

# BULLYING

NEWSLETTER [ VOL.9 | ISSUE 9 | BULLYING 101 ]

## Bullying The Role of Schools

Schools play a critical role in stopping bullying, because most aggression happens on school grounds during recess, in lunch rooms, or in bathrooms. Schools should have and enforce zero-tolerance programs that make it clear that bullying won't be tolerated.

### School-based programs can help reduce bullying when they:

- Raise awareness of bullying through school assemblies and classroom discussion of the problem. These conversations should include teaching healthy ways to control anger. They should also teach the value of cooperation, positive communication skills, and friendship.
- Have peers help settle an incident and talk with all students involved.
- Increase parents' and teachers' involvement.
- Increase supervision of children on school grounds, especially when they are out of the classroom.
- Form clear rules about behavior that will not be tolerated.
- Provide support and protection for children who are bullied.

You can help your child's school develop bullying policies by becoming involved in parent-teacher organizations (PTO or PTA) and by volunteering to help teachers.

In the classroom, teachers should make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated. Teachers must be prepared to follow through with consequences if bullying occurs. Doing so sends the message that adults are serious about the problem. It also encourages children who are not involved in bullying to report any incidents they see.

Conferences can be held—separately or together—with the parents of both children involved in bullying incidents.

School-based programs are one piece of a larger plan to help children understand the importance of treating one another with kindness and respect.

## Bullying is a **BIG** Problem

Every day thousands of teens wake up afraid to go to school. Bullying is a problem that affects millions of students, and it has everyone worried, not just the kids on its receiving end. Yet because parents, teachers, and other adults don't always see it, they may not understand how extreme bullying can get.

Bullying is when a person is picked on over and over again by an individual or group with more power, either in terms of physical strength or social standing. If someone sends you a mean email about another person, don't forward it to others. Print it out and show it to an adult.

Two of the main reasons people are bullied are because of appearance and social status. Bullies pick on the people they think don't fit in, maybe because of how they look, how they act (for example, kids who are shy and withdrawn), their race or religion, or because the bullies think their target may be gay or lesbian.

Some bullies attack their targets physically, which can mean anything from shoving or tripping to punching or hitting, or even sexual assault. Others use psychological control or verbal insults to put themselves in charge. For example, people in popular groups or cliques often bully people they categorize as different (psychological bullying). They may also taunt or tease their targets (verbal bullying).

Verbal bullying can also involve sending cruel instant or email messages or even posting insults about a person on a website—practices that are known as cyberbullying.

## How Does Bullying Make People Feel?

One of the most painful aspects of bullying is that it is relentless. Most people can take one episode of teasing or name calling or being shunned at the mall. However, when it goes on and on, bullying can put a person in a state of constant fear.

Guys and girls who are bullied may find their schoolwork and health suffering. Amber began having stomach pains and diarrhea and was diagnosed with a digestive condition called irritable bowel syndrome as a result of the

stress that came from being bullied throughout ninth grade. Mafooz spent his afternoons hungry and unable to concentrate in class because he was too afraid to go to the school cafeteria at lunchtime.

Studies show that people who are abused by their peers are at risk for mental health problems, such as low self-esteem, stress, depression, or anxiety. They may also think about suicide more.

Bullies are at risk for problems, too. Bullying is violence, and it often leads to more violent behavior as the bully grows up. It's estimated that 1 out of 4 elementary-school bullies will have a criminal record by the time they are 30. Some teen bullies end up being rejected by their peers and lose friendships as they grow older. Bullies may also fail in school and not have the career or relationship success that other people enjoy.

## Who Bullies?

Both guys and girls can be bullies. Bullies may be outgoing and aggressive. Or a bully can appear reserved on the surface, but may try to manipulate people in subtle, deceptive ways, like anonymously starting a damaging rumor just to see what happens.

Many bullies share some common characteristics. They like to dominate others and are generally focused on themselves. They often have poor social skills and poor social judgment. Sometimes they have no feelings of empathy or caring toward other people.

