October is national bully prevention month. The Stopbullying.gov website (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/index.html>) offers this definition about bullying:

“Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.  In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

* An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
* Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.”

This definition is strong and very vivid. This website goes on to describe the types of bullying as well as other related topics. Reading through the information provided on any anti-bullying website or literature can elicit strong emotions about what school age children who are bullied go through. As a school psychologist I understand fully what the emotional and academic impact of bullying can be for the victim.

As parents we want to ensure that our child/children are safe physically and emotionally. As educators we have the same goals for all children who come before us. Anti-bullying awareness has made a big impact on bullying in society. We’ve moved beyond the “Boys will be boys” or “That clique of girls” mentality to addressing social and emotional issues associated with bullying. Educators now have more opportunities to participate in anti-bullying staff development, more literature is provided to educators to assist in ways to deal with bullying situations and schools are promoting anti-bullying programs.

What should parents know about bullying?

* If your child talks to you about bullying listen and offer support. Sometimes children are reluctant to tell parents about bullying for fear of a potential reaction or not being taken seriously. Reinforce to your child that they are doing the right thing by telling you.
* Let someone at school know. It’s surprising how often a parent brings up to school staff (teacher, administrator, and counselor) that their child was being bullied and no one at school was aware of the situation and therefore couldn’t offer assistance.
* Remind your child that fighting back or bullying back is not the answer. In certain situations it’s OK to stand up to the bully, but the child must be in a safe situation.
* If your child reports that another student is being bullied encourage him/her to report it to an adult at school. Remind your child that they are supported for speaking out against bullying.

There are volumes of websites that you can read through that will provide in depth information about bullying (what to do, signs, tip sheets, etc). With regard to bullying, knowledge really is power. Empowering our children to know what to do, who to talk to and the knowledge that they are supported if they are bullied really can make a difference.

*Information compiled by Lisa Tomaino, School Psychologist in the Wake County Public School System in October 2014.*