

Bodies and Bullying

Marissa is talking to some friends in the hall. Scott comes up and roughly puts his arm around her. Marissa tries to squirm away, but Scott has a good grip on her. "Let me go!" she shouts. She pulls away and tries to leave. Scott blocks the way. When Marissa turns her back on him to go in the other direction, Scott snaps her bra.

This type of behavior among upper-elementary students is common, and they find it confusing and difficult to handle. According to the *Steps to Respect* program, the behavior depicted above is bullying. Here are several reasons why:

- Scott's behavior is unfair and one-sided.
- Marissa feels uncomfortable and trapped.
- Scott continues even after Marissa asks him to stop.
- Scott's behavior involves inappropriate touching.

Definition: *Bullying* is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose.

People who bully try to zero in on something that will "get to" someone else. As children mature, bullying becomes more focused on their changing bodies. Name-calling, rude gestures, explicit pictures, inappropriate touching, graphic jokes and language, racial and homophobic slurs, and put-downs for not acting like a boy or a girl are common ways they bully others about bodies. As with all forms of bullying, bullying about bodies can have harmful results and should be reported.

Students in your child's class are learning how to respond safely to bullying (including when to get an adult's help and how to report it). Below are some ideas that you can use at home to reinforce the *Steps to Respect* skills and concepts your child is studying.

- Discuss examples of respectful language and behaviors. Try to focus on examples that might occur between boys and girls. Have your child evaluate examples by asking: Is the behavior fair? How might someone feel when treated this way?
- Discuss appropriate touching versus inappropriate touching between boys and girls. Help your child understand why this is an important distinction to be able to make.
- Establish a safe climate for your child to talk about his or her changing body. Discuss ways that your child can become more comfortable with these changes. Encourage your child to tell you when he or she is being teased about his or her body. Make sure to tell the school with such teasing is going on. Our staff has been trained to know how to respond when this kind of bullying occurs.

These are difficult issues for adults to talk about with children, but children rely on us to help them cope. Thank you for continuing to help create a safe school environment for all of our children.