

More effort needed to help children keep bullying at bay

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PUBLISHED: 4:00 AM, NOVEMBER 16, 2016

Bullying is very real in Singapore and appears to be gaining ground, mainly due to the fact that our children and young people rarely speak up to adults to report bullying (“Police probe alleged student bullying after video of attack goes viral”, Nov 12).

Some may not wish to say anything for fear of retaliation. Some may also hide bullying-related behaviour because they believe they need to “work things out” on their own, or that adults and teachers can do little to help.

In most cases, bullying becomes an “invisible” behaviour that is largely undetected by the school, teachers or concerned parents until it is too late. Because of this, adults often underestimate the seriousness and extent of bullying in schools today.

According to the Singapore Children’s Society bullyfree.sg website, one in five primary-school students and one in four secondary-school students have been bullied. One in three people has been cyber bullied. This is heartbreaking. As a father of a secondary-school boy, and as a parenting coach, I hope that concerned parents, educators and counsellors can come together to help bullied students, and that student bullies get the help they need.

Schools must make a concerted effort to address the nature and seriousness of bullying consistently. This can come in the form of targeted pastoral guidance programmes on bully prevention and anger management, while improving on protocols with regard to handling bullying incidents. These include steering student bullies towards behavioural change while managing the emotions of victims.

At home, parents need to guide children to understand the power dynamics of bullying behaviour, and to emphasise the importance of responsible and non-violent behaviour. Teaching them to differentiate between reporting (telling to keep someone safe) and telling tales (telling to get someone into trouble) can also empower students to come forward rather than remain passive bystanders to wrong behaviour.

I hope for more discussion on what we can do to help children get the help they need to keep bullying at bay.