Although most bullies think they're hot stuff and have the right to push people around, others are actually insecure. They put other people down to make themselves feel more interesting or powerful. And some bullies act the way they do because they've been hurt by bullies in the past — maybe even a bullying figure in their own family, like a parent or other adult.

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## BIG Problem continued

Some bullies actually have personality disorders that don't allow them to understand normal social emotions like guilt, empathy, compassion, or remorse. These people need help from a mental health professional like a psychiatrist or psychologist.

## What Can You Do?

For younger kids, the best way to solve a bullying problem is to tell a trusted adult. For teens, though, the tell-an-adult approach depends on the bullying situation.

One situation in which it is vital to report bullying is if it threatens to lead to physical danger and harm. Numerous high-school students have died when stalking, threats, and attacks went unreported and the silence gave the bully license to become more and more violent.

Sometimes the victim of repeated bullying cannot control the need for revenge and the situation becomes dangerous for everyone.

Adults in positions of authority — parents, teachers, or coaches — can often find ways to resolve dangerous bullying problems without the bully ever learning how they found out about it.

If you're in a bullying situation that you think may escalate into physical violence, try to avoid being alone (and if you have a friend in this situation, spend as much time together as you can). Try to remain part of a group by walking home at the same time as other people or by sticking close to friends or classmates during the times that the bullying takes place.

## Bullying Survival Tips

Here are some things you can do to combat psychological and verbal bullying. They're also good tips to share with a friend as a way to show your support:

- **Ignore the bully and walk away.** It's definitely not a coward's response — sometimes it can be harder than losing your temper. Bullies thrive on the reaction they get, and if you walk away or ignore hurtful emails or instant messages, you're telling the bully that you just don't care. Sooner or later the bully will probably get bored with trying to bother you. Walk tall and hold your head high. Using this type of body language sends a message that you're not vulnerable.

- **Hold the anger.** Who doesn't want to get really upset with a bully? But that's exactly the response he or she is trying to get. Bullies want to know they have control over your emotions. If you're in a situation where you have to deal with a bully and you can't walk away with poise, use humor — it can throw the bully off guard. Work out your anger in another way, such as through exercise or writing it down (make sure you tear up any letters or notes you write in anger).
- **Don't get physical.** However you choose to deal with a bully, don't use physical force (like kicking, hitting, or pushing). Not only are you showing your anger, you can never be sure what the bully will do in response. You are more likely to be hurt and get in to trouble if you use violence against a bully. You can stand up for yourself in other ways, such as gaining control of the situation by walking away or by being assertive in your actions. Some adults believe that bullying is a part of growing up (even that it is character building) and that hitting back is the only way to tackle the problem. But that's not the case. Aggressive responses tend to lead to more violence and more bullying for the victims.
- **Practice confidence.** Practice ways to respond to the bully verbally or through your behavior. Practice feeling good about yourself (even if you have to fake it at first).
- **Take charge of your life.** You can't control other people's actions, but you can stay true to yourself. Think about ways to feel your best — and your strongest — so that other kids may give up the teasing. Exercise is one way to feel strong and powerful. (It's a great mood lifter, too!) Learn a martial art or take a class like yoga. Another way to gain confidence is to hone your skills in something like chess, art, music, computers, or writing. Joining a class, club, or gym is a great way to make new friends and feel great about yourself. The confidence you gain will help you ignore the mean kids.
- **Talk about it.** It may help to talk to a guidance counselor, teacher, or friend — anyone who can give you the support you need. Talking can be a good outlet for the fears and frustrations that can build when you're being bullied.
- **Find your (true) friends.**

If you've been bullied with rumors or gossip, all of the above tips (especially ignoring and not reacting) can apply. But take it one step further to help ease feelings of hurt and isolation. Find one or two true friends and confide how the gossip has hurt your feelings. Set the record straight by telling your friends quietly and confidently what's true and not true about you. Hearing a friend say, "I know the rumor's not true. I didn't pay attention to it," can help you realize that most of the time people see gossip for what it is — petty, rude, and immature.

