

No Bullies No Victims

# Parent Handouts

# No Bullies No Victims

## Bullying – A Parent’s Perspective

What do you tell your children when you find out they are the targets of bullying at school? It needs to be more than “Just ignore them”, much more than “Toughen up – don’t be a crybaby”, and a complete departure from “What did you do to deserve it?” and “Just give it back to them – harder!”

Working backwards: Please do not tell your children to physically fight back! A generation ago, that might have been acceptable advice. Now, the schools and the justice system do not care who starts a fight. Schools practice “zero tolerance” and both fighters are in trouble, possibly arrested. Too many targets have been punished, on top of being victimized and pushed to overreact, while the bully denies any role as instigator. Will the bully admit he or she had it coming? Of course not! In fact, the bully’s parents may even press charges!

“What did you do to deserve it?” Some kids really are natural targets. They are different, introverted, misfits. Sometimes the bully is right about the facts: the child is fat, slow, weak, hyperactive, or whatever. Does that give anyone the right to point it out to them in the meanest possible manner, and attach a negative conclusion about their worth as a person? The answer is “NO!!” No matter what difficulty your child has, no one has the right to bully them.

This is an important message. Most verbal bullying gives the message that the child is worthless, is a bad person, has no friends, etc., because of some characteristic which is, in fact, true. It is this negative interpretation of the facts that you can counter, through patience, love and practice. The messages you give your child about who they are is just as important as what their peers are saying at school.

Our self-image is often formed by what others say, and, especially, how they say it. Children usually assume that there is something wrong with them: that whatever they are sensitive about – which the bullies WILL find and exploit – makes them deserve the bullying. Then, they compound that assumption with self-loathing at their inability to handle it. It may be true that a child needs to “toughen up.” Saying that to them won’t help. Helping them to see bullying for the abuse of power that it is, will. Your child does not have to believe the bully’s interpretation of the facts!

Your child needs to know that there is no excuse for other children to interpret the facts to mean that they are unacceptable as human beings because of their differences. Everyone has the right to feel safe at school– even if they truly are disadvantaged physically, developmentally, psychologically or socially.

If your child has been a bully or has been aggressive with other children it is important to help that child change his or her behavior. You can support your child by noticing and pointing out aggressive behavior, helping them label what they feel and explore new, less aggressive ways to get what they need. Many times children don’t realize they are using aggression when assertiveness would work much better.

### **There are four key ideas that can really help kids handle bullying at school:**

**Bullying is always done on purpose, to hurt someone.** ALL of the “things bullies do” are choices they make, on purpose, to hurt other people. It’s not about what we wear or how we look or act.

**Nothing about your child gives anyone the right to bully them.** Teach your child not to accept the bully’s interpretation.

**Every child can do something about bullying.** Whether your child is the target, a bystander or a bully, change is always possible. Help your children to practice the techniques they learn in the bully presentations and help them to plan ahead for handling difficult situations. Help your child to focus on the good in themselves and in others. Help them also to find their own strengths and talents to help build their self esteem.

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## What is Bullying?

- A **PATTERN** of **REPEATED, DELIBERATE** hostility and aggression by group or individual, towards another, designed to injure, disturb, threaten or upset the target
- **UNEQUAL POWER** - A target who is *WEAKER* and less powerful in some way than the bully
- Lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings and concerns of the target
- Blaming the target for what has happened
- Targets feeling helpless and out of control

## Kinds of Bullying

- **Physical Bullying** – hitting; kicking; taking or damaging victims’ property; pushing; blocking others into corners or lockers; pinching; spitting; tripping; pulling hair; biting
- **Verbal Bullying** - name calling; insulting, persistent teasing; making threatening remarks or gestures; sarcastic remarks; making fun of appearance, clothing, family or abilities; cursing or using foul and inappropriate language; yelling at someone
- **Emotional Bullying** - excluding others from a group; forming “cliques” or gangs; spreading nasty rumors; rejecting others from a peer group for no apparent reason; ridicule; humiliation; preventing someone from doing what they are supposed/want to do; making someone do what they don’t want to do or that they know to be wrong; framing or blaming someone to get them in trouble; tattling
- **Sexual Bullying** – **ANY** unwanted physical touch, negative comments about someone’s body; making crude sexual remarks; embarrassing others; coercing someone into doing something they feel uncomfortable with; calling someone “gay”, “fag” or “lesbian”, making comments about someone’s body; making obscene or crude gestures; any actions that make someone feel uncomfortable about themselves or their bodies; making rude or inappropriate drawings; sending sexual information out over electronic media; spreading rumors about someone’s alleged sexual activities or reputation.
- **Racial Bullying** - Racial taunts; graffiti; racial name calling; making someone feel different or excluding them based on race, religion or ethnic background;
- **Cyber Bullying** – Using a website to spread rumors or say unkind/inappropriate things about another student or post pictures; using e-mail, Instant Messaging, text messages or cell phones to send threatening or hateful messages or information to or about another student.

