

Beyond bullying: *What you can do to help*

**A handbook for parents and teachers
of junior high students**

Beyond bullying: *What you can do to help*

**A handbook for parents and teachers
of junior high students**

Authors: Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools Enhancing Teaching and Student Learning Committee: Niki Wosnack, Sue Waring, Emilie Keane and Doug Chase.

Thanks to the students from G. H. Primeau School, Vincent J. Maloney Catholic Junior High School and Ecole Secondaire St. Marguerite d'Youville.

Developed under agreement with the Minister of Learning, province of Alberta, Canada.

The Alberta Teachers' Association

© 1999 by The Alberta Teachers' Association.
All rights reserved. Published 1999. Revised 2000

Revised copyright © 2006 The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton T5N 2R1.

Printed in Canada.

Any reproduction in whole or in part without prior written consent of The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities is prohibited.

ISBN 1-897324-10-3

What is bullying?

Bullying is the interaction between two or more people when one person or a group repeatedly acts, or gets others to act, in ways that are physically or psychologically harmful.

Bullying is always characterized by an imbalance of power and negative intent. This distinguishes bullying from everyday conflict. There are many expressions or forms of bullying. The most common include

- physical attacks/aggression;
- verbal aggression in the form of threats, put-downs, taunts or name-calling;
- actions which result in exclusion from peer groups; and
- stealing money/possessions, or extortion.

In most cases, bullying behavioural patterns develop over time and are consistent or escalate even though the bully chooses different victims.

Characteristics of someone who bullies

Someone who bullies may demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Likes to dominate; is power oriented.
- Values the immediate rewards aggression brings.
- Has low empathy for others, shows no remorse.
- Shows distorted thinking, such as, “Everyone should do what I tell them to do. I’m powerful if others are afraid of me.”
- Thinks aggression is a way to get control.
- Has low or high self-esteem.
- May model bullying behaviour after someone in the family or a significant other.

NOTE: Not all those who bully demonstrate every characteristic shown above.

Potential outcomes

We have to take bullying seriously because of the negative effects that it has on the bully and victim alike.

Victims

1. Learning Problems

- Long-term or significant stress caused by bullying actually destroys neurons in the brain that are necessary for long-term memory storage and retrieval. Clearly, this has a serious and negative impact on learning.
- Reasoning and the ability to apply logic or understand complex concepts are not possible in the presence of threat. Brain research has shown that emotions have a huge impact on attention, which in turn drives learning and memory.

2. Brain Functioning and Threat

The brain is endowed with a strong survival mechanism. Reactions and the survival instinct dominate response patterns when a threat is perceived. As a result, when a person feels stressed or threatened, behaviours become rote or constricted. Why? When a threat is perceived, the brain responds by sending messages to the amygdala, a structure in the mid-brain region. The amygdala then signals for the production of stress hormones which trigger an alarm or alert system within the body. This is the start of the fight-or-flight response. These hormones affect the way we feel, act and think.

The stress and anxiety caused by bullying and harassment affect learning in the following ways:

- Reduced learning and inability to engage in higher-order thinking
- Impaired ability to focus and concentrate
- Inability to prioritize
- Increased rote behaviour
- Memory deficits

Chronic or prolonged stress and threat also affect the body by weakening the immune system and impairing long-term memory.

3. Life Issues

Victims of bullying face many daunting realities.

- Increased school absences negatively affect performance.
- Victims are at risk for high levels of depression and diminished self-esteem.
- There is increased probability that future offspring will be victims.
- There is increased risk that victims will engage in bullying behaviours.

Aggressors

1. Justice Issues

- Those who bully others are four times more likely to commit criminal offences as young adults or adults.

2. Learning Problems

- Those who bully others are more likely to drop out of school.

3. Life Issues

- Research indicates that those who bully others face futures likely to be characterized by poor, fragmented relationships and dead-end jobs.
- There is a high probability that the children of parents who bully will become bullies themselves.

