andrea remembers as a teen avoiding walking through a certain corridor at her school. Every time she did she was rated by a group of boys for her attractiveness. It was a humiliating experience that was shrugged off by school administrators as a case of “boys being boys”. Today, as a mother of a teen, Andrea takes any complaints of sexual harassment very seriously. Andrea is well aware that sexual harassment can threaten a student’s physical and emotional well being.

**For victims of sexual harassment or assault call the Victim Information Line
1-800-563-0808**

Dirty jokes, sexually explicit drawings, unwanted touching, pressure for sexual favours, spreading rumours about other students' sexual orientation or lifestyle are all examples of sexual harassment. Youth who are sexually harassed can have trouble learning, skip classes, drop out of school, lose trust and self-confidence, and feel isolated and alienated.

Is my child a harasser?

Michael's family never had the money to buy the latest fashions. Then suddenly Michael started coming home with expensive clothing which he claimed were gifts from other kids. But Michael's parents knew that something was up.

There are warning signs that a child is harassing. If an adolescent or teen suddenly acquires large amounts of money or possessions you know are not affordable, it's cause for concern. Other signs are a lack of respect for you and other authority figures, and a drop in school performance or attendance. A disregard for the feelings or rights of others, or threats of violence to solve problems require serious attention.

Finally, if your child blames others for his or her problems, gets suspended from or drops out of school, joins a gang, gets involved in fighting, steals or destroys property, or uses alcohol or other drugs, you'll want to seek professional help.

Signs a teen is harassing others

- a disregard for the feelings of others
- threatens to use violence
- sudden acquirement of possessions without reasonable explanation
- drop in school performance or attendance

What can a parent do?

If you suspect that your teen is harassing others, open up the doors of communication. Try talking with your child without jumping to conclusions; he or she may become defensive and you'll be no further ahead.

If your teen is accused of harassing

- stay calm
- don't deny it
- listen to both sides
- contact the school or police if you think your teen could cause serious harm to others

If your teen is accused of harassing, don't threaten punishment; this just keeps the cycle going. If the accusation is valid, come up with a logical consequence such as having your teen apologize to the person who has been hurt.

If your child is 12 or over and you think he or she has or could harm others, you should inform the school. In the case of weapons possession, serious physical injury or threats, sexual

assault, robbery or extortion, and hate-motivated violence, parents need to talk to their child's teacher, counselor, principal or, if warranted, the police. It's for the safety of everyone.

Parents have rights too

As a parent you have the right to be informed of your child's behaviour and to have access to your child's student records. And as a parent you have the right to appeal any decision made by the school that adversely affects the education, health or safety of your child. If your child is arrested and detained in custody under the Young Offenders Act, the police must notify you of the arrest and must also notify you of any summons and appearance notices issued to your child.

Every bully needs a victim

The fact is harassers have no power without their victims. Research reveals that there are two types of victims, *passive* and *provocative*.