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## Facts and Figures on Bullying

- Studies in several countries have shown that at least 80% of students in schools are involved at the beginning of the school year as bullies look for receptive targets
- Throughout the school year approximately 30% of children are involved as bullies, targets or both. It is estimated that there are more than 2 million bullies nationwide and 3 million targets
- According to the CDC, every day 160,000 children miss school for fear of being bullied.
- Bullies tend to come from homes where there is poor supervision, and aggressive behavior is modeled and/or tolerated.
- Only half of bullies have low self-esteem. The other half have inflated self-esteem and believe they have the right to victimize others.
- Most adults are not aware of a bullying problem and most victims do not tell an adult.
- Both boys and girls bully. Boys are more likely to engage in direct physical bullying. Girls tend to use covert behaviors such as social exclusion, peer rejection and spreading rumors. However, boys do engage in relational, and female aggression is on the rise - girls are becoming more physically violent.
- Direct bullying seems to increase through the elementary years, peak in the middle school/junior high school years and decline during the high school years.
- Physical or psychological intimidation occurs repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse.
- Bullies tend to have problems with aggression, alcoholism and failed relationships as adults.
- Many children labeled as bullies will experience some legal problems as teens and adults.
- Targets may end up with lifelong problems with depression and low self-esteem
- Childhood physical or sexual bullies are more likely to become sexual harassers and violence prone in their relationships as teenagers.
- **Bullies and targets can benefit long-term from individual and group counseling, however immediate and consistent consequences, along with long-term close supervision and monitoring are the only effective means of reducing bullying behaviors immediately.**

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## Why Do Bullies Do It?

- Family problems – poor parenting, violence, substance abuse, divorce, death or illness in family.
- Poor role models from the family, friends or media violence
- Been bullied themselves and passing it along
- Selfish or spoiled and always want to get their own way
- Truly believe they are better than others, and have the right to put others down
- Have no friends and feel lonely or want attention.
- Feel bad about themselves and want to make others feel bad too
- Feel insecure and unimportant - bullying gives them power
- Want to look “cool or tough” in front of others – bullies can be great leaders
- Boredom
- Joined a bully group and have gone along with things just to keep on the bully’s good side
- Don’t understand how bad victims feel
- Poor social skills
- Think it’s fun or funny
- Feel helpless, out of control and powerless and so they want to feel “in control”
- Worried about their own flaws so they bully to feel successful and competent
- Aggressive behavior patterns
- Want to dominate their peers
- To keep themselves out of trouble while blaming others
- Defiant and impulsive

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## Why Might Kids Be Targets?

- Passive when confronted by a bully
- Are alone or have gotten into a cycle of withdrawal
- Cry or show emotions easily
- Lack the social skills to deflect the bullying
- Not able to dodge a conflict with humor
- Don't think quickly on their feet
- Easily aroused or frustrated – bullies love reactions
- Behave or look “different” than the other children around them – (eg. Disabilities, skin color, clothes, awkward)
- Learning or speech difficulty, other disabilities or very smart
- Physically or emotionally weaker than the bully
- Suffer from low self esteem
- Anxious and cautious
- Timid/shy or provocative/annoying
- Simply there – ANYONE CAN BE A TARGET

**None of these characteristics are the reason kids get bullied. They are just excuses the bully makes. Bullying is about the bully wanting power!**

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## Signs a Child is Being Bullied For Parents

### Children may:

- Be frightened of walking to or from school
- Change their usual route
- Not want to go on the school bus; beg you to drive them to school
- Be unwilling to go to school
- Feel ill in the mornings
- Begin to skip school
- Begin doing poorly in their school work
- Come home regularly with books or clothes destroyed
- Come home starving because the bully has taken their lunch or money
- Become withdrawn, start stammering, lack confidence
- Become distressed and anxious
- Have appetite problems – eating too much or too little
- Threaten or attempt suicide
- Cry themselves to sleep; have nightmares
- Keep “losing” possessions or money
- Ask for money or start stealing money (to pay the bully)
- Refuse to say what is wrong due to fear of retaliation by the bully
- Have unexplained bruises, scratches or cuts
- Begin to bully other children
- Become unreasonable and aggressive
- Give improbable excuses to explain any of the above

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## If Your Child Is Being Bullied

- Ask your child directly if he/she is being bullied.
- **TAKE THE PROBLEM SERIOUSLY - CONTACT THE SCHOOL IMMEDIATELY.**
- Listen to your child without interrupting or judging. Let them tell you what is happening. Ask questions that help get all the facts, but don't interrupt.
- Keep telling your child you love them and are 100% on their side.
- **ASSURE THEM THAT THE BULLYING IS NOT THEIR FAULT.** Tell them "there is nothing about you that makes you deserve to be treated that way."
- Help them learn assertive – not aggressive – ways to react to the bully and explain why.
- Practice assertiveness techniques with your child.
- Help your child to think up simple responses to the bully.
- Help your child minimize opportunities for bullying.
- Remind your child that keeping safe is more important than possessions.
- Make time to sit down with your child and listen to their feelings and ideas.
- Discuss alternatives with your child; encourage them to see themselves as having options.
- Praise your child when they accomplish something, remind them of these accomplishments when they are feeling helpless or hopeless.
- Make opportunities for children to succeed.
- Help children develop social skills. Make opportunities for children to practice. **START SMALL and BE PATIENT!!**
- Help children to take up a hobby, activity or sport, or volunteer together.
- Consider enrolling your child in a self-defense class to build confidence, not to fight back.
- Encourage your child to join new groups, and lend support until he/she feels comfortable.
- Work with the school to eliminate the problem.

