



# **Making a Difference in Bullying**

**What teachers of elementary students  
need to know**



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# WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is a relationship problem.

Bullying is a form of abuse at the hands of peers that can take different forms at different ages. Bullying is defined as repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Craig, 2000). Through our research, we understand bullying as a disrespectful relationship problem:

- Children who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others
- Children who are victimized become increasingly powerless and find themselves trapped in relationships in which they are being abused.

Read on to learn about how you can make a difference in bullying. Remember, addressing bullying means your classroom will be a better learning environment for all students.

## Tips to Share with Children who are Bullied

- ♦ If it's hard for you to stand up for yourself, ignore the bullying and walk away...then tell someone who can help.
- ♦ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent, teacher or coach.
- ♦ If you're scared to talk to an adult on your own, ask a friend to go with you.
- ♦ Go to areas where you feel safe.
- ♦ Stay close to students you can count on to stick up for you.
- ♦ Look confident and tell the child who bullies to back off...bullying is NOT cool!
- ♦ Stay calm...try not to show you are upset when being bullied.
- ♦ Get funny...humour shows you're not bothered.
- ♦ Be assertive, not aggressive...fighting back often makes the bullying worse.
- ♦ Remember that no one deserves to be bullied.

# 10 THINGS TEACHERS CAN DO TO ADDRESS BULLYING. . .

## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Children watch adults' behaviour closely. If we model respectful and empathic behaviour and positive conflict resolution strategies, then children are more likely to adopt similar behaviours in their peer relationships. On the other hand, if our interactions are critical, demeaning, or aggressive, how can we expect the children around us to behave any better? Think carefully about the words you choose and the way you behave.

## ESTABLISH A CODE OF CONDUCT

Involve students in developing a code of conduct about what they consider to be acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. If children are responsible for creating a class policy around bullying, they are more likely to follow and enforce it with their friends. Post the code of conduct to remind children (and adults) about what will and will not be tolerated at school.

## DEVELOP FORMATIVE CONSEQUENCES

These are consequences that are designed to send the message that bullying is unacceptable while also providing support for children who bully to learn the skills and acquire the insights they are lacking. For example, a child who bullies may have to sit out of an activity but uses that time to write a letter of apology or draw a picture of what it feels like to be bullied. Children who bully need help understanding the impact their behaviour has on others.

## ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO REPORT

Convey the message that it is the teacher's job to deal with bullying and that you want to know about all incidents. Clarify the difference between tattling and telling: Tattling is what you do to get someone into trouble, telling is what you do to get someone out of trouble. Providing alternative ways to report bullying at school, such as an anonymous bullying box, can help reduce the discomfort children feel around reporting bullying.

## ACKNOWLEDGE POSITIVE BEHAVIOURS

You can encourage positive connections among children by praising respectful and cooperative behaviour whenever you see it. The more you praise a behaviour, the more often it will happen. Children love praise and they will work hard to get it from you. Try and focus on the positives of your students, even when they need correcting. Remember, children are works in progress—they can't always get it right.

## Tips to Share with Children who Watch Bullying

- ◆ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent or a teacher...remember that telling is not tattling.
- ◆ If you walk away and get help, you are part of the solution...if you stay and watch, you are part of the problem.
- ◆ Stand up for children who are bullied...they can't do it themselves.
- ◆ Invite kids who are bullied to play with you somewhere else.
- ◆ Comfort the person who was hurt and make it known that what happened was not fair or deserved
- ◆ The best thing you can do for kids who are bullied is to be their friend
- ◆ If it is hard for you to speak out against bullying on your own, ask a friend to do it with you.
- ◆ Help kids who bully, don't hurt them..  
Speaking out helps, bullying back doesn't help.

## Tips to Share with Children who Bully

- ◆ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent, teacher, or coach. They can help you find ways to get along with others.
- ◆ Ask a friend to help you stop if you start to bully others.
- ◆ Set goals each day to make it easier not to bully (e.g., Keep cool; Today I'll help others rather than hurt them)
- ◆ Understand that you may not like everyone around you but you do have to treat them with respect.
- ◆ Appreciate kids' differences...different doesn't mean worse or better than you.
- ◆ Put yourself in other kids' shoes...would you want to be picked on, put down, or left out?
- ◆ Apologize to the kids you have bullied
- ◆ Know that if other children watch and laugh, it doesn't mean they like it when you bully.
- ◆ Be a real leader...Real leaders treat others with respect.

### MINIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BULLYING

Organize activities so that the child who is being bullied is always surrounded by children who will stand up for him/her. How do you do this? Teachers should always select children's teams, groups and seating arrangements. If children are allowed to make these decisions, those students who are bullied will always be left out and teased. Break up groups of children who may act aggressively together.

### TEACH THE SOCIAL SKILLS CHILDREN LACK

Children who are bullied often have difficulties standing up for themselves. Teachers can help them practice this skill through role plays and modeling assertive behaviour. Help children to determine if their behaviour may be exacerbating a bullying situation. Children who bully need help with learning different problem-solving skills and resisting peer pressure to bully. Give them frequent reminders of these strategies and share your optimism that they'll successfully avoid bullying others.

### BUILD ON CHILDREN'S STRENGTHS

Children who are bullied often have low self-esteem. Encouraging them to participate in activities they enjoy can help these children feel good about themselves. Highlighting their talents for other children to see can change their reputation in the peer group. For children who bully, provide opportunities for them to use their natural leadership skills in a positive way (e.g., teaching younger students a new sport or skill).

### TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

If you suspect that a student is being bullied, you're probably right. Children will often deny bullying and feels like bullying, it most likely is, even if students deny it. Trust your instincts and intervene.

### BE READY TO LISTEN AND HELP

If a student reports being bullied, be ready to listen right away. Don't put it off. Thank the child for having the courage to come forward and explain that it is his/her right to feel safe. Ask for details about the incident and convey your concern. Be willing to respond to all reports, even the seemingly trivial ones such as name-calling. Consistency matters!

## THE MANY FORMS OF BULLYING IN CHILDHOOD:

### **Physical bullying**

- ◆ Hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property

### **Verbal bullying**

- ◆ Name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, humiliating or threatening someone, racist or sexist comments

### **Social bullying**

- ◆ Excluding others from the group, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging friendships.

### **Cyberbullying**

- ◆ Using email, cell phones, text messages, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships

## HOW DO TEACHERS KNOW IF A STUDENT IS INVOLVED IN BULLYING?

Bullying is a covert behaviour and is usually hidden from adults. Look for the following clues:

### **SIGNS OF BEING BULLIED**

- ☑ Afraid to go to school or other activities
- ☑ Appear anxious or fearful
- ☑ Low self-esteem and make negative comments
- ☑ Complain of feeling unwell
- ☑ Lower interest in activities and performance
- ☑ Lose things, need money, report being hungry
- ☑ Injuries, bruising, damaged clothing or articles
- ☑ Appear unhappy, irritable
- ☑ Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- ☑ Threats to hurt themselves or others
- ☑ May appear isolated from the peer group

### **SIGNS OF BULLYING OTHERS**

- ☑ Aggressive with parents, siblings, pets, and friends
- ☑ Low concern for others' feelings
- ☑ Bossy and manipulative behaviour
- ☑ Unexplained objects or money
- ☑ Secretive about possessions and activities
- ☑ Holds a positive view of aggression
- ☑ Easily frustrated and quick to anger
- ☑ Does not recognize impact of his/her behaviour
- ☑ Has friends who bully and are aggressive
- ☑ Child has trouble standing up to peer pressure

## WHY TEACHERS SHOULD CARE ABOUT BULLYING

Many people feel that bullying is “*just kids being kids*” and that it’s “*harmless.*” In fact, bullying is anything but harmless.

### **RISKS FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE BULLIED:**

- ☑ Depression (low mood, a sense of hopelessness)
- ☑ Social anxiety, loneliness, isolation
- ☑ Poor health (e.g., headaches, stomach aches)
- ☑ Low self esteem
- ☑ School absenteeism and academic problems
- ☑ Aggressive behaviours
- ☑ Contemplating, attempting, or committing suicide

### **RISKS FOR CHILDREN WHO BULLY OTHERS:**

- ☑ Not knowing the difference between right and wrong
- ☑ Delinquency and substance use
- ☑ Academic problems and school drop out
- ☑ Adult criminality
- ☑ Difficulties in their relationships with others
- ☑ Being bullied at the hands of others