Witnesses

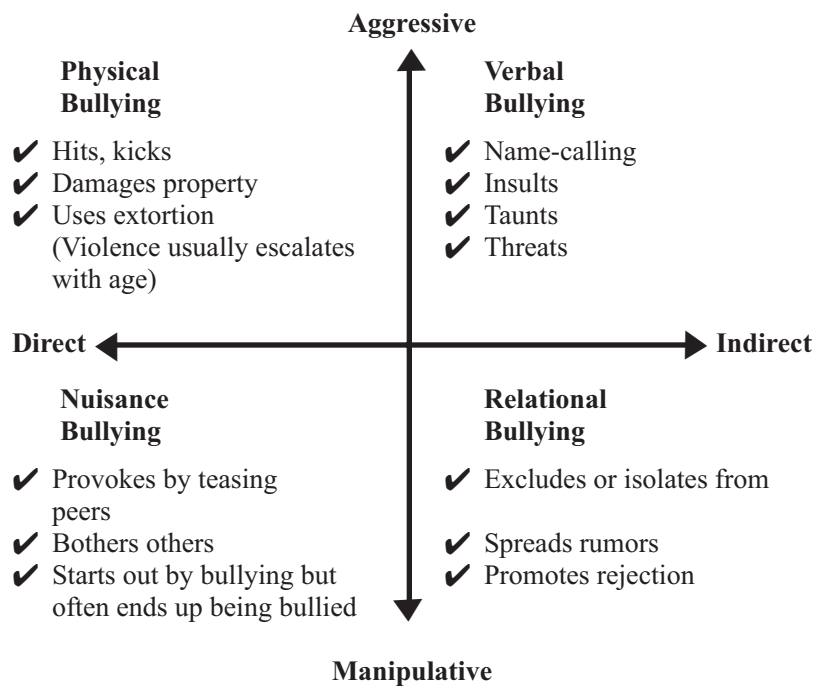
1. Becoming Desensitized

- Young people who witness bullying and do nothing to stop it become desensitized to the harm it causes.

2. The Cycle of Violence

- By not expecting young people to intervene or report bullying when they see it, the cycle of violence is perpetuated.

Bullying behaviours



Victim behaviours

Although there is no specific type of victim, the following behaviours or characteristics may signal a vulnerability that could encourage bullying:

- Movement that is hesitant and does not appear purposeful
- Lack of eye contact
- Head down, shoulders hunched
- Apologetic tone
- Avoidance of others
- Minimal response to peers
- Body language signals a posture that appears “poised for escape”

Indicators of bullying

The following are signs that your teen may have been a victim of bullying:

- Absenteeism that is too frequent and may involve skipping school
- Belongings or money that mysteriously disappear
- Uncharacteristic difficulty attending and completing school work
- Verbalization which avoids talk about school or shows unhappiness at school
- Unexplained bruising or disheveled clothing
- Adoption of nervous mannerisms, withdrawal from family and/or friends
- Crying at night or in secret
- Apathy/depression
- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Reluctance to walk to and from school, or to ride the bus

School staff—what you can do

1. Take reports of bullying seriously. Advice such as “Just ignore them” or “Walk away” is not helpful and sends a message that adults will not help. Research shows that adult intervention is the most effective way to stop bullying behaviour. High adult visibility within the school, in hallways and on school grounds has also been shown to be an effective deterrent to bullying behaviour.

2. Use anonymous surveys to find out if bullying is a problem in your school. Key information includes

- gender/grade level of person responding to survey
- areas on/around the school where students feel safe/unsafe/somewhat safe,
- staff responses when help is requested (helpful/somewhat helpful/not helpful) and
- type and frequency of bullying behaviour.

Do not use anonymous surveys to identify names of children who bully.

