

An Easy-to-Read Booklet on Dealing with Bullying

Parents and Caregivers Can Lessen the Hurt and Harm of Bullying

Bullying is a school, home and community problem that affects all kids.

Bullying is a **learned behavior** that fails to show **respect**. The bully **intends hurt** and **repeats** this behavior.

- 20% of kids say they have been a bully.
- 50% say they have been a victim/target of a bully.
- 80% are regularly bystanders.

During calls to the Parent Help Line, parents discuss their fears and feelings about bullying:

- *I feel helpless. I cannot keep my child safe.*
- *I report the bullying, but the student continues the threats.*
- *I just learned my daughter is a cyber bully.*
- *My son now hates school. He shows signs of depression.*

This booklet provides tips to help kids deal with bullying – whether they are the bully, the target or the bystander. **Parents and caregivers can lessen the hurt and harm that are the results of bullying.**

Parents need to teach their child **skills**. Most kids do not naturally have social skills. So, just telling your child what to do and say is not enough. You need to teach and practice skills. Then, during a bullying incident your child can use these skills to help himself or others.

How Can You Help?

- Know the facts and risk factors of bullying.
- Assess your child: Is he a bully? Is he a target? Does he see others bullied? *Use the chart on the back of this booklet.* Listen and avoid judgment and anger.
- Show empathy. Let your words, tone of voice, and actions say, “*I understand your feelings.*”
- **Teach positive life skills.** Build self-esteem. Practice coping skills.
- Stop bullying in your home. Set rules and enforce them.
- Become a school volunteer – an extra set of eyes to see and stop acts of bullying.



Facts About Bullying

Is bullying just kids being kids? No! *Bullies learn this mean behavior and intend harm. A child needs an adult to help him deal with a bully.*

Bullying is a daily school problem.

It involves:

- **Repeated** behavior **intended** to do physical, emotional or social **harm**.
- An imbalance of power, such as size or popularity. A stronger bully preys on a weaker or younger target. Bullies need to dominate.
- Words and actions that get more hateful as the target reacts, shows fear or cries.

Bullying behavior can cause long-term problems for the bully, target and bystander.

Most kids do not tell their parents or any other adult about bullying. The school's staff does not usually see the bullying. So, parents and caregivers must take the lead. Knowing the facts prevents reactions that could increase the bullying.

By State Law, every school has a bullying prevention policy. Read your school's handbook. Usually, both the bully and the target receive discipline. Often, the school informs the parents when the target loses control after repeated bullying events.



Who are the bullies and targets? Both boys and girls are bullies who have the social skills to control others. They target kids with low self-esteem, poor social skills, few friends or an imbalance of power. Students between 4th-7th grades report the most bullying. In middle school, some bullies are the popular kids. One in 4 teens are bullied. Nine out of 10 LGBT students are bullied.

What do they do? Often, boy bullies use more physical threats and actions; girls use bullying words and non-verbal gestures. Bullies target different or weaker kids. By 4th grade, more verbal bullying replaces physical bullying. As students get older, the bystanders more often admire the bullies, join the bullying, and aid the target less.

Where? Common *school* sites for bullying include the school bus and bus stops, lunchroom, halls, bathrooms and playground (67%). Forty-three percent of kids fear harrassment in the bathroom. Kids also report bullying in their home, in their urban and rural neighborhood, and on their phones and computer (33%).

Why? They have learned the skill when someone bullied them or they saw bullying. It provides feelings of control and power.

When? The bully strikes the target when an adult is not present or she turns her back.

Helpful webpages with activities:

- <http://www.stopbullying.gov>
- <http://www.aap.org/health/bullying>
- <http://www.education.com>
- www.sps186.org/teachers/cmartsch
- <http://www.pbis.org>
- <http://www.parenthelpline.org>

Tips for Parents of Targets

If your child has a disability, behavior, body frame, background or talent that differs from other students, he could be a target. Parents are often the best resource to build a child's confidence and teach social skills — that help bully-proof him.

A bully's mean words and actions can cause anxiety and a change in behavior.

Without help, a target may:

- Have difficulty learning.
- Become socially isolated.
- Attempt suicide.
- Hurt others with a weapon.

Few targets ask parents for help. Parents need to watch for warning signs.

- Low self-esteem and poor social skills.
- Trouble sleeping, bed-wetting.
- A loss or lack of friends.
- Loss of interest in school and activities.
- Drop in grades.
- Torn or lost clothing / items, bruises.
- Lack of self-defense ability - words or actions.

What can you do?

1. Use the Bullying Behavior Chart (p. 8).
2. Help your child feel **safe telling you** about the bullying. Listen, support and care. Do not show anger, yell or lash out at the bully or his parents. Let the school confront the bully and his parents.
3. Teach her to **tell the bully to stop**. The school expects a student to use **S.W.A.T.** — **Stop, Walk Away, Tell** an adult.
4. Take action if the bully does not stop. Ask the teacher, counselor and principal for help.