## What If You're The Bully?

All of us have to deal with a lot of difficult situations and emotions. For some people, when they're feeling stressed, angry, or frustrated, picking on someone else can be a quick escape — it takes the attention away from them and their problems. Some bullies learn from firsthand experience. Perhaps name-calling, putdowns, or physical force are the norms in their families. Whatever the reason, though, it's no excuse for being the bully.

If you find it hard to resist the temptation to bully, you might want to talk with someone you look up to. Try to think about how others feel when you tease or hurt them. If you have trouble figuring this out (many people who bully do), you might ask someone else to help you think of the other person's side.

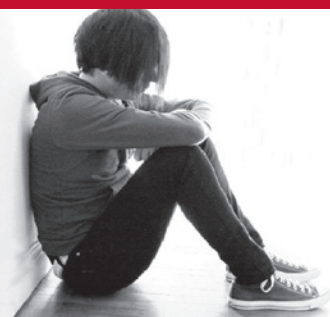
Bullying behavior backfires and makes everyone feel miserable — even the bullies. People might feel intimidated by bullies, but they don't respect them. If you would rather that people see your strength and character — even look up to you as a leader — find a way to use your power for something positive rather than to put others down.

Do you really want people to think of you as unkind, abusive, and mean? It's never too late to change, although changing a pattern of bullying might seem difficult at first. Ask an adult you respect for some mentoring or coaching on how you could change.

**“One of the most painful aspects of bullying is that it is relentless.”**

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## Steps to STOP Bullying in Schools

If the environment at your school supports bullying, working to change it can help. For example, there may be areas where bullies harass people, such as in stairwells or courtyards that are unobserved by staff. Because a lot of bullying takes part in the presence of peers (the bully wants to be recognized and feel powerful, after all), enlisting the help of friends or a group is a good way to change the culture and stand up to bullies.

You can try to talk to the bully. If you don't feel comfortable in a face-to-face discussion, leave a note in the bully's locker. Try to point out that his or her behavior is serious and harmful. This can work well in group situations, such as if you notice that a member of your group has started to pick on or shun another member.

Most people hesitate to speak out because it can be hard. It takes confidence to stand up to a bully — especially if he or she is one of the established group leaders. But chances are the other students witnessing the bullying behavior feel as uncomfortable as you do. They may just not be speaking up. Perhaps they feel that they're not popular enough to take a stand or worry that they're vulnerable and the bully will turn on them. Staying quiet (even though they don't like the bully's behavior) is a way to distance themselves from the person who is the target.

When a group of people keeps quiet like this, the bully's reach is extending beyond just one person. He or she is managing to intimidate lots of people. But when one person speaks out against a bully, the reverse happens. It gives others license to add their support and take a stand, too.

Another way to combat bullying is to join your school's anti-violence program or, **if your school doesn't have one, to start one of your own.**



## BULLYING – How Adults Can Help Stop It

As with many issues related to growing up, openly talking about bullying before it happens is most helpful for children. Teach your child how to recognize and react to bullying, regardless of who is the victim. Also, talk about and model empathy, which is being sensitive to and understanding how other people feel. This can help prevent your child from becoming involved in bullying others.

Children on both sides of bullying incidents need help. Adults must first recognize that bullying should not be ignored. This includes the form of bullying that makes others feel excluded and shunned. No bullying behaviors should be considered a normal part of growing up. Bullying is abusive behavior that has a negative impact on other children. Bullying may also be an early sign of more violent or cruel behavior later in life.

If you witness bullying, intervene and speak up. Make it clear that you will not tolerate it. Ideally, build an alliance with a bullying child's parents first. If you confront the bully on behalf of your child without his or her parents around, you risk putting the child on the defensive. Also, children who bully often are skilled in turning their parents against you. Don't give them the chance to come up with a different version of the real story. And remember that parents may be the role models for a child's bullying behavior.

## If you think your child is bullying others

Aggressive behavior often starts early in a child's life. Although it is normal for young

children to hit, fight, and argue with each other, most will learn to control these impulses. You can help your child understand that his or her words and actions affect other people. You play an important role in making your child aware of others' feelings.

Your child may be bullying another if s/he:

- Comes home from school with extra money or "new" toys, books, or clothes.
- Is cruel or mean when talking about other children.
- Excludes other children from activities.

