

## Bullying awaits 30% of students 8.26.06

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DURHAM — Going back to school may make some children anxious and others joyous. But for the estimated 30 percent of school children who will be bullied or will bully this year, returning to school may be a dreadful experience.

Bullying is a problem that affects not just the two children involved, but can impact a whole school, according to Melissa Holt, a research scientist with the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center. As children return to classrooms, it's increasingly important for parents, teachers, and fellow students to recognize, and respond to, signs of bullying.

"The school climate needs to show bullying won't be tolerated and there will be a respectful climate for everyone," Holt said.

As children return to school, Holt said it's

important for parents to keep a watchful eye out for signs their child might be dealing with bullies. Children who are victims of bullying might show a disinterest in school, complain of feeling sick a lot or appear withdrawn and depressed.

And though the signs are more difficult to spot, Holt said parents should also look for signs that their child might be a bully.

"Asking what sort of behavior they're engaging in at school might help you determine that," she said. If their child is bullying other students, parents should make it clear they do not support the behavior and direct the child to focus his or her energy in meaningful ways, according to Holt.

Students who are victims of bullying can face depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, lower grades and other problems. The bullies themselves can also face later consequences.

"Bullies are more likely to have conduct problems" later in life, Holt said. "In adulthood, they're more likely to be convicted of a crime."

The problem can extend outside of school as well. Research into bullying has shown that both victims and bullies are involved in other forms of victimization at home, in the community and other places outside the classroom.

Holt said studies have shown bullying behavior generally occurs at the elementary- and middle-school levels. Incidents of bullying typically peak in middle school and decline through high school. This is because as children get older it becomes less socially acceptable to engage in bullying behavior, Holt said.

Children who are developmentally disabled, in remedial education or who in some way differ from the norm are more likely to be victims of bullying, according to Holt.

Children are facing a range of bullying, from verbal and physical harassment to confrontations in cyberspace, according to Holt. While boys are more likely to experience physical bullying, girls are more likely to face relational bullying, such as gossip or rumor spreading. Children are also likely to face cyber-bullying, or harassment through e-mail, the Internet or text messages.

Parents and teachers both can play an active role to combat bullying.

At home, parents can provide a model for "respectful actions" and connect with children about what's going on in school. If a child is being bullied, parents should contact school officials and inform them of the problem. Teachers can take a more active role in intervening if they see a child being bullied. And both parents and teachers can provide support and encouragement to children who are victimized.

"The general thing is to create a climate that doesn't tolerate bullying," Holt said.