

# **HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH BULLYING**

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# INTRODUCTION

No school can say that it is free of bullying. It is an ongoing problem that affects all schools at some stage. However, research has shown that effective intervention dramatically reduces both the occurrence and impact of bullying.

In this book we have focused on what a school can do to help children deal with bullying. From the outset, it is important to say that if the adults in the school are not aware of their own behavior, they may be contributing negatively to the ethos of the school – by engaging in put-downs or unkind behavior towards one another or the students. Self-awareness among staff is one of the fundamental elements of a successful anti-bullying policy.

For the purpose of this concise book we shall assume that the staff members in your school are working on their personal growth, self-awareness, and relationships with one another and the children, and that they are actively committed to creating an ethos in which anti-bullying strategies can flourish.

This book highlights how, in such an atmosphere, schools can create an all-pervading, respectful anti-bullying ethos through systematic interventions with consistent consequences. This book presents strategies on how to interact effectively with children who bully and information about the kind of response to expect from them as they progress towards a clearer understanding of their behavior and its effects on others.

This book also focuses on how to help children who are being bullied and explores the possibility that some advice is not appropriate. It offers guidance on how to encourage the support of parents and how to work with them as a team in a nonjudgmental way.

You will learn how to have a positive influence on the large percentage of children who are not involved in bullying and who are of great significance in any anti-bullying campaign.

## WHAT IS BULLYING?

You may be familiar with the term “bullying,” but do you feel confident that you can distinguish bullying from other inappropriate behaviors? Look through the list on page 6 and check off any actions that you believe constitute bullying.

### ACTION PLAN

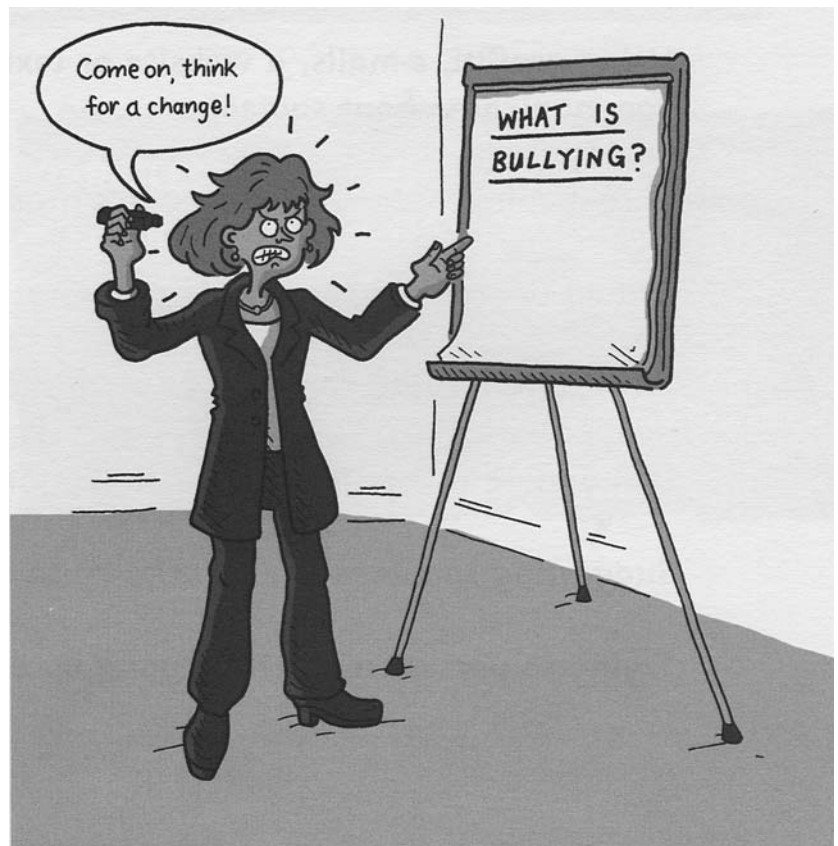
*Show members of staff the list of behaviors on page 6 and ask them to check any that they would consider to be bullying. Ask them to add any other bullying behaviors they have witnessed to the bottom of the list.*

### ACTION PLAN

*Look at the list of behaviors again, and discuss the factors that may make it clear whether or not the incidents described are bullying. From this, you can generate a definition of “bullying” that the staff and students can use as they explore the issue. The definition that you come up with should reflect the factors listed on page 7. Record your definition of bullying as part of your anti-bullying policy. Make sure that all members of your school community are aware of it—teachers, administrators, children, and parents.*

As you review this activity together, it should become clear that all of the behaviors listed can be types of bullying, depending on factors such as frequency, systematic nature, and intent.

Having established that a range of behaviors can be seen as bullying, it is helpful to have a working definition of *bullying* in order to proceed from an agreed basis as your school develops ways of addressing this issue.



# INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Check the behaviors that you consider to be types of bullying.

- Spreading nasty rumors about several children***
- Making a racist, sexist, or homophobic remark***
- Calling someone an unkind name***
- Whispering about someone in front of them***
- Using put-downs, sarcasm, and insults***
- Humiliating or excluding someone from a game***
- Threatening to hurt someone***
- Persistently blackmailing someone***
- Using graffiti, e-mails, a website, or text messages to communicate about someone***
- Threatening to damage someone's property***
- Hiding or stealing someone's property***
- Physically hurting someone at recess***
- Demanding things from someone by force***
- Suggesting someone is untouchable to another child***
- Trying to persuade others to gang up on someone***

Bullying is generally accepted as having the following features:

- 1.** It is a deliberate action - the desire to hurt someone is intentional rather than accidental.
- 2.** It is unfair – the person/people doing the bullying is/are stronger, more powerful, or has/have a higher status than the target of the bullying.
- 3.** It is repeated over time – it is not a one-time incident of aggression or conflict.

Bullying may be divided into two main categories:

- 1.** Physical – punching, kicking, hitting, pulling hair, twisting arms, tripping.
- 2.** Emotional – spreading malicious rumors, teasing, calling names, blackmailing, making offensive comments, ostracizing, using put-downs, humiliating, making threats, embarrassing, excluding from activities.

Bullying may be direct, as in name-calling, teasing, and physically hurting; or indirect, as in ostracizing someone, spreading malicious rumors, making unpleasant comments, and giving scornful or dismissive glances.

### REFLECT

*What do you consider to be the most prevalent form of bullying in your school?*

*Do you sometimes overlook the less overt forms of bullying and concentrate only on the more obvious examples?*

### Why Does Bullying Happen?

There are many complex reasons why a child may bully another. Some of them are listed here.

- Through an instinctive, personal dislike of someone
- Because it seems like fun
- To gain prestige with peers
- To experience a feeling of power over others
- To get something he or she wants
- Through jealousy of another person
- To be “in” with a certain group
- To avoid being bullied or as a result of being bullied
- Because of poor parenting and a lack of good role models
- To cover up personal feelings
- Through a lack of empathy for others
- Through feelings of exclusion

Bullying is an inappropriate attempt to solve a problem or fulfill a need. It is not an inherent character trait. Though some children are naturally more aggressive than others, this should not be automatically labeled as bullying. It is best to avoid labeling children involved in a bullying incident. Using the labels “bully” and “victim” may convey a feeling of permanence to the children concerned. This may be avoided by using terms such as “the child who is bullied” and “the child doing the bullying.”

### ACTION PLAN

*Discuss with the staff at your school the reasons why children may bully to see which reasons apply to the students with whom they work.*



### How to Prevent Bullying

Bullying is a widespread problem and a source of worry for most schools, but research has shown that with a focused, proactive approach it can be significantly reduced. Dealing solely with the child doing the bullying or trying to teach assertiveness skills to counter bullying is not enough and rarely brings long-term success.

Bullying will not flourish in an environment that actively promotes positive relationships and has a proactive anti-bullying policy. Lack of interven-

tion tells those who bully and the targets of their bullying that this is an acceptable form of behavior. Lack of action is the same as granting permission.

The greatest impact on bullying comes from a whole-school approach in a coordinated campaign conducted over one or two terms and revisited on a yearly basis. This needs to be supported by a consistent whole-school approach to promoting positive behavior. We advocate using the Whole School Quality Circle Time model (for details of books and materials about this, see the Resources section at the end of the book). Using this model, the ethos of the school can be changed, which will have a greater impact than dealing with each incident as it occurs. A well-planned and purposeful program will provide the challenge needed to raise every child's enthusiasm, encourage their ownership of your anti-bullying policy, and show that you take the issue seriously.

The important people to reach in any campaign to reduce bullying are the bystanders and witnesses. These are the children who are not actively involved in systematic bullying behavior and are not the target of bullying. If their attitude and reactions are changed, bullying will be significantly reduced. They can have a positive influence on those already involved in bullying and those who may become involved. As a whole school, you can help children in the following ways:

- Implementing a whole-school proactive approach to anti-bullying. We suggest that this be done through the use of Quality Circle Time, Golden Rules, and appropriate rewards and consequences.
- Ensuring that your policy on bullying is explicit and that you initiate consistent intervention through a set of escalating consequences.
- Holding a campaign over at least one term to spread your anti-bullying message to all children. This could coincide with National Youth Violence Prevention Week, which is usually in March ([www.nyvpw.org](http://www.nyvpw.org)). We have included other websites that you may find useful in the Resources section.
- Providing thoughtful and challenging scenarios, stories, and role-plays during assemblies and in class that will challenge the children's perceptions and capture their imagination and enthusiasm.
- Gradually instilling an ethos in your school that encourages all the children to take responsibility for reporting bullying incidents that they may witness.
- Adopting a whole-school attitude that takes pride in the safe-school environment that you are able to offer – make sure that this pride rubs off on the children.
- Encouraging parents to be party to and take pride in your safe-school policy through letters home, assemblies, and conversations with them.
- Reviewing your procedures and attitudes regularly to maintain the standards necessary for success.