

The Big Bad Bully: How to Make Him Go Away... Forever

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with Trish Wright

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**That bully only looks so tall...
Because he makes you feel so small...
But you can shrink him down to size...
By standing up and being wise!**

www.kidsafe-caps.org

Bullying is wrong and can be stopped.

It is not just a right of passage. It has life long ramifications for both the bullied and the bully.

The statistics are so startling that bullying and reports of bullying are now being taken very, very seriously. Here are just a few of the facts:

- 2.1 million bullies and 2.7 million victims are lurking in our schools.
- 525,000 attacks occur in an average month according to the National School Safety Council.
- 6.5 million boys and 3.5 million girls are involved in fights and 4.5 million students are threatened with bodily harm each year.
- According to the National Education Association, 160,000 kids skip school due to fear of being bullied every day.
- According to studies, 10% - 15% of children are bullied regularly, 25% have been bullied recently and 50% have been bullied at some point.
- Nearly 1 in 10 children are bullies themselves.
- 60% of "bullies" in middle school had one criminal conviction by the age of 24.

Now that I have your attention, bullying occurs regardless of the size of a school or its setting (rural or suburban) or racial composition.

Bullying makes children feel lonely, unhappy and afraid. Serious bullying can lead to depression and low self esteem--problems that can carry into adulthood, and

violent acts of revenge.

We can do something about this--both *when* our kids are bullied and *before* they are bullied. Here's the Who, What, Why and How of bullying.

WHAT'S BULLYING?

Bullying takes place when someone makes another feel unsafe, uncomfortable or scared. Bullying typically takes two forms:

Physical Bullying:

This involves hitting, kicking, pushing, shoving or making a child do something they don't want to do.

Verbal/Psychological Bullying:

Not as visible or as readily identifiable as physical bullying, verbal bullying involves calling someone names, saying or writing mean things about a person, spreading rumors, making threats, purposefully excluding a child from activities or otherwise ignoring them and making them feel invisible.

WHO'S THE TARGET?

Kids that are targets of bullies typically stand out in some way. They may:

- Be smaller or bigger than other kids.
- Be a minority
- Act shy
- Be new to the school
- Have a distinguishing characteristic
 - Glasses
 - Birthmark
 - Disability
 - Hair Color
 - Weight

- Have low self-esteem resulting in an “I’ll take it” posture
- Be in the wrong place at the wrong time

WHO’S THE BULLY?

Bullies come in all shapes, sizes and socioeconomic standings. The bully could even be the “popular” kid in school. The bully could even be your child.

Bullies bully for a variety of reasons. They may feel the need to be in control or they may feel jealous. The bully may have trouble sharing things including the limelight. Some bullies may just be spoiled and be used to getting what they want.

Bullies frequently have seen people close to them like parents or siblings bully and get results...or be bullied. They may even have been bullied themselves and be striking back at someone else without realizing it.

Some bullies may have trouble controlling their anger, may never have been taught to behave correctly, or may lack supervision in the home. They may not know how to express their feelings or have any one to talk to about them.

Certain bullies could be bullying as an outgrowth of problems occurring in other parts of their lives. They may not be getting enough attention from parents or teachers.

Some experts believe bullying behavior can be triggered by violence in movies, television and video games, hence desensitizing children and giving them the idea that bullying behavior is “the norm.”

HOW TO HANDLE BULLYING?

R.A.D.A.R. is the key to both preventing a bullying situation from occurring and for handling a bullying situation once it arises. It is my own acronym for:

.....BUILDING SELF ESTEEM.....

Low self esteem is the root cause of both being bullied and bullying. Here are some ways you can build your child’s self esteem:

- Praise appropriately and frequently. Excessive praise can lead to unrealistic expectations or discount “true” praise.
- Proactively listen—at eye level.
- Encourage sports of all kinds.
- Accept your child.
- Search for talents.
- Set limits.
- Enforce limits through discipline.
- Teach your child to visualize his or her positive traits and positive outcomes.
- Have your child practice making positive self-statements. This could be one or two “repeat after mes” at bedtime.
- Help your child make friends (more on that in our newsletter).
- Give your child lots of opportunities to make choices and decisions and to recognize her good decisions.
- Watch what you say.
- Keep criticism to a minimal. Praise the opposite.
- Be a positive role model
- Identify & redirect any inaccurate beliefs your child may hold about themselves.
- Provide constructive experiences for your child to be involved with.
- Show your child there is a way they can control and/or redirect their feelings
- Say “I love you” every day and mean it. Say “You’re special” every day and mean it. Say “When you grow up, you will be awesome” every day and mean it.
- Make a name poem. Hang it prominently in your child’s room. Read it aloud everyday. Agree with it. For example:

