

BULLYPROOF OUR SCHOOLS

THE “CAN-DO’S” TO KEEP
OUR SCHOOLS SAFE



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DEALING WITH BULLIES

It is a crisp, fall morning and Sharon Martin¹ is heading out the door to drive her daughter, Lisa, to school. Lisa is a bright, kind, cheerful fourth-grader who usually welcomes school days with open arms. She looks forward to the time spent with friends at lunch and learning about her favorite subject—science! But lately, something's changed in Lisa. She doesn't want to go to school and she frequently complains of morning stomachaches and headaches. This particular morning is the worst so far. Lisa is hysterical in the back seat crying and pleading to stay home.

What Sharon doesn't realize is that her daughter is being bullied at school. The once pleasant, exciting, safe place Lisa loved has now turned into a place of cruelty, pain, and suffering. The other girls in her class don't understand how

¹ Names have been changed.

a girl can be interested in science. Lisa explained to her mother that it started out with name-calling, “nerd,” “geek,” “weirdo.” Next, the name-calling escalated to exclusion on the playground. “Don’t hang around her, she’s weird. I think she smells like all that science stuff she plays with,” whispers one girl to the other. “Yeah,” the other agrees as they run away. Lisa did her best to ignore it, but over the span of a few weeks the relentless whispering, gossiping, and exclusion by a few girls removed any social interaction Lisa had with her classmates. It became very difficult to be friends with “the weirdo” in class, so Lisa’s few friends began avoiding her too.

Unfortunately, Lisa’s experience is all too common. The National Center for Youth Issues reports over 160,000 bullied children purposely miss school every day in the United States alone. In the last several years America has witnessed incidences of violent retribution by victims of bullying. This has led to an increase in awareness of the significant problem of bullying. Even with an increase in public awareness, statistics show that a large number of students are reporting that they are targets of bullying in school. Almost all bullied children feel that being bullied has caused them social, emotional, and/or academic problems.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying happens when individuals intentionally hurt or threaten someone through verbal, physical, or mental abuse. The myth of bullying is that it's a bigger boy pushing around a smaller boy. The reality is bullying happens in many different ways and is instigated by both boys and girls.

Verbal abuse – This is where words are used to hurt others. Verbal abuse can include insulting, name-calling, teasing, and threatening.

Physical abuse – This occurs when the bully causes physical harm. Physical abuse can include punching, hitting, pushing, shoving, pulling hair, tripping, kicking, and slapping. Doing harm to other people's possessions is also physical abuse, such as stealing lunches, ripping up notes, or kicking books down the hall.

Mental abuse – This is where the mind is affected. Mental abuse can include spreading rumors, ignoring, excluding, gossiping, and isolating.

Cyberbullying – Through the use of technology, students are being hurt by cruel e-mails, text messages, or instant messages (IMs); web sites meant to damage reputations; embarrassing photos taken

with cell phone cameras; and being threatened in chat rooms. Cyberbullying is both easy to do and dangerous. It is more anonymous than other kinds of bullying, and students may say things online they would never say in person.

WHERE DOES IT HAPPEN?

Bullying can happen anywhere. Typically bullying tends to happen in areas where fewer adults are present. Each school has its own “hot spots.” These hot spots may include hallways, stairwells, locker rooms, restrooms, playgrounds, and cafeterias. And keep in mind, bullying can also happen right in the classroom setting, in front of the teacher. Students may pass a threatening note or give nasty, dirty looks without the teacher noticing.

WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO?

The target of bullies must remember that he or she does have choices:

Tell an adult. Bullying should be reported to an adult. If you are being bullied or you are a bystander and see it happening, talk to a teacher, guidance counselor, school resource officer, other school staff member, your parents, or another trusted adult. Remember, you are not “telling on”

someone when you choose to report bullying. You are taking a stand against bullying in your school and demanding respect for yourself and others.

Tell the person to stop. Remain calm, make eye contact with the person, and tell him or her to stop in a firm voice. You don't have to threaten the person or make insults. Just make it clear you want him or her to stop.

Choose not to fight back. Fighting back will only escalate the situation and it could lead to you getting hurt. The goal is to avoid violence.

Learn to walk away. Go somewhere else. Just say, "I don't have time for this" and walk toward a coach, teacher, school staff member, or some friends. You are not running away from a fight, but you are doing what is most important—avoiding conflict and keeping safe.

