

Understanding and Stopping Bullying

Research suggests that we can best 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.

Children who repeatedly bully establish patterns of using **power and aggression** in relating to others. In fact, some experts define bullying as repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized.¹ With repeated incidents, the child who bullies gets more and more power. At the same time, the victimized child loses power in the relationship and becomes increasingly powerless to defend him or herself.

The dynamic of the power relationship is the same, but bullying expresses itself in different ways at different ages. It can range from easily identifiable physical violence, through verbal taunts to social exclusion. With cell phones and computers, bullies now have a new way of attacking their victims, called “cyberbullying,,” which is often off the radar screen of adults.

Bullying is a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions. Here are some tips you can give to children, whether they are victims, perpetrators or bystanders in the complex power dynamics of bullying.

Tips to Share with Children and Youth 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 and try not to look 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.

Tips to Share with Children and Youth 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. Let them know 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 about 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 and Youth 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. (For example, Keep cool; Today I’ll help others rather than hurting them.)
- Understand that you don’t have to 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.

¹ Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Olweus, 1991; Pepler & Craig, 2000



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