Reducing School Bullying

Are you aware of how your school handles bullying issues? Research shows that “zero-tolerance” policies are ineffective. What works better is a clearly stated policy which makes clear that students will not bully others, will help victims of bullying, will proactively include students who are frequently left out, and will tell an adult when they know someone is being bullied. If your school does not have strategies like these in place, you might consider talking with other parents and finding ways to advocate for such policies.

At home, parents can help reduce bullying through the following actions:

- **Raise your children in an authoritative, but not authoritarian, manner:** Be firm, but not punitive; establish consistent limits but offer choices; listen to your children so they know they are important and respected; encourage and support your children daily, so that when challenges arise they can meet them confidently.

- **Recognize that your children reflect your values:** Teach your children to treat everyone with respect and kindness; never ridicule those who are different; model effective communication techniques, for if you speak offensively to wait staff, teachers or sales clerks, you are showing your children that bullying is acceptable.

- **Talk with and listen to your children everyday:** Ask open-ended questions about whom they spend time with at school, what they do on the way to and from school, and what goes on in the hallways. If children feel valued and listened to, they will be more likely to let parents know if bullying occurs.

- **Help your children establish a strong support system:** Arrange for social visits with other children; encourage your children to join clubs and sports programs. Having strong friendships builds self-esteem. This serves as a deterrent to bullying as does having a group of friends to hang out with at lunch, on the bus, or when walking home. Children are more likely to be targeted by bullies when they are alone.

- **Learn the signs of bullying:** Children who are bullied often complain of headaches or stomachaches; may want to stay home from school or go very early or very late; frequently withdraw from activities and may see their school grades plummet. In the case of cyberbullying, children will often become both secretive and intense about their internet use or pull back and avoid it entirely.

- **Teach your children to be good witnesses:** Those who witness bullying often feel powerless. Although children should never put themselves in danger, they may effectively diffuse an incident by yelling, “Stop! You are bullying!” Witnesses can also help by supporting the victim, reducing attention to the bully, and reporting the incident to a responsible adult.

Carebridge services are available to covered faculty and staff and their families at no cost to them. Contact Carebridge at any time by calling 800-437-0911 or emailing clientservice@carebridge.com.