*****DAN*****

- D**ynamic
- A** amazing
- N**ice

Recognize It
Avoid It
Deal With It
Act After the Fact
Rally the Community

The parent “radar” must be tuned to the child to RECOGNIZE bully symptoms:

- More frequent illness, particularly on Sunday night as your child anticipates the start of a new school week.
- Change in appetite—both more and less eating could be warning signs of something going on at school.
- Loss of interest in activities—particularly if your child stops wanting to attend a previously enjoyed activity.
- A drop in grades.
- Unexpected releases of anger or temper as your child tries to cope with his unexpressed anxiety.
- Ripped or torn clothing.
- Cuts or bruises without an adequate or believable explanation.
- Complaints of stomach aches or back pains or other physical ailments.
- Change in sleeping patterns (too much sleep, won’t get up, can’t fall asleep).
- Spending more time alone or reluctance to leave the house.
- Changing temperament (i.e., looking or acting sad).
- Frequently “lost” lunch money or misplaced (stolen) school items.

If you see notice tell tale signs of bullying, initiate conversations with your child to uncover what may be occurring. Don’t give up until you feel comfortable with what you’re hearing and your radar is no longer “beeping.”

Share with your child that you suspect something is going on at school like

bullying. This may require educating your child about how to talk about feelings and emotions--something they, and you, may not have had to do in the past.

When talking with your child, try moving from general to specific questions...

- ✓ How was your day today?
- ✓ What was the best part of your day?
- ✓ If there was a “best” part of your day today what would it have been?
- ✓ What was the worst part of your day?
- ✓ If there was a “worst” part of your day today what would it have been/”
- ✓ I bet you’re glad it’s Friday. What was the best/worst part of this past week? What else was good/bad about your week/day? If something else was good/bad about your week/day what would it have been?
- ✓ Oh? What happened then? Really?

Make sure your child feels supportive. Try asking “and then what happened”, “and then what.” What ever you do, do not judge your child or criticize his behavior.

If your child is being bullied, for some reason, they may think they deserve it. Keep telling your child he or she is unique, special and deserving of respect and kindness from others.

AVOID IT

If you determine your child is being bullied, now’s the time for you and your child to come up with an anti-bullying plan.

First, you’ll want to put in place an Avoidance Plan to immediately minimize the bullying and to buy time to put in place a plan to end it once and for all.

Your Avoidance Plan should include:

- Sitting near the bus driver.
- Walking with/or near a teacher to class.
- Staying away from isolated places or places where the bullying typically happens, particularly locker rooms and bathrooms.
- Initiating a buddy system.
- Permanently labeling all belongings so they are less likely to be stolen
- Avoiding the bully. Stay away from where the bully typically “hangs out.”
- Involving an adult to provide interference.

Do not tell your child to “work it out” on his or her own.

DEAL WITH IT

With your Avoidance plan in place, you’ll now want to develop a Deal With It plan to bully-proof your child by teaching him effective counter behaviors such as:

- Ignoring the bully. Walk away if possible.
- Running away if necessary. Who cares if the bully laughs at you? Safety first.
- Acting confident. Look him or her squarely in the eyes. Deflect the bully’s comments with a joke or by agreeing with him. Write down and practice a few replies:
 - Yes, I know. I’m a byproduct of my parents’ genetics.
 - You’re not the first person who’s told me that.
 - You can thank my parents for that.
 - And your point is?
 - Tell me something I don’t know.
 - Yes that’s one of the things that makes me, me.
- Deflecting emotions. Your child should not cry or get defensive. Practice slow breathing. Count to ten. Practice using visualization techniques (i.e., imagine the

bully with his pants around his ankles). The bully wants to know he’s gotten to you. Don’t give him the satisfaction.

- Be sure to advise your child NOT to use violence on the bully or try to plan revenge on his own as this could backfire and make the situation worse.
- Tell an adult in charge. If the bully was or seems like he can get physical, firmly request your name be withheld. Mom and Dad, be sure the adult in charge takes the situation seriously.
- Follow up with the authority figure to ensure a course of action has been planned and is taking place.
- If you choose to follow up with the parent directly, remember to go in first as a fact finder. Gather all the information you can about the “bully’s” side of the story. Then share your child’s side of the story. Collectively come up with an action plan. Again, follow up to be sure it has been implemented.
- Have your child write a journal about the incident(s) and keep writing in it going forward. Teach your child to include in their journal all the reasons they deserve and should be treated with respect and the things they uncover about themselves that make them unique.
- Document your incident with school administrators and the PTA.
- Remember the bully has the problem, not your child!

