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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2004 annual meeting, May 26-28, 2004.

BULLYING CAN LEAD TO AGGRESSION AND DEPRESSION IN BOTH VICTIM AND PERPETRATOR

Experts say United States can learn from Canadian experience

- What are the effects of bullying on victims and perpetrators?
- Can parents recognize symptoms of bullying?
- How early does bullying start; can it be prevented?

Bullying in schools is a major problem, both in Canada and the United States. Video footage of elementary school playgrounds show that a bullying incident occurs every 7 minutes. An estimated 10 to 20 percent of American students are chronic targets of bullying at school—that's 40 to 80 children in a school of 400. Some experts estimate that 15-40 percent of children are involved in bullying as aggressors or victims, and these students are at risk for problems such as truancy, delinquency and depression.

Bullying is a group phenomenon, with bystanders playing a critical role in either reinforcing or stopping bullying. When bystanders are quiet, they appear to support bullying; if they take action, they risk becoming tattlers. Experts say that kids must be taught the difference between tattling and reporting bullying. Tattling to get someone in trouble is not the correct approach. But reporting bullying to protect someone's safety is what children should be taught to do.

A series of studies presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Prevention Research in Quebec City, Canada, will look at how Canada is dealing with bullying. Currently, there is a groundswell of activities in Canada at the local, provincial and national levels. Programs in Canada begin with elementary school kids, who are taught to develop positive relationships with their peers, while teachers learn to create and implement effective policies. U.S. experts say there is much to learn from the Canadian experience. Bullying experts will also address the question of whether bullying is a part of normal development. Some kids who bully may be displaying future leadership potential; but others may progress to dating violence and other kinds of aggression. A desire to avoid school and anxiety about going to school are signs that parents should watch for among victims of bullying.

Sources: Karin Frey, Ph.D., University of Washington, Seattle; Debra Pepler, Ph.D., York University, Toronto; Wendy Craig, Ph.D., Queens University at Kingston, Ontario.