

## **BULLYING – MORE THAN AN ISSUE FOR SCHOOLS**

By now, most of us are well aware of the serious issue of bullying. There certainly are no shortages of headlines that pull our attention to the serious impact that bullying is having on our children, youth, schools, and ultimately our communities.

Most likely, each of us has been a part of bullying at one time or another, and can remember the negative feelings associated with being the bully, the victim or a bystander. Typically we don't relate bullying to an impact on our health. However, there are many negative health effects such as distress, anxiety, sleep disturbance, a sense of isolation, depression, loss of self-esteem and self confidence which can affect our school performance, interactions with family and friends, as well as our physical well being. Bullying can have long term consequences on both our physical and mental health well into adulthood and may lead to depression, substance abuse, anxiety, and other stress related health problems. The common perception that bullying is a school problem and that teachers should handle it ignores the many complex contributing factors. In fact, bullying is a much broader social problem that often happens outside of schools, at home, on the street, at our local parks, at the local pool, and in the adult workplace. As adults we need to take responsibility for learning about the issue, and appropriate ways to intervene. We could begin by taking a serious look at our own behavior and recognizing that we are the role models for our children and youth.

Halting the cycle of violence really must start with all of us. Addressing bullying must be considered a community priority and not left on the backs of our schools. There is an obvious urgency for change, and as a community it is essential that we work together sharing our experiences, talents, and resources to tackle the issue. We can begin by recognizing that we all have a role to play. What can you do? Consider developing a violence prevention policy for your sports team or employer, volunteer for your parent council at your child's school, join the Mariposa County Project Respect Committee, speak out against violence in our community when you see it, and most importantly be a role model for our children; "don't be a bully."

If you suspect that your child or teen is being bullied, be there for them, listen and let them know it is not their fault and give them love and support. If you need assistance please call your child's principal or visit our new local website for information for parents and anyone concerned with the issues related to bullying:

[www.mariposaprojectrespect.org](http://www.mariposaprojectrespect.org).

For more information on how to get involved in bullying prevention, contact Cindy Robles or Chevon Kothari at Mountain Crisis Services (742-5865) or Stella Pizello at Mariposa County Unified School District (742-0250).