Role play with your child. Have your child role play in front of a mirror. Laugh and be silly about it. Make it a bonding experience. And, still, continue to role play some more.

AFTER THE FACT

After a specific bullying situation has been put to rest, there’s still work to do. You must ask what caused your child to be the

focus of the bullying in the first place and counter those tendencies.

- Consider enrolling your child in a self-defense course. Regardless of the type of self-defense course chosen (karate versus Tae Quon Do) these courses all stress self-discipline, self-control and self-esteem over aggression.
- Monitor and make sure your child is spending time with friends who respect him or her.
- Seek professional help if your child appears overly shy or low in self-esteem. These behavioral traits can be addressed early so as not to carry over into adulthood.

After the fact is the time to begin educating those around you about bullying. Awareness of, and education about, bullying needs to be brought to the attention of teachers, administrators, the PTA and fellow students as well.

Bullies like to have an audience. So why do “good” kids stand by and watch the bully bully? Watching bullying can vicariously allow a “good” kid to let off some of their own frustrations and hurt. They rationalize that they aren’t doing the hurting, just watching.

Additionally, “good” kids may be afraid that if they do speak up, the bully will pick on them next. Parents need to teach anti-bully behavior to their own children.

- Children need to be educated that if only one person shouts “Stop it. That’s uncool,” the bullying behavior will stop 50% of the time.
- “Good” kids need to know that bullying includes telling secrets, rumors, excluding others, saying mean things, using negative gestures, giving the silent

treatment, saying “you’re not my friend”. Kids need to know that bullying is not just about being physical and taking things away.

- Children should be taught to get an adult should they find themselves watching a bullying incident.
- Students need to be told to report the incident in the school’s “bully box” or suggestion box.
- Teach your child to offer support including going with the student to tell her parents or school what happened.

If your child turns out to be a bully or has begun to show some bullying characteristics, you must initiate conversations so he or she understands there are serious repercussions to bullying including:

- Loss of privileges,
- Loss of personal items of enjoyment
- Loss of extracurricular activities
- Writing a personal letter of reflection

RALLY

This is when you quietly rally as many people as possible in saying “NO” to bullies. Teachers, administrators, the student council, and the PTA all need to help to minimize bullying on school grounds.

Get them to distribute a NO BULLYING PLEDGE card. Have teachers ask the kids to recite it and place the card in their wallets then and there.

THE “SAY NO TO BULLYING” PROMISE

**I promise not to bully other people.
I will say “STOP IT” if I see bullying.
I will call on an adult to help.
I promise to do my best to include
those easily left out.
I will watch my own words and actions.
Bullying can stop with me.**

To avoid bringing unnecessary attention to your child, don't take credit for any of these "No Bullies" rallying activities.

One closing thought...Kids are by nature good. Our media are bringing extremes--highly charged images and conversations—into our home and to our kids. We, as parents, have to constantly be vigilante to redirect our children's attitudes so they know, in this ever changing world, that your expectations of kindness and decency remain constant.

I hope this has been beneficial. Here's to happy, healthy children.

Sincerely,

John Burstein

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If you found this article helpful, [check out our companion video Life Skills.](#)
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Information provided by John Burstein and Slim Goodbody, Inc. should be used for general information purposes only. Advice here is not intended to provide a basis for action in particular circumstances without consideration by a competent professional.
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Sources: National Education Association; National Center for Assault Prevention; Teacher Magazine, Aug/Sept 1997; Bully-Proof Your School by Colleen Newquist, copyright Education World; Education Digest; National Association of School Psychologists; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

...ADDITIONAL RESOURCES...

Books About Bullying:

- Bully Proofing Your School by Carla Garrity
- Bullying at School—What We Know and What We Can Do by Dan Olweus
- The Bully, The Bullied and The Bystander—From Pre School to High School—How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break The cycle of Violence by Barbara Coloroso
- What To Do When Kids Are Mean to Your Child by Elin McCoy

Web Sites Covering Bullying:

- www.pbskids.org
- www.bullying.org
- www.nobully.org
- www.education-world.com
- www.kidspeace.org
- www.childsafetyexperts.com
- www.safechild.org
- www.no-bully.com
- www.kidpower.org
- www.kidsafe-caps.org

Web Sites Covering Self Esteem:

- www.kidshealthworks.com
- www.keepkidshealthy.com