

Bully-proofing your son

By Ian Lillico

"Sticks and stones will break your bones-words will never hurt you" is a saying that is patently untrue today - especially for boys in school.

Recent research indicates that Australian schools really need to tackle bullying by working closely with parents. Boys have difficulty dealing with threats or insults, as they are often unable to retaliate verbally. When boys are shamed by public acts of verbal bullying their self-esteem is eroded dramatically.

Parents need to work with schools to treat bullying seriously as it can lead to absenteeism, depression and (if ignored) self-harm and even suicide. Parents need to be vigilant with their children's friendships and encourage boys to have a peer group outside their school friends to act as support for them when bullying occurs.

Parenting boys is not easy in today's society as there has been a blurring of masculinity and changes to the world of work, which places more emphasis on emotional intelligence (more a feature of girls) than physical strength. Open communication with sons is essential so that when problems (such as bullying) occur, they are more likely to tell parents. Boys often equate admitting being bullied to a sign of weakness.

Studies conducted in Australia reveal that the majority of students are supportive of victims of bullying and would like schools to take action to stop bullying. A number of schools in Western Australia have made it cool to do where students report incidents of bullying to teachers or peers.

When students allow bullying to take place they actually condone it. When schools act to remove bystanders they reduce the bully's power and the propensity to bully is reduced.

When a boy bullies younger brothers or sisters, it is often a sign that someone is bullying him. Parents need to be aware that boys often wear masks during puberty and give the impression that they are okay when they are actually hurting inside.

Schools and homes must be safe places where boys feel valued, cared for and understood. In today's society boys are equally as vulnerable as girls, but rarely reveal their real feelings. Helping them to remove their masks is essential for their future well-being. **Let's work together to help our sons deal with this serious issue.**