In a 1995 study done in Toronto, students reported that school personnel and other adults intervened in only 1 out of 25 instances of bullying. The following staff checklist, adapted from *Take Action Against Bullying** (Lajoie, McLellan and Seldon 1995) helps staff recognize their reactions to bullying situations.

Staff checklist—bullying behaviours

	Yes/No
Incidents of verbal aggression are heard in our school. Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly ____ Monthly ____)	_____
Students roughhouse in/around our school. Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly ____ Monthly ____)	_____
I can recognize confrontational or negative posturing behaviours. Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly ____ Monthly ____)	_____
I notice students who are likely to be victimized/bullied.	_____

*Lajoie, G., A. McLellan and C. Seldon. *Take Action Against Bullying*. Coquitlam, B.C.: Bully B'Ware Productions, 1995.

Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly____ Monthly ____)

I can recognize student reactions to bullying/victimization. _____
 Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly____ Monthly ____)

I know how to safely and effectively respond when bullying occurs. _____
 Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly____ Monthly ____)

I recognize the need for confidentiality. _____
 Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly____ Monthly ____)

I know when bullying should be reported to administrators. _____
 Frequency (Daily ____ Weekly____ Monthly ____)

My classroom rules and procedures reflect a strong anti-bullying philosophy. _____

3. Respond verbally and follow through.

- “Do you need some help here?”
- “You may think it’s just fooling around, but it doesn’t look to me like everyone thinks it’s fun.”
- “I need to talk to you for a minute. Please come here.”
- “Stop [behaviour] now, please.”
- “You know the rules about . . .”
- “I’m not sure, in seeing what you’re doing, that feelings aren’t being hurt. Stop [behaviour] now!”
- “This looks like/sounds like bullying to me. You know our school rules. Stop . . .”

The next step involves following through to ensure that the incident is not repeated and that safety concerns are addressed, then determining whether further intervention is necessary. Follow-through is essential if bullying is to be decreased.

4. Teach awareness and anti-bullying strategies directly. It is important that students understand the difference between normal conflict and bullying. Use of role-play to practise effective response is recommended. With student participation and involvement, establish anti-bullying codes of conduct. Carry these forward to the larger school community. Stress that breaking the code of silence surrounding bullying is an act of courage and strength.

Caution: Do not allow students to play the role of the bully. Some students become attracted to the feeling of power this role gives them. The teacher should play the role of the bully and emphasize playing out responses for tonality and assertiveness.

5. Advise parents about the programs offered by the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools Project and the discipline system in your classroom/school. Other complementary programs such as peer support, peer mediation and classroom meetings assist students by training them in the use of effective problem-solving strategies. Suggest strategies for parents to follow if their child experiences bullying or initiates it.

6. Deal with all reports of bullying. Working together to assist aggressor and victim will help in creating and maintaining a safe school atmosphere. Parents fear that their children may be labeled, so taking care to ensure privacy and offering assistance are critical to success. It may be wise to assign a school contact. Always speak to parents and victims, and students who bully separately. Stick to discussing specific behaviours (what was said/done) from notes taken to document the information at the time of reporting. Use language that is clear and addresses behaviour. For example, "Harold pushed Hedwig into a locker in the hallway outside our class on three occasions in the last week and has threatened to punch her on two occasions in the same time period" is language that explains behaviour accurately and factually and does not include speculating about another's motivation. Incidents of bullying should be documented by staff. Ensuring that all staff members have a supply of report forms will expedite the reporting process. Keep the forms brief. Office staff should enter the information from the reports into the computer soon after the forms are dropped off at the office. This will provide a tracking system for the school and allow the school administration to identify students who repeatedly bully others or who are repeatedly victimized.

Parents may be upset and defensive. You may find parents of teens who bully see their child as a victim or as someone who has been provoked into bullying. Do not get drawn into debating motivation including whether such actions were provoked or defensible. Gently and calmly remind them of the school goal of maintaining a safe and caring environment. Set clear expectations for student behaviour, including logical consequences for bullying behaviour. (See page 16 for guidelines for development of logical consequences) Teach alternatives and give strategies for home use that reinforce school practices. Giving examples related to common conflicts within the home may help to provide concrete examples for dealing with aggression.