If you see any of this behavior, take action. Discuss the situation with your child as soon as possible before the behavior becomes routine. Ask questions to find out what is going on in your child's life. It may be that your child is being bullied and is dealing with it by targeting other children. Or your child may not yet know the importance of understanding the feelings of others (empathy).

You can help your child by setting rules, supervising activities, and leading by example. Control your anger, and show sensitivity and respect for others. If a child bullies, do not punish him or her with physical force (corporal punishment), such as spanking. Physical punishment only strengthens the belief that people can get what they want through aggression.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (U.S. Organization) recommends that parents of children who bully seek help from their child's teacher, principal, school counselor, pediatrician, or family doctor. These professionals can help evaluate your child's behavior and make a referral to a child and adolescent psychiatrist, a psychologist, or a licensed counselor who can work with your child.

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## Adults Stop It continued

### If you think your child is being bullied

Many children are too embarrassed or are afraid to tell an adult about bullying. They may think that involving an adult will only make the problem worse. Help prepare children by teaching them socialization skills, modeling friendly behavior, and telling them that you will always be there for them. Mention that if something bothers them, they can also talk with a school counselor.

Be familiar with signs of bullying, such as frequent headaches, stomachaches, or not wanting to go to school. Also, ask your child questions, such as whom he or she eats with at lunch or plays with at recess. If you sense something is wrong, trust your instincts.

#### Help your child deal with bullying by:

- Talk about the situation. Although often reluctant at first, many children who are bullied will open up if they are in the right environment. A good place to start these discussions is in the car or other place where you have little eye-to-eye contact. Listen calmly and thoughtfully. Don't promise that you won't tell anyone. Rather, admit that you may need to become involved but you will do your very best not to make problems worse.
- Practice role-playing at home. Encourage your child to react calmly and confidently to taunting. Help your child understand that responding with physical aggression or insults usually will make the problem worse.
- Teach your child behaviors that show confidence rather than shyness and vulnerability. Children can learn to look people in the eye and speak up when they talk. Assure your child that confident behavior can be learned. Help build your child's self-esteem by suggesting that he or she meet others through different activities. Having friends and interests can boost a child's confidence and make him or her less likely to be bullied.
- Encourage your child to think about the qualities that make a good friend.
- Suggest that your child join activities that are supervised by an adult. Bullying is less likely to occur near adults.



## Recognizing the Warning Signs

### Being Bullied

- Comes home with damaged or missing clothing or other belongings
- Reports losing items such as books, electronics, clothing, or jewelry
- Has unexplained injuries
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or feeling sick
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Has changes in eating habits
- Hurts themselves
- Are very hungry after school from not eating their lunch
- Runs away from home
- Loses interest in visiting or talking with friends
- Is afraid of going to school or other activities with peers
- Loses interest in school work or begins to do poorly in school
- Appears sad, moody, angry, anxious or depressed when they come home
- Talks about suicide
- Feels helpless
- Often feels like they are not good enough
- Blames themselves for their problems
- Suddenly has fewer friends
- Avoids certain places
- Acts differently than usual

### Bullying Others

- Becomes violent with others
- Gets into physical or verbal fights with others
- Gets sent to the principal's office or detention a lot
- Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained
- Is quick to blame others
- Will not accept responsibility for their actions
- Has friends who bully others
- Needs to win or be best at everything

### HELP LINES

Someone is at immediate risk of harm because of bullying	Call the police 919
Your child is feeling suicidal because of bullying	Contact the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Crisis Centre) T +242 328-0922
Your child's teacher is not keeping your child safe from being bullied	Contact your local school administrator (principal or superintendent)
Your school is not keeping your child safe from being bullied	Contact the Department of Education T +242 502-2700
Your child is sick, stressed, not sleeping, or is having other problems because of bullying	Contact your counselor or other health professional
Your child is bullied because of their race, ethnicity, or disability and local help is not working to solve the problem	Contact the Ministry of Education T +242 502-2700

Did you know that 56% of students have personally witnessed some type of bullying at school.