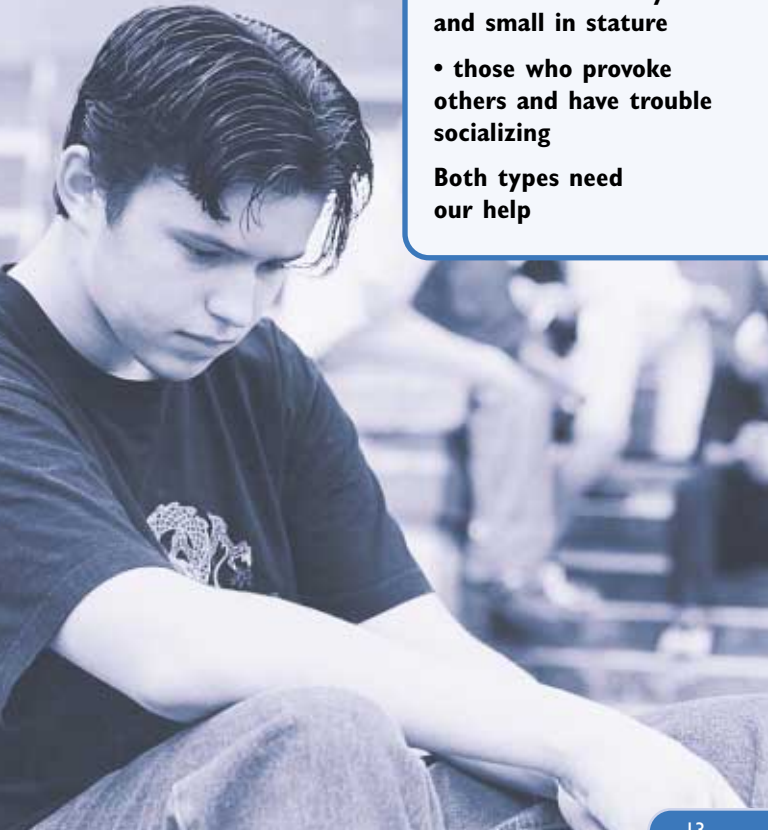
Passive victims are the most common. Often smaller in stature than their harassers, they tend to be shy and have fewer friends. They spend their energy trying to avoid their harassers.

Provocative victims are rarer and often thought to be harassers themselves. They regularly pester others, are quick tempered, have problems socially interacting and are willing to fight back. All victims who are harassed live in fear and silence, and need our help to deal with the trauma.

There are two types of victims

- those who are shy and small in stature
- those who provoke others and have trouble socializing

Both types need our help



Is your child a victim?

For years Jasdeep hung out with the same group of friends, until suddenly he found himself at the receiving end of their cruel comments and racist jokes. Eventually they shunned him entirely.

The phone stopped ringing and he became easily irritated with his parents. He never told anyone about the months and months of harassment he suffered at school. Even when he returned home one evening with a torn jacket and bruised lip, Jasdeep lied and told his parents he'd fallen off his bike.

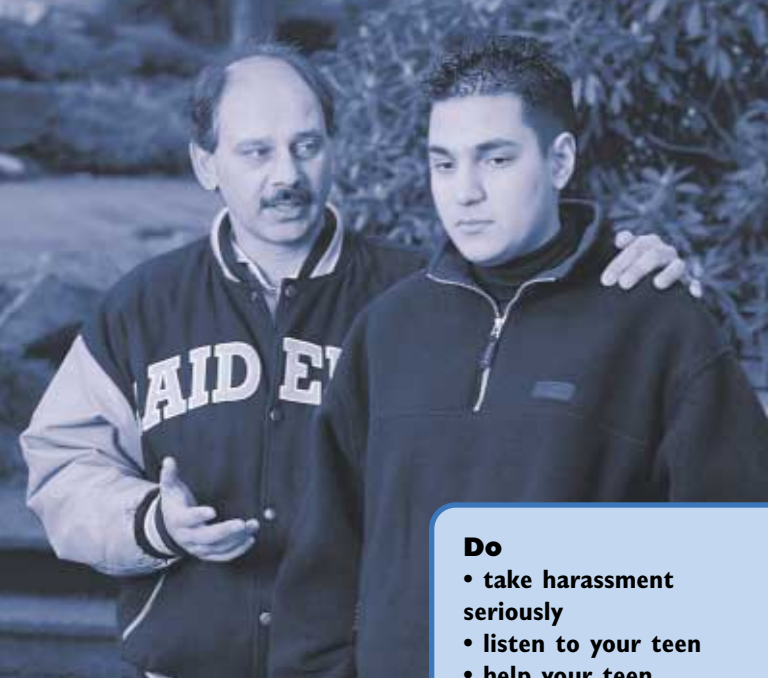
Teens rarely reveal that they're victims of harassment. They may be afraid of retaliation, of being seen as "a wimp", or they may believe that nothing can be done to change it.

