



# How to Help and Heal My Child When Bullying Has Occurred

## The Targeted Child

If your child has been bullied, you understand the pain you and your child feel. Here are a few tips to becoming bully-proof:

1) Make sure your child understands he or she has received a painful dart as if he or she were a target board. The dart could have hit anyone so it's never the target's fault. The problem lies with the bully; bullying is the bully's way of gaining power and control. You may be targeted once but it doesn't have to happen again.

2) Encourage friendships. A bully usually targets loners or those with few friends. A target tends to be shy, quiet, or reluctant to ask for help. Friends take up for one another, stick together and a bully does not like to be out-numbered.

More importantly, friendships will help your child "become better skilled at dealing with a variety of personalities and handling different social interactions" (Boys Town; 2008).

3) Ask your child to think of fictional characters who were a great friend to others. What characteristics are normally found in friends? How do friends treat one another? Social interaction is a great way to meet new friends.

4) We want children to be self-confident and proud of who they are. "Kids who can hold their heads high and walk with confidence are less likely to be singled out" (Boys Town; 2008). If a child has a low opinion of him or herself, he or she may feel deserving of bullying behavior. Low



self-confidence often attracts a bully. If a child has their head down low, slouches down and avoids eye contact, he or she "starts acting like a victim" (Boys Town; 2008). Remember: It's easier for a child to feel brave when he or she feels good about him or herself (KidsHealth, 2008).

Children need to be reminded of their strengths, think positively of themselves, and build friendships where they can learn acceptance and respect.

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### Special points of interest:

- ♦ *The child who is bullied.*
- ♦ *The social dynamic.*
- ♦ *Know the warning signs.*
- ♦ *What can I do as a parent?*
- ♦ *The hurtful cycle.*
- ♦ *Is it easy to be a bystander?*
- ♦ *Who likes the bully?*

## A Fluid Dynamic

Antagonism and conflict are unfortunately a common byproduct of normal social discourse. The inability to effectively deal with these occurrences frequently plants the seeds for bullying behavior. Children may bully another student, become victims of bullying, or simply be a bystander that witnesses destructive behaviors.

The rapidly changing social dynamics within various sub-environments can lead to a child being an antagonist, target, or bystander. A child who has been a victim on the playground may vent his or her frustration by becoming the antagonist in the music room.

A thorough investigation will help determine the catalyst that fosters unhealthy actions and attitudes before they become established. When we act proactively, we eliminate future problems, including lasting effects of unhealthy social behavior (NASP, 2008).

## Caution: Know the Signs

How do you know if your child is a bully? We often see, and want to see, the best in our children so we miss some telling signs. Here are a few warning signs from the National Association of School Psychologists that your child may be more of a bully than a friend.



My child -

\*has been accused of bullying behavior by teachers or friends.

\*has been in trouble for fighting; my child tends to be physically aggressive.

\*does not like to be told what to do and often does not listen (defiant).

\*readily exhibits anger and frustration or lacks patience with others.

\*is domineering with peers either in groups or individually.

\*may frequently refer to others in negative terms (dumb, stupid, idiot,

etc.).

\*demonstrates little compassion for those who are different.

\*has witnessed a parent act aggressively towards, or threatened, others.

“One common misconception is that bullying is an unavoidable part of childhood and adolescence and for this reason, bullying behaviors may be ignored or not noticed” (NASP, 2008). Vigilance is the first step in determining whether a problem exists.

## What Now?

Realization that their child has been the target of aggressive behavior is shocking and upsetting to any parent. In spite of the understandable emotion and alarm, this is the time to be composed. The National Education Association (NEA, 2008) has made some of the following suggestions:

1) Never approach a bully or his or her parents (NASP, 2008). If bullying has taken place at school, make an appointment to speak to the principal. Most schools have an anti-bully policy in place, will follow the rules of the law, and act on behalf of you and your child. If the problem is not resolved at the

“Under Title IX the Education Amendments of 1992, schools have a legal responsibility to ensure that a non-hostile environment is available to all students”  
National Education Agency, 2008

school level, or has not taken place at school, you will need to contact local authorities.

2) It is never a child’s fault when he or she is bullied. Be sympathetic and offer a judgment-free sounding board.

3) Speak calmly to your child, reassuring him or her that the problem

will be resolved. If your child believes he or she has, or will, unduly upset you, they may be more hesitant to confide in you later.

4) Never agree to keep bullying secret. Explain to your child that secrets at the risk of a person’s safety can not be kept.

5) Ask your child where the bullying has taken place and who has been involved, including bystanders. Record details, noting dates, times and other pertinent information.

6) If your child has cuts, bruises or any other outward signs of injury, take a colored photograph.