For example,

- **State the behaviour that is unacceptable.**

“You just hit your brother because he wouldn’t give you his CD.”

- **Set limits.**

“It’s OK to be angry when you don’t get your way—it is *not* OK to say or do things that hurt others.”

- **Teach alternatives.**

“It’s OK to tell your sister you are angry because she won’t share her CD player. What are two ways you can solve the problem?”

Parents of victims will want to know how school personnel will respond to ensure safety and assist cessation of bullying. Be prepared to explain strategies and programs you are using to ensure safety and enhance development of coping strategies. Parents will also want to know the consequences for bullies. Communication with parents is critical to enlisting their support until the bullying has been eliminated. It is important in discussions with parents to keep the focus on their own child’s behaviour while assuring them that the other child will be dealt with fairly.

7. Follow through with related activities.

Note the following suggestions.

- a) Integrate learning activities that address bullying into one or more lessons aimed at curriculum outcomes in the subject(s) you teach.
- b) Ask students what they think are the natural consequences of bullying and discuss its immediate and long term impact on those who bully and their victims.
- c) Invite one of the school administrators to the class to explain how bullying behaviour is handled, the process of involving parents, and what range of consequences have been agreed upon in the past.
- d) Institute a poster or essay contest that demonstrates one or more of the following:
 - the negative impact bullying has on the individual and/or the school community;
 - the school as a safe and caring place where bullying is not tolerated and aggressors face the consequences of their aggression; and/or
 - what you can do to stop bullying.

A catchy slogan should be included to emphasize the message that bullying hurts and cannot be tolerated.

School staff— handling bullying effectively

Victims

- 1. Stay calm. Talk to victims separately.**
- 2. Get the facts.**
 - Include the names of those involved, the sequence of events/ behaviours/frequency of bullying and the circumstances and location.
- 3. Offer support.**
 - Tell the victims it's not their fault, they didn't cause it.
 - Validate the courage it takes to report bullying.
 - Assure them you will take all possible steps to see that the bullying stops.
 - Tell them their parents and the aggressor's parents will be contacted.
 - Ask what needs to happen to make them feel safe in the future.
- 4. Make safety arrangements.**
- 5. Practise effective responses.**
 - Involve them in groups and situations where they can make appropriate friends.
 - Teach them how to recognize and affirm the use of assertive strategies.
- 6. Affirm their courage in reporting the bullying.**
- 7. Monitor the situation and follow up with the student and his or her parents.**

Aggressors

- 1. Stay calm. Talk to the aggressors separately.**
- 2. Get the facts.**
 - Include the names of those involved, the sequence of events, the frequency of bullying, the circumstances and the location.
 - Document the information, being careful to keep emotional responses and unsupported conclusions out of the documentation.

Note: It is quite common for aggressors to minimize or deny actions or responsibility for actions.

3. Be firm.

- Set limits.
- Agree upon logical consequences or, failing that, assign logical consequences
- Contact parents.

4. Offer help.

- Offer to help practise positive, productive alternative behaviours for similar situations.

5. Investigate.

- Find out what purpose the bullying is serving and how established the pattern of bullying has been.

6. Build skills.

- Institute an “Attitude Adjustment” course in the case of continued bullying. The course should span three to five noon hours or after-school sessions and teach aggressors to recognize and correct negative behaviour patterns.

7. Aid reconciliation.

- When appropriate, discuss ways to make up for hurt caused.
- Consider the wishes of each victim.

8. Monitor behaviour and follow up with the students and his or her parents.

Witnesses

1. Respond to reports.

- Always respond to reports of bullying or harassment and follow through.
- Create a climate in your classroom and the school where reporting bullying is encouraged.
- Ask students to think about the short- and long-term consequences of not reporting bullying.

