



Bullying and Parental Intervention

By Lucy Rimalower, LMFT

Parents in my practice often ask “when do I intervene when my teen is faced with bullying?” Some parents believe they should contact school or other authorities at the first sign of their child’s social discomfort. Other parents want their children to handle social conflict more independently.

Start with your child. Teens I work with complain of the “Parent Protective Problem” in which parents jump to action before they can even finish the story. Give your child the opportunity to download his feelings and needs regarding the incident.

Evaluate safety. Is your child physically safe at school? If the answer is no, contact the school and possibly the police to come up

with a plan.

Ask your child about emotional safety. Are there friends she can turn to for support? Is she isolated? Is there a teacher or counselor at school that she can reach to for guidance or respite? Would it be safe for your child to address the bullying party about his behavior?

Your child may also have some ideas about how he’d like to respond. He may feel he can handle the situation himself. If so, set limits. “You can try to address this yourself but if it escalates (ex: becomes more aggressive, more bullies get involved), I’m going to intervene.”

Even with a good support system at school, your child may still want you to reach out for help. Guidance counselors and other

community members may be able to conduct anti-bullying sessions and other strategies to promote compassion and reduce bullying.

If your child is enacting the bullying behavior, let her tell her story. Ask her to role-play being the person feeling bullied. Explore what your family’s values are around how to treat others. Take a look at your family’s dynamics to see if bullying is an issue that needs to be stopped in your own home.

Lucy Rimalower, LMFT, is in private practice in Los Angeles. She works extensively with adolescents and teens dealing with body image and eating disorders. She also works with families with same-sex parents. She speaks and conducts groups on critical adolescent issues. lucyrimalower.com



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