Brush it off. Show that it doesn't bother you. Often the people who bully want a reaction from you. They want to see you be afraid, cry, yell, or anything. If you are afraid, try not to show it. Attempt to show the bully that they have no power over you, and walk away.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

Teachers and staff members have an important role in stopping bullying in our schools. Many schools today choose to have training for staff, students, and parents in awareness, supervision, and prevention of bullying. All school staff including custodial staff, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers should understand the importance of knowing their school policy on bullying and reporting it. Schools can:

Deal with the situation right away. Never assume that the current problem will resolve itself. Be sure you know and follow your school policy for dealing with bullying situations. Intervene immediately when you witness disrespect.

Talk with the student being bullied. Give support and communicate that adults are there to help him or her and to protect him or her from further bullying.

Talk with the student engaging in the bullying. Attempt to keep the focus on the student's actions that were wrong and make it clear that the bullying behavior is unacceptable. It is important to model respectful communication, but do not let the student talk his or her way out of the situation.

Give the student consequences. It may be necessary to show the bullying student consequences to his or her behavior. An example would be taking away free time or sending the student to the principal's office. When firm consequences are given, it sends a clear message that bullying will not be tolerated at school and an environment of respect is expected.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Parents have such an important role in stopping bullying. Parents and guardians can:

Be informed. Educate yourself about bullying and the anti-bullying policy in your children's school.

Know the symptoms of someone being bullied. Some common signs are missing and avoiding school; coming home with missing or damaged clothing or property; and appearing sad, anxious, and/or depressed. Some other signs would be complaints of frequent headaches or stomachaches, trouble sleeping, or changes in appetite.

Talk to your children. Speak with your children about bullying and the

consequences of it. Remind yourself that if your child has been a victim of bullying, he or she may not choose to talk with you about it, and therefore you need to encourage him or her to talk. Parents should ask questions about what happened. Remember, you can help break the “code of silence” that often surrounds bullying. Also, listen carefully to what your child is trying to express while remaining supportive and calm. Let the child know it is not his or her fault and that you are there to help. Encourage your child to keep a log about how he or she is being bullied.

Speak with your child’s school. When you have contacted the school to report the bullying, make sure to follow-up at a later date to ensure the bullying has stopped.

Spend quality time with your child. This helps rebuild his or her self-esteem, confidence, and trust.

Help your child make new friends. Encourage the child who has been bullied to get involved in volunteer work, join a club, or participate in organized sports. Support your child in building new friendships.

Consider additional help. Lastly, be sensitive to the possibility that your child needs more help than you can give. There are times when professional counseling is needed.

WHAT IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY?

First, remain calm. It is hard to hear that your child bullies, but by dealing with it and working at home and with the school to set up guidelines for your child, changes can be made.

Be clear that bullying is wrong. Let your child know that bullying is a serious issue, and that the bullying behavior will not be tolerated. Have firm consequences in place if the bullying does continue.

Teach your child respectful behavior. Take the time with your child to work with him or her in learning to respect others. Remember, as a parent, your child is watching you; you are a role model in everything you do and say. Teach your child to take responsibility for his or her actions. An individual who bullies can learn more about respect by respecting

authority figures, as well as peers, and getting involved in school clubs, volunteer work, and team sports.

Pay attention to your child's media use and exposure. Some music, TV shows, movies, and video games can make violence or bullying appear okay.

Keep an open-door policy. Lastly, it's a good idea to maintain an environment in the home that allows an exchange between you and your child to talk about his or her feelings, friends, and school.

LET'S MAKE A CHANGE!

If educators, students, and parents/guardians come together, there can be a community-wide effort to send out the message that bullying will not be accepted. Bullying is not a rite of passage, a part of growing up, or something that all kids survive that should be dismissed. Bullying hurts! Taking a positive approach, teaching our children to respect one another by showing them, and saying, "This is how we treat other people" will have a significant impact on reducing bullying behavior. Children have the right to go to school and not be afraid. If we don't stop the bullying, who will?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Stop Bullying Now!
From the U.S. Department
of Health & Human Services
www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov

Safety NET Kids
[www.safetynetkids.com/index
.php?location=programs](http://www.safetynetkids.com/index.php?location=programs)

Kids Against Bullying
www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org

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