2. Set a caring example.

- Model caring and respect for students and staff members in the school.

3. Develop skills.

- Teach students how assertive, rather than passive or aggressive, responses to conflict can result in peaceful resolution.

Parents—what to do

Parents of victims

- 1. Stay calm.**
- 2. Offer comfort.**
 - Let your teen know you are on his or her side and will do all you can to ensure safety.
 - Tell your teen that reporting the bullying was the right thing to do.
 - Tell your child that he or she has the right to be safe at school.
- 3. Work with the school.**
 - Contact the teacher immediately to ensure the situation is monitored.
 - Ask for advice about contacting the bullying teen's parents.
 - Check the school's plan for intervention.
 - Ensure that the school has a no-bullying policy.
- 4. Make safety arrangements.**

For example, tell your child

 - not to go places alone and
 - to inform an adult if someone is bullying him or her.
- 5. Help your child develop skills** that will prepare him or her to respond assertively to bullying and the confidence to use these skills to stay safe.
- 6. Practise effective responses.**
 - Recognize and praise use of these responses as you see them.
 - Never encourage a physical response toward bullying.
- 7. Affirm your teen's courage in telling** you about the bullying and learning how to deal with bullying behaviour.
- 8. Communicate.**
 - Talk about feelings and let your teen know you believe in his or her ability to work through the problem.
 - Follow through by checking with the school to ensure the problem is resolved.

Parents of aggressors

- 1. Stay calm.**
- 2. Be firm.**
 - Set limits and give clear messages that you love your teen but all bullying must stop.
 - Agree to, or failing that, impose logical nonviolent consequences.
- 3. Offer help.**
 - Let your child know that you will work with him or her to help find better ways to solve problems.
- 4. Investigate.**
 - Talk about how bullying affects victims.
 - Ask why your child is bullying and help him or her find positive ways to interact with others.
 - Check with the teacher and get as much specific information as possible.
 - Identify the circumstances when your teen engages in bullying.
 - Be careful not to excuse the aggression. Work to gain an understanding of the skills your teen needs to learn to solve problems effectively.
- 5. Have balance.**
 - Make sure to spend time affirming the qualities and behaviours you appreciate in your teen.
 - Take care not to focus on what isn't working. It is paramount to affirm and encourage positive behaviours and constructive problem-solving skills.
- 6. Encourage talk of feelings.**
 - Teach your teen ways to express feelings that will help build empathy and problem-solving skills. Modeling by talking about how you feel may be helpful.
- 7. Practise alternatives.**
 - Work out different ways to solve problems which do not involve verbal or physical aggression.
 - Discuss ways to handle the situations that have posed problems in the past.
 - Make a plan. Practise new responses.

8. Aid reconciliation.

- Help your teen work out a way to make it up to the victim(s).
- Consider what the victim would want to happen.

9. Co-operate with the school.

- Keep in touch with teachers to find out how your child is doing.
- Ask for help if you need it.

10. Monitor TV/video games.

- Be aware of what your teen watches and how he or she spends time. Media violence has been shown to increase aggression in youth.

11. Reflect.

- Examine your parenting strategies, especially strategies used to discipline.
- Remember that you are a powerful role model for your teen.

Parent resource—advice to teens who have witnessed bullying

1. Silence encourages bullying.

Thank your teen for having the courage to tell you about it. Encourage your teen to tell the teacher what has been observed if the incidents occurred at school. Explain why reporting is necessary and offer to help do this. Explain the difference between ratting to get someone in trouble and reporting to prevent another from being hurt.

2. Set a caring example.

A warm, calm manner and nonjudgmental response will set the stage for this discussion. Model caring for others. This will serve your teen well in the future. Talk to your child about the victim's probable feelings. Ask how it would feel if he or she were the one being bullied—share your feelings too.