Eighty percent of the time, arguments with a bully will end up in physical fights. Most bullies end the mean behavior in 10 seconds when the target says **Stop**.

Teach your child to look confident. Bullies choose targets who appear weak or scared.

- Stand up tall. Respect personal space. This says I am not afraid.
- Make eye contact when you talk or listen. A blink or quick look away is normal.

Learn the S.W.A.T. skill. Ask what form of S.W.A.T. your school uses. If they have no set method, teach your child **S.W.A.T.** — **Stop, Walk Away, Tell** an adult.

- Tell the bully to **Stop**. Use a firm voice. Hold up your hand.
- **Walk Away** safely. Keep aware of the bully's actions.
- **Tell** an adult you trust.

Practice. Until he does **S.W.A.T.** correctly, offer positive pointers. Is she standing tall? Is his voice firm? Is she making eye contact? Does he walk away safely?

Use the skill as needed. Observe your child with others. When you get home, discuss what he did right and what he can do better.



Help for Bullies

Bullying is learned negative behavior. One in 5 kids admits to bullying. Bullies often have good self-esteem and the social skills to dominate others.

However, bullies are often poor students and another bully's target. Later life problems of bullies include:

- Serious crimes and prison (60% by age 24),
- Tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse,
- Low-paying jobs (due to high drop-out rate), and
- Failed marriages and child abuse charges.

Could this describe your child?

- Appears confident, popular, angry, aggressive, defiant, or impulsive.
- Is an arrogant winner and a sore loser.
- Controls others, and breaks rules.
- Fights with his siblings and friends.
- Defends her actions - saying it's the target's fault.
- Disregards others' feelings.

If it does, he needs your help.

What can you do to help?

1. Assess how you parent. Do you yell or use physical punishment? Do your words and actions bully? Do you enjoy parent-child time, or is it a battle?
2. Use the Bullying Behavior Chart (back page) with your child to identify bullying acts in your lives.
3. Take small steps to change bullying behavior. As a role model, you may need behavior changes too. As you and your child change, applaud success and recognize mistakes.
4. Ask the school counselor to help teach your child needed skills. These include empathy – how the other person feels – and anger control.

5. Observe your child's words, facial expressions and gestures. They give clues about his mood and his needs. Calm or redirect him when he is **getting** angry. Use M.E.L.T. or other de-stressing tool — taking a deep breath, counting to 10 or 100, walking away or positive self-talk until he cools down.
6. Involve your child in sports, school clubs, scouts, and religious groups.

Use this tool to de-stress:

Aggression Replacement Tool – M.E.L.T.

Play relaxing music (60 beats/minute) as you MELT.

M - Mellow out

E - Empty out the negatives

L - Laid Back

T - Tranquil Breathing (Repeat 2 times)

- Sit with back supported, feet on the ground (6" apart) with hands on knees.
- Breathe in – let your stomach push out while inhaling.
- Breathe up into your lungs – big deep breathe.
- Breathe out - exhale.



Action Plan for Parents of Bystanders

Bystanders are the largest group of kids affected by bullying. The bystander watches a bully harm another child. His attention gives the bully the social reward he seeks.

Sadly, 85% of bullying incidents have bystanders.

Some kids (54%) just watch the harmful act. Others support the bully with prodding, laughter or cheering. This support increases the *length* of the incident. *Talking about* the bully and his mean action after the event also increases the bully's power.

Bystanders have the greatest power to stop bullying.

They can use the **Stop, Walk Away and Tell** tool. When a bystander tells the bully to stop, half stop within 10 seconds.

Fear often prevents a child from telling the bully to *stop* or telling an adult. However, *every child can walk away* – and help the target walk away. Even if the bully does not stop, the bystander *must leave the site*. This removes the peer attention, power and control that feed the bully.

Is your child a bystander who fears being a target? Does he help the bully for his own safety and out of fear?

As a bystander, your child also endures negative effects. Feeling powerless and pressured, the bystander avoids the bully, the bully's friends and the target. Your child can suffer the same symptoms as the target. Fear, anxiety, and guilt can lead to depression.

Adults can help bystanders. However, most targets and bystanders believe adults ignore the bullying problem. In one study, adult playground supervisors stopped only 4% of the bullying incidents. **Tell an adult** requires an adult that will *listen* and *act*. Ask the school staff how they handle bullying.

What actions should parents take?

- Complete the Bullying Behavior Chart (see page 8).
- Set a *Respect Others* rule and enforce it.
- Stop bullying in your own home when kids imitate TV, movies or video games.
- Teach **Stop, Walk Away, and Tell** (see page 3).
- Suggest your child ask a target to play — if he feels safe doing it.
- Do family activities that build skills and values.
- Discuss the bullying your child sees at school, at home or in the community.



Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is self-worth, confidence and self-respect. A child with a good self-esteem knows his value. He has a good opinion of himself. Bullies, targets and bystanders all benefit from good self-esteem.

How can you help a child build good self-esteem and social skills?

- **Have a positive attitude.** See the glass half-full – not half empty. When a child fails to meet a goal, help him list options for success the next time. Share his sadness, but give hope. Offer extra training to improve the desired skill.
- **Choose your words with care.** A negative word can hurt or deflate self-esteem.
- **Never call your child names like *lazy* and *stupid*.** Everyone needs positive words. In just a second, your words can build or hurt self-esteem.
- **Let him make decisions.** Limit choices to two or three options that you can accept. Making decisions builds confidence – that he can make good choices.
- **Avoid rescuing.** It prevents hurt but also a *needed lesson*. Watch her as she plays. Later, and *without an audience*, talk about hurtful words or actions in a calm tone. Discuss how she can react better next time. Let *her skills* rescue her.
- **Nurture special interests.** As he gains skill in an activity he enjoys, he builds an “I Can” attitude. He also connects with kids who share his interest.
- **Expect her help.** Assign chores. Do community volunteer work together.
- **Plan adult time.** A safe adult relationship expands his thinking and talking skills.
- **Dream about the Future.** Discuss career choices. Encourage her. Ask what skills she will need to fulfill her dream. Help her build these skills.

**It takes good self-esteem for targets and bystanders to bravely and safely
Stop, Walk Away, and Tell.**



Social skills can protect your child from bullying — whether she is the bully, target or bystander. Teaching social skills prepares your child for success at home and at school.

Children learn behaviors — both good and bad. *If you do not teach your child positive social skills, society may teach negative ones.* Ask yourself, “Are my words and actions teaching my kids good or bad behavior?”

Where do you start? Use the Skill-building books by Ellen McGinnis and Arnold Goldstein:

- *Skillstreaming in Early Childhood*
- *Skillstreaming the Elementary Child*
- *Skillstreaming the Adolescent, and*
- *Aggression Replacement Training.*

For a preview of each book, go to <http://www.books.google.com>. Enter the title of the book.

These books teach skills such as:

- Offering to Help a Classmate
- Expressing Concern for Another
- Responding to Teasing
- Avoiding Trouble
- Staying Out of Fights
- Problem Solving

All of these skills help a child avoid bullying. Search online or ask your librarian for other books.

How to Teach a Skill: Skill Rehearsal

- 1. Identify a skill.**
For example, telling a bully to stop.
- 2. Break the skill down into little steps.**
Keep it simple. Discuss posture, eye contact, hand gestures, tone of voice.
- 3. Model the skill.**
Find out the gesture your school uses for **Stop**.
- 4. Help your child practice the skill.**
Practice the Stop, Walk Away and Tell skill several times.
Until he does it correctly, offer positive pointers.
- 5. Apply the skill in real life.**
Set up activities that need the skill – an outing to the park, a friendly ball game. Quietly remind her to use the skill.
The Parent Help Line website, **www.parenthelpline.org**, includes other useful skills:
 - Ask for Help
 - Deal with Group Pressure
 - Have a Conversation
 - Use Self-Control



Bullying Behavior Chart

Bullying is a learned behavior. Stronger and older kids who are bullied try these behaviors on younger and weaker kids at school and at home. Over time, the bully uses meaner words and actions.

Most kids play the role of the bully, the target and the bystander at some time. To bully-proof your children, you must know the words and actions they use. Use this chart to help each child identify bullying behaviors.

1. Ask your child to circle ○ the behaviors he does to bully others.
2. Ask her to box □ the behaviors she deals with as a target.
3. Ask him to star ✱ the behaviors he observes as a bystander.

Words	Actions
Name calling Put downs Insults Teasing about looks/abilities/clothes/belongings Spreading rumors or gossip Sexual name calling Share secrets	Dirty looks or eye-rolling Negative facial looks or threatening gestures Insulting gestures like nose-holding Power play to exclude from group Tripping Pushing / Shoving Mean tricks
Blame target for action Insult to race, gender, family Threat to silence "If you tell, I will" Mean phone calls or cyber-teasing Serious gossip or rumors Tellings others to exclude target from group	Make someone look foolish Destroy school work or deface belongings Steal school work or belongings Hurt target by tripping or making him fall Scratching Hitting, fighting, hurting Breaking up a friendship Exclude target from a group Starting a de-friend campaign
Threaten family Tell others to enforce exclusion of target from group Repeated violent threats Threaten to break bones Threaten assault with a weapon Threaten to kill Sexual threats	Destroy property / clothing Arrange public humiliation Carry out a de-friend campaign Ongoing cyber-bullying Set fires Serious harm Torture Assault with a weapon Carry out sexually threats/ touches



**Call Parent Help Line at 217-544-5808
 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
 7 days a week for questions and concerns about bullying.**