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## If Your Child Is the BULLY

- STAY CALM. DO NOT BECOME ANGRY OR DEFENSIVE.
- Find out exactly what your child has done and if they have behaved this way before. Keep in mind that BULLIES TEND TO MINIMIZE OR DENY THEIR BEHAVIOR.
- Explore with your child to see if he/she has any idea why they bully and what they think might help.
- Reassure them that you love them – it's their behavior you don't like.
- Find out if there is something in particular troubling them and try to sort it out.
- SET LIMITS. Let your children know that bullying is NEVER OK. Arrange for effective, non-violent consequences that fit the behavior.
- **INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF SUPERVISION YOUR CHILD RECEIVES, BOTH AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL. ASK WHO, WHAT, WHERE AND WHY OFTEN.**
- Minimize the viewing of violent television shows, video games and movies your child is allowed. Watch television and movies with them and discuss. Set standards for YOUR home.
- Address any ongoing violence or problems within the family.
- Stop any show of aggression. Help children recognize their anger and explore constructive ways to deal with the anger.
- Teach your child the difference between passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior. Help him/her practice assertive behaviors at home. Be supportive.
- Discuss alternatives for when your child may be faced with a frustrating situation or an opportunity to bully. Teach them to PLAN AHEAD!
- Encourage children to WALK AWAY, COOL DOWN AND THINK.
- Praise your children when they accomplish something.
- Work with the teacher and school personnel in setting realistic goals for your child and follow up frequently, providing support and encouragement.
- BE PATIENT!!! Changes take time, but continue to provide consequences for backsliding

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## Teaching Assertiveness Skills

- Demonstrate assertive behavior.
- Contrast aggressive, assertive and submissive responses through role play or demonstration.
- Discuss specific troublesome situations and how to respond assertively.
- Teach children to seek help when confronted by the abuse of power by other children or adults.
- Remind children they have the option to ignore routine teasing by turning their heads or walking away.
- Teach and practice with children:
  - Standing up straight and tall with a serious/calm expression, crossing arms to look confident, making eye contact and speaking assertively – or saying nothing at all!
  - Using humor to diffuse a situation or simply agreeing with the bully
  - Distracting the bully by talking about something else and not responding to the cruelty
  - Walking away TO a group of other students or adults
  - Saying “So?” or “What’s your point?” with some attitude!
- Teach children to ask for things directly and respond directly to each other. Friendly suggestions are taken more easily than bossy demands. Bullies need to learn social skills also.
- After a conflict between children, adults can replay the scene with each child separately and discuss feelings and other ways each child might have responded. Have each child take the other’s part as well.
- Show children how to resolve problems firmly and fairly.
- Identify acts of aggression, bossiness or discrimination for children and teach them not to accept them.
- Show children the rewards of personal satisfaction through standing up for themselves, rather than depending on the approval of others only, and helping others to do so.
- Discuss and model appropriate interpersonal boundaries and respect for others.
- Supervise, coach and notice their efforts. Remember: **PRACTICE MAKES BETTER!**

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## Helping Your Children Be Strong

### **Strong Kids:**

- Laugh at themselves
- Play well with others
- Understand how to use problem solving skills
- Respond to the needs and feelings of others
- Are independent
- Have a sense of purpose and the future
- Feel loved, accepted and supported at home

### Parents Need to:

- Provide children with structure and routines
- Set clear and consistent rules; use alternatives to physical force
- Keep track of what is going on at school
- Encourage children to try new things
- Be accepting, caring and supportive of every child in the family
- Have high expectations of children's behavior
- Give children a voice in setting rules and routines
- Give children responsibilities at home
- Encourage volunteerism
- Spend individual time with each child at leisure at least once a week
- ASK WHERE; WHEN; WITH WHOM; DOING WHAT?**
- Listen more than they talk when the child wants to reveal problems.

### Healthy Families:

- Share a sense of pride and tradition
- Eat together at the table regularly
- Talk together everyday
- Plan together so that everyone knows what is ahead
- Celebrate holidays and special events in their own special way
- Problem solve together
- Are flexible in their approach to problems
- Are willing to ask for help when they need it
- Care about the development and happiness of others
- Volunteer together
- Have a shared spiritual faith
- Help each person find a way to succeed