3. Encourage support.

Take this opportunity to talk about others. Point out that if enough teens stand up against it, bullying stops. Also discuss safety issues and when it's dangerous enough to get an adult immediately.

General parameters for safety include noticing and pre-planning not to be alone with someone observed to be physically or verbally aggressive. If someone is at risk of physical injury or is unable to cope with harassment or bullying, adult intervention should be sought.

4. Practise skills.

Help your teen practise ways to support others without escalating the bullying or using bullying behaviour. Intervening by asking the victim to join their group, simply calling the bullying what it is and asking the aggressor to stop or getting an adult to assist you are some useful strategies. Talk to the school counsellor for more ideas.

5. Co-operate with the school.

Ask how your teen could help the situation and what behaviour is most appropriate to take.

Logical consequences

The 4Rs of Logical Consequences

Reasonable

Related

Respectful

Responsible

Introduction

In arriving at logical consequences for incidents where bullying or harassment has taken place, care must be taken to ensure that the aggressor has the opportunity to learn different, more constructive ways to interact with peers. One way to set the stage for behavioural change would be to design and conduct an Attitude Adjustment Program over several noon hours or after school. This program would incorporate identifying problem behaviours, thinking errors and corrective responses to past behaviours which resulted in bullying or harassment of others.

Students would have the opportunity to work with a staff member to correct negative behaviours and thinking patterns. Goal setting and a method for monitoring future behaviour would also need to be established as part of this program.

Guidelines for development of logical consequences

A range of logical consequences that could be applied should meet the following criteria:

1. Reasonable → the consequence fits the inappropriate behaviour.
2. Related → the consequence teaches a skill or attitude that will prevent future inappropriate behaviour.

3. Respectful → the consequence must respect the dignity of both victim and aggressor.
4. Responsible → the consequence ensures that the aggressor is the one who is held accountable for his or her actions.

Re-examine any philosophy in which the incorporation of zero tolerance means one size fits all when it comes to assigned consequences.

Unfortunately, zero tolerance has been reframed as a simplistic justification for treating every problem with one solution. Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler, behaviour- management consultants and authors of *As Tough as Necessary: Countering Aggression, Violence and Hostility in Schools*, are skeptical about any intervention that treats dissimilar problems with similar behavioural outcomes. They encourage schools to develop legitimate, high standards and a “tough as necessary” approach that finds the balance between being strong and being fair.

Zero tolerance is too often an excuse to punish without thought, to remove the troublemakers without guilt or responsibility, or to sound tough without doing the tough work of finding real solutions. “As tough as necessary” is the conceptual opposite of zero tolerance. It means “do what works.” . . . In some cases, the toughness required might be stronger than a previous zero tolerance solution. In other cases, the solution might involve other alternatives, including counseling, parent involvement, conflict resolution, planning or training.” (Curwin and Mendler 1997)

Resources

Books

Alberta Teachers' Association. 2000. *Safe and Caring Schools: Havens for the Mind*.

Zarzour, K. 1994. *Battling the School-Yard Bully: How to Raise an Assertive Child in an Aggressive World*. New York: Today's Parent, HarperCollins.

Video

King, R., and R. Squire, in association with Toronto Board of Education. 1997. *Bullying at School: Strategies for Prevention*. Toronto: King Squire Films.

Internet

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities: www.sacsc.ca

Alberta Education: <http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca/safeschools>

Tri-faculty Research (The faculties of education from the universities of Lethbridge, Calgary and Alberta): <http://www.education.ualberta.ca/educ/research/tri-fac/tri-fac.html>

<http://dialspace.pipex.com/townsquare/gaj28>

<http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOC/kids3.htm>

<http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOC/tableoc.htm>

<http://www.naeyc.org>

<http://www.aap.org/family/parents/resist.htm>

Always preview resources for your children to ensure the information and suggestions are suitable for your child. Some books and Internet sites may contain sensitive information on abuse.

ISBN 1-897324-10-3