There are signs that your teen may be a victim. Your child may avoid or change the route to and from school for no apparent reason. He or she might come home disheveled or extremely hungry, could be missing personal possessions, phone calls may drop off, or your child may appear distressed after receiving a phone call. Other signs include upset stomachs, sulkiness, sleeplessness, or sleeping more than normal.

Trust your instincts. If your "parent radar" is telling you something's wrong, you're probably right.

Signs a teen is harassed

- upset stomach
- sleeplessness
- avoiding school
- missing personal possessions
- sulkiness
- coming home disheveled or hungry
- lack of contact and social interaction with peer group



How can a parent help?

It's tempting to tell your teen to stand up to a harasser. The fact is such action usually creates a far more dangerous situation.

Harassment is real and must be treated seriously, right from the start. So never blame your child for the harassment and never tell your teen to deal with it on his or her own.

Listen closely to your teen without interrupting. While it's great to help your teen problem-solve, chances are he or she may have already tried everything.

If your teen is having trouble making friends at school, try to get him or her involved in clubs or teams outside the school and in something your teen is good at. It may be a sport that he or she's great at, a drama club, or even an organized youth group. It's important to help teens keep their self-esteem intact during these difficult times.

Do

- take harassment seriously
- listen to your teen
- help your teen problem solve

Don't

- blame your teen for the harassment
- expect your teen to deal with it on his or her own

Should a parent intervene?

If your instincts are telling you that your teen is being harassed, try spending some time together such as taking a long car ride. Often kids will disclose harassment when they know they have your ear and feel safe.

Intervention is vital, but how you intervene is equally important. Generally it's not recommended that you contact the harasser or the parent of a harasser. Instead talk to your teen about reporting the incident to the principal, a teacher or counselor. Expect resistance and explain that there's a big difference between "ratting" and "reporting". Reporting is done to help keep someone safe. Ratting or snitching is done to get someone in trouble.

When you talk to the school ensure that it has a plan in place to address bullying and harassment, and that it will keep your teen's identity confidential. If you're getting little response call your local school district office and ask to speak to someone responsible for this area.



Here's how to intervene

- **First get your child's OK to report. Explain that reporting is done to keep people safe.**
- **Ensure the school protects your child's identity before discussing the problem.**
- **Document the incidents.**
- **Call your school district office for more help.**

If harassment continues, document the incident(s). This helps to identify a pattern and provides some objectivity.

Keep in mind, kids often harass others in response to their own victimization. So by addressing the situation, both the victim and their harasser can get the help they need.

Why care when your child isn't involved?



Studies reveal that people who have witnessed harassment and didn't intervene felt more fearful and lived with a sense of shame. To say the least, harassment affects everyone.

Silence only perpetuates the problem. Encourage your teen to tell you about any harassing they may be aware of. If you're aware of an incident yourself, talk to the school. You can even do this anonymously.

At home, talk about harassment and violence with teens. Ask them how they would deal with harassment if it happened to them, or to others. Discussions like these can be the first step in changing things for the better. We need to break the code of silence about harassment. As a society, it's up to everyone to create a safe world for our children.

People who have witnessed harassment but didn't intervene report feeling dis-empowered, fearful, and guilty years after the bullying occurred.

An ounce of prevention...

Richard's parents considered themselves open minded and tolerant. So when they told the occasional joke with racist or homophobic overtones, they thought it was harmless. When Richard's parents were informed by the school that their son had been caught writing homophobic slurs on another student's locker, they were shocked. They didn't understand where this behaviour came from.

Help prevent harassment by

Day to day there's a lot we can do to help prevent violence. Talk to your teen about what it means to be a friend.

Discuss and model non-violent ways to cope with anger. Maybe now is the time to change those habits of shaking your fist at a motorist or berating a store clerk.

Teach acceptance and the value of differences. Avoid stereotyping others through jokes and comments.

Get to know your teen's friends. Invite them into your home. And when your child isn't home, know where he or she is and with whom. Talk about the violence your teen is exposed to in movies, music, the media and in video and computer games.

