

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.
- 80% are regularly bystanders.

By Illinois law, schools must have a bully prevention policy. This policy prohibits bullying in school, on the school bus, at the bus stop, at school events and cyber bullying. The staff follows the school's discipline code in dealing with bullying.

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.**

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 or background 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 to discover that their child is a target. Some of the signs are:

- 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.

Often, parents do not know what to do.

What can you do?

1. Help your child feel **safe telling you** about the bullying. Listen, support, care and respect your child. Do not show anger, yell or lash out at the bully or his parents.
2. Teach her to **Stop, Walk Away and Tell (SWAT)**. 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** — using the **HEARS tool**. She must **Walk Away** safely - looking over her shoulder. Then, **Tell** an adult.

3. The school expects a student to use **SWAT** before it takes action. So, practice it at home until your child knows what to do.
4. Take action if the bully does not stop. Ask the teacher, counselor and principal for help. The counselor may offer one-on-one or group skill-building — for the bully and the target.
5. Let the school confront the bully and his parent. This protects you and your child.

Empathy Training H.E.A.R.S. Tool:

- H.** Hold the correct position – stand up tall. Respect personal space. This says I am not afraid, and I am listening.
- E.** Eye contact. Look the other person in the eye when you talk or listen. This is not a stare. A blink or quick look away is normal.
- A.** Assess the other person's feelings. Are they happy? Sad? Angry?
- R.** Respond to feelings with your face. This non-verbal tool says *scared, angry, happy or sad*.
- S.** Say the person's feelings in your own words. "You must be angry..."



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 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 other's feelings.

If it does, *you* should try to help her stop or prevent her bullying of others.

1. How do 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 chart on the back page with your child to identify bullying acts in your lives.
3. Take small steps to change the bullying behavior. You are a role model and may need behavior changes too. As 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. Ask how else he can handle the situation.
6. Involve your child in sports, school clubs, scouts, and religious groups. They offer a chance to practice new skills and leadership positions.

Use this tool to de-stress:

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

M - Mellow out

E - Empty out the negatives

L – Laid Back

T – Tranquil Breathing

- 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

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



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 Talk** 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. Most targets and bystanders believe adults ignore the bullying problem. In one study, adult playground supervisors stopped only 4% of the bullying incidents. **Talk to an adult** requires an adult that will *listen* and *act*. Ask the school staff how they will react to a bullying situation.

What actions should parents take?

- Set a **Respect Others** rule and enforce it.
- Stop bullying in your own home when kids imitate TV, movies or video games.
- Practice the **Stop, Walk Away, and Talk** tool until it comes naturally. Search http://pbis.org/common/pbisresources/publications/bullyprevention_ES.pdf for how to teach Stop, Walk Away, and Talk. Practice it.
- Urge your child to say **Stop** to a bully or ask a target to play - if she feels safe.
- Teach your child to use a strong, assertive, friendly voice. Practice it at home.
- Do family activities that build skills and values.



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.

It takes good self-esteem to bravely and safely **Stop, Walk Away, and Tell**. This anti-bullying tactic denies the reaction and the social reward that bullies seek. A bully chooses a target with poor self-esteem. The target's and bystander's reaction can give the bully control and power - or take it away.

How can an adult 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. Offer extra training to develop the skill – reading, baseball, or acting. Share his sadness, but offer hope.
- **Choose your words with care.** Avoid overused, general phrases like “Good Job!” Instead, *describe* the words or action that pleased you. “You did nine Math problems correctly.” “You cleaned your room.” Use a simple “Thank you” for tasks you expect her to do.
- **Let him make decisions.** Give him 2 or 3 good options that you accept. His decisions build confidence – that he can make good choices.
- **Never call your child names like *lazy* and *stupid*.**
- **Avoid rescuing.** Removing obstacles avoids hurt but also a *needed lesson*. Watch her as she plays. Later, and *without an audience*, discuss her hurtful words or actions in a calm tone. Help her choose a plan to do it better next time. This develops problem-solving skills.
- **Nurture special interests.** As he gains skill in an activity he enjoys, he builds an “I Can Do” 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.

All of these activities develop life skills that can bully-proof your child. They help him know he is worthy of love, of friends, of respect.



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 Stop, Walk Away and Talk skill.

Let your children practice the 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 – outing to the park, 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

To bully-proof your child, you must know the role your child plays. Use this chart to help identify bullying behaviors. Have him circle the acts he does to bully others. Box the acts he deals with as a target. Put a star by the acts he sees as a bystander. Bullying has long-lasting physical, emotional and social effects on the bully, the target and the bystander. We must stop bullying.

Physical		Emotional		Social	
Repeated harm to the target's body or property.		Repeated harm to the target's self-esteem		Repeated harm to the target's group acceptance.	
Words	Actions	Words	Actions	Words	Actions
Teasing or put downs about appearance or abilities Sexual name calling	Threatening gestures Tripping Pushing / shoving	Name calling Put downs Insults Teasing about appearance / belongings Sexual name calling	Dirty looks Negative facial expressions Insulting gestures like nose-holding Eye-rolling Exclusion	Gossip Rumors Teasing publicly about clothes	Passively not including in group Mean tricks Share secrets
Threats to silence "If you tell, I will ..." Sexual threats Statements: "I will hurt you" Blame target for an action	Damaging property Stealing Hitting, fighting or hurting Scratching Tripping or a fall	Insults towards family Harassment by phone / internet Threat "I will hurt you" Blame target for action	Destroy school work Deface personal property Steal school work or belongings	Insult race of gender Serious gossip or rumors Telling others to exclude target	Make someone look foolish Exclusion from the group Breaking up a relationship De-friending
Repeated violent threats: break bones or kill Threatens family Threaten assault with a weapon	Destroy property Set fires Torture Serious harm Assault with a weapon	Public threats of serious harm Threaten family	Exclusion Destroy personal clothing / items	Tell others to enforce total exclusion of target from group Sexual threats Cyber-teasing	Arrange public humiliation Carry out a "defriend" campaign Cyber-bullying

Find this chart, booklet and helpful parenting tips at www.parenthelpline.org.



**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.**