## The Cycle of Bullying

Bullying frequently follows a circular pattern. The antagonist uses fear and intimidation to bully others. The target of this unacceptable behavior attempts to either solve the problem individually or simply ignores the bully but does not request adult support. The bystander (one who witness bullying behavior) usually remains silent as well. Bystanders may fear being bullied themselves, losing popularity or be-

ing labeled a “snitch.” Thus, the bullying cycle continues. “The bully-victim relationship tends to continue unless there is some sort of intervention from parents or other adults” (Boys Town, 2008).

Children must realize that bullying is wrong and should be reported to an adult (NASP, 2008).



“Bullying can make school a place of fear and can lead to more violence and more stress for everyone”  
KidsHealth, 2008

## My Child is a Bully

When the evidence clearly demonstrates that your child is a bully, the realization can be unsettling. The National Association of School Psychologists has given parents helpful suggestions.

1) If your child has been accused of bullying behavior at school, know exactly what your child has done and ask your child to take responsibility, apologizing if appropriate.



2) Support school personnel in front of your child and work with your child at home, monitoring bullying behaviors and stressing the importance of creating a safe place for all students.

3) Discuss with your child how bullying affects others as well as themselves.

4) In depth discussions that help create empathy for others are an important step. "Some children may feel pressure to partici-

pate in bullying behavior in order to fit in with peers or to avoid being bullied themselves" (NASP, 2008).

5) Discuss alternative approaches to conflict.

6) Stress that aggressive behavior will not be tolerated. Outline rules and establish consequences when they are broken.

7) Until your child shows a great deal of change and maturity, adult supervision is needed.

8) Seek help if needed. The school counselor is a great place to start.

## The Bystander

When we ask our children to stand up for someone or defend another, that's a tall order. There are many reasons why bystanders remain silent. The bystander may be frightened of the bully or may regard the bully as a "friend." The bystander may be nervous to ask for an adult's help or may have asked before but received answers such as, "Work it out," "You need to get along with everyone," or "We'll handle this later." A bully often watches, or is perceived to be watching, for "snitches." A bystander may not like the targeted student either; he or she may not be popular or be considered "a loser or weird" (Boys Town, 2008).

Regardless of the reason, a bystander has his or her personal reason for not wanting to get involved. "As a parent, it's important to teach and reinforce virtues such as caring and respect" (Boys Town, 2008). Here are some things you can do at home:

1) Model consideration and compassion. Ask your child to treat others like he or she would like to be treated.

2) Speak and act with respect for those in authority (teachers, officers).

3) Expect positive actions and

Bullying exists and we must  
"be proactive in trying to  
prevent it"  
-Parenting, 2008

praise "acts of kindness" (Boys Town, 2008).

4) Volunteer and become involved in community projects. "This will give a sense of obligation to others" (Boys Town, 2008).

It's important to teach all children that, unfortunately, ignoring bullying will not solve the problem.

## No One Really Likes a Bully

Believe it or not, some students do not understand the difference between teasing and bullying. Bullying is much easier to recognize when it's physical, not emotional.

A bully may initially receive respect and popularity but over time, the power fades as students no longer accept threats. Other students, who acted as friends, will walk away as

they tire of mean and hurtful actions. Bullies "soon find out that other kids just think of them as trouble-making losers" and are left behind (KidsHealth, 2008).

Bullies, who learn to act in more positive ways, often go on to be great kids. Some bullies, despite the help and



advice from others, will have to learn the hard way and will end up in trouble. "In the end, whether bullies decide to change their ways is up to them" (Boys Town, 2008).

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## September Q&A

*Q: What should I tell my child to do if he or she is bullied?*



Children should never be encouraged to “fight back” because this can make things worse (NDSU, 2008). The National Education Association recommends five ways for handling a bully:

- 1) Remain calm and do not show emotion. Bullies want you to cry!
- 2) Ignore a bully's first attempt to antagonize you and walk away. If the bully does not get a reaction from you, he or she may move on.
- 3) Look the bully in the eye and say, “Leave me alone!” The bully does not want to bring attention to themselves, especially if adults are present.
- 4) Run away if necessary and avoid being alone.
- 5) If you are worrying about the bully or find yourself afraid to go to class, or school, it's time to tell an adult. Your parent, teacher or school counselor are your best options.

“By discussing problems before they escalate, conflicts can be resolved and school life can work for everyone” (NEA, 2008).

## Resources:

Boys Town. “The Bully, The ‘Bullied’ and The Bystander.” [http://www.parenting.org/flight/e\\_current.asp](http://www.parenting.org/flight/e_current.asp) (accessed September, 2008).

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National Education Association. “For Parents: If a Child Complains of Being Bullied.” <http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullyparentscando.html?mode=print> (accessed August, 2008).

National Education Association. “Parents’ Role in Bullying Prevention and Intervention.” <http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullyingparentsrole.html?mode=print> (accessed August, 2008).

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North Dakota State University. “Bullies.” <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/famsci/fs570w.htm> (accessed, 2008).