Finally, keep the lines of communication open. Negotiate with your teen on limits around curfews, homework, chores and activities. Give them choices, but follow through with non-violent consequences such as withdrawal of privileges.

- **modeling anger management**
- **accepting differences in others**
- **discussing media violence with your teen**
- **knowing your teen's friends and whereabouts**
- **setting limits but providing choices**

Get involved with your child's school

Under the School Act, every parent has the right to form or join a PAC (Parent Advisory Council). Find out if your school has one. PACs are specifically created for parents and can provide a forum for their views, arrange for public speakers, and set up workshops.

Harassment and bullying usually occur when kids are on their own. A parent's presence at special events such as school dances can be helpful. But keep in mind, at this age it's best to limit involvement with a school to special events or through your school's PAC. Too much parent visibility can single a teen out, so be sensitive to their culture.

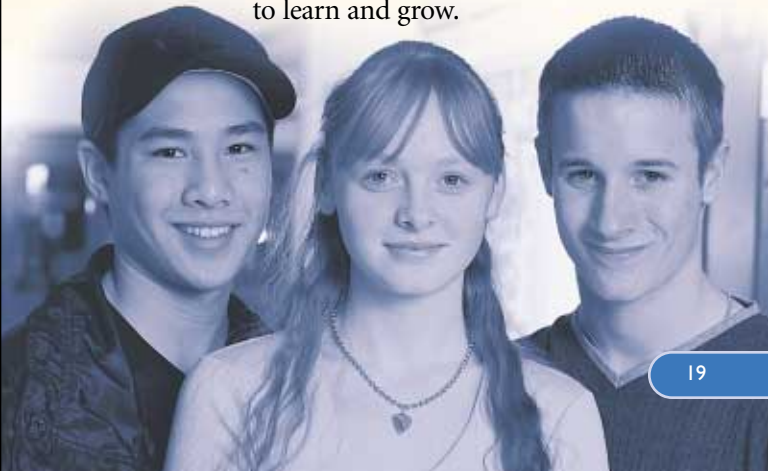
What are BC schools doing?

Many schools have implemented anti-bullying strategies and all BC teachers have access to anti-bullying training programs and information. Students are learning more about living together violence-free through "841-KOZ", a workshop sponsored by the BC Ministry of Attorney General. An invaluable resource for parents is The BC Safe School Centre.

It's up to everyone

We all want our children to live in a safe, caring and non-violent world. And everyone – from parents, to schools, to the community at large – has a role to play in creating a positive place for our children to learn and grow.

**A great
parent resource
is The BC Safe
School Centre.
Call 1-888-
224-SAFE**



Resources

For information on violence prevention

Call: Live Violence Free 1-888-606-LIVE (5483)

The BC Safe School Centre

Call: 1-888-224-SAFE (7233)

<http://www.safeschools.gov.bc.ca>

BC Youth Against Violence Line

Call: 1-800-680-GANG (4264)

For Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays

Call: PFLAG (604) 689-3711

For racism information

Call: BC Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism
& Immigration (604) 660-2203

<http://www.mrmi.gov.bc.ca>

For the Sexual Assault
and Family Violence Crisis Line

Call: Victim Information Line 1-800-563-0808

For parent information & support

Call: BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils
1-888-351-9834

For family violence information and education

Call: BC Institute Against Family Violence
1-877-755-7055 or in Vancouver: 669-7055

<http://www.bcifv.org>

Recommended reading

“The School-Yard Bully”

By Kim Zarzour – Publisher: HarperCollins, 1999

“How Parents Can Take Action Against Bullying”

By Cindi Seddon, Gesele Lajoie, Alyson McLellan

– Publisher: Bully B’ware Productions, 2000

“Sex, Power and the Violent School Girl”

By Sibylle Artz – Publisher: Trifolium Books Inc., 1997

“Stop Teaching our Kids to Kill”

By David Grossman and Gloria DeGastane

– Publisher: Canadian Manda Group, 1999