

# What Every Parent Should Know about Bullying

A companion publication to the Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit

## What is bullying?<sup>1</sup>

- **Bullying is when children or adolescents harm others on purpose.** It includes things like hitting, pushing, name-calling, making fun of others, gossiping, excluding others, spreading rumors and cyberbullying.
- **When bullying happens, the person who is bullied has a hard time defending him/herself.** This is because there is an imbalance of power. The child that bullies may be stronger, more popular or hold power over the person who is bullied.
- **The harmful actions are repeated or they are very severe.** This makes bullied children feel very upset or causes them to stop doing things they used to enjoy.

Cyberbullying is done through text messages, email or Internet posts on sites like Facebook or MySpace.

Bullying harms children and teens. It can make them feel bad about themselves and can hurt their relationships with others. Bullying can also interfere with learning.

## Why do some children bully others?<sup>2</sup>

Children may bully others for lots of reasons. These reasons include:

- Wanting to be in control or feel powerful
- Wanting attention from others
- Poor adult supervision
- Adult acceptance of bullying
- Prejudice

## What can parents do when bullying occurs?

Bullying is not something kids need to endure. Putting up with bullying does not make a child stronger. It makes them more at-risk for emotional stress.<sup>3</sup> Students that bully are also at-risk. They are more likely to

## If you suspect a child is being bullied, DO NOT:

- Blame the child
- Use the word tattletale
- Tell the child to ignore it
- Tell the child to retaliate
- Expect the child to work it out alone
- Allow mediation, if the child is reluctant
- Demand apologies

get in trouble, participate in risky activities and have problems as adults.<sup>4</sup>

Fortunately, there are many things that parents can do to address bullying.

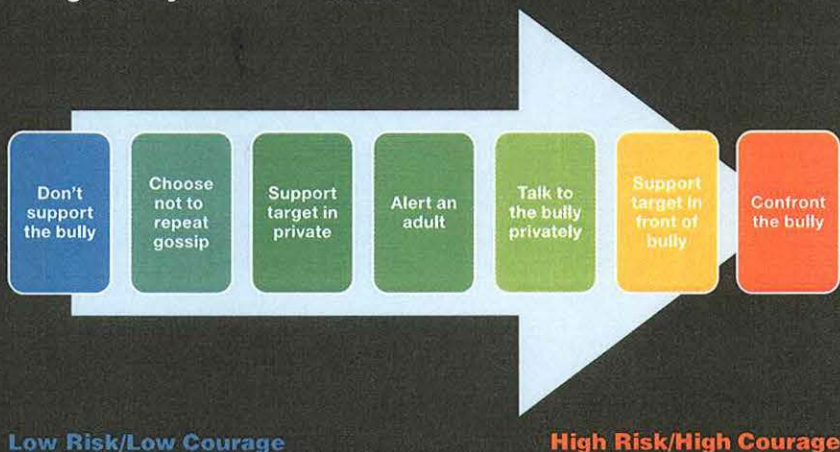
(See reverse side.)

## Bystanders Matter<sup>5</sup>

Bystanders are the people that see bullying when it happens. Bystanders may encourage bullying to continue if they participate, laugh or ignore bullying. Children should be taught about the role of bystanders in bullying. They should discuss and practice helpful responses.

This graphic shows examples of helpful bystander actions.

## Range of Bystander Actions



Adapted from *Bullies & Victims: Helping Your Children through the Schoolyard Battlefield*. Fried, S., & Fried, P. (1996). New York, NY: M. Evans & Co.

## Tips for parents whose children are bullied:<sup>6</sup>

### Talk with your child.

Explain what bullying is and that it is wrong. Let your child know that you will be there to help him or her – and always follow through.

### Work with teachers, counselors and principals.

Every school district in Pennsylvania must have an anti-bullying policy. Review your school's policy and talk to your child's teacher, guidance counselor or principal if you have questions about it.

### Identify an adult at school who your child trusts.

This adult can help your child feel safe at school by listening to him or her. If the adult is willing, he or she may play an active role in checking in with your child and following up with specific concerns.

### Document and report continued bullying.

Keep detailed records about the bullying so you are able to tell the school exactly what happened. If bullying continues, write a letter to the school to report the bullying and ask for a response.

### Help your child develop new friendships.

Try to connect your child to other children who are positive influences or have things in common with your child.

### Help your child learn how to react to bullying, such as:

- Speak up when bullying happens.
- Try not to cry or lash out in front of the bully.
- Walk away.
- Tell a trusted adult.

## Helpful hints from kids who have been bullied:<sup>7</sup>

- Tell an adult at home
- Tell a friend
- Make a joke about it instead of reacting with emotion
- Tell an adult at school
- Remind yourself that it was not your fault

Source: [www.youthvoiceproject.com](http://www.youthvoiceproject.com)

### Work with other parents.

It takes a group effort to stop bullying. Work with other parents to respond to bullying if it is happening in your neighborhood after school hours.

### Seek help if your child talks about suicide or seems unusually upset.

Immediately seek the help of a doctor or a mental health professional. If you cannot reach one of these people, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255.

### If your child experiences cyberbullying, he or she should:<sup>8</sup>

- Not respond.
- Block the sender.
- Save or print harmful messages.
- Report cyberbullying to a trusted adult.
- Contact websites or Internet service companies to ask that the harmful messages be removed.

Authorities may be able to help in some cases of cyberbullying. If the cyberbullying is interfering with learning, report it to the school. If you think a crime was committed (e.g., serious threats of harm), contact the police.

While it is helpful for parents to set limits for using cell phones and computers, taking these items away from children all together is not recommended. This may actually cause children to hide their online lives from their parents.

## Tips for parents whose children bully others:<sup>9</sup>

### Discuss bullying and set clear rules at home.

Let children know that bullying is wrong and that it will not be accepted.

### Provide consequences for bullying.

This may include time out, loss of TV, cell phone or computer time, grounding, etc.

### Work with school staff.

Learn about the school's bullying policies and meet with school staff. Get reports on how your child is doing.

### Model the behavior you expect from your child.

Show respect to others. Solve problems without aggression. Set a good example for your child.

## Recommended Resources

### StopBullying.gov

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

This website provides information about how kids, teens, young adults, parents, educators and others in the community can prevent or stop bullying.

### Cyberbullying Research Center

[www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)

The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about cyberbullying among adolescents.

### GLSEN

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

GLSEN provides resources and support to address bullying generally, and bullying of LGBTQ students, in particular.

### Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit

[www.SafeSchools.info/BP\\_ParentGuide.pdf](http://www.SafeSchools.info/BP_ParentGuide.pdf)

For additional information and resources, please see the *Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit: Resources for Parents and Professionals*.

## About this Guide

This Parent Guide, produced by the Center for Safe Schools through a Highmark Foundation grant, was guided by input from parents and organizations that serve youth. It represents Highmark Foundation's commitment to improve children's health and well-being.

For a complete list of source material referenced here, please see the online version of this Parent Guide at [www.SafeSchools.info/BP\\_Toolkit](http://www.SafeSchools.info/BP_Toolkit)

## Section 10: Tips for parents and caregivers of children who bully others

Sometimes parents must deal with situations in which their children have behaved in a way that is mean and hurtful to others.

**Parents can support children who bully to make positive behavioral changes by using the following strategies.<sup>14</sup>**

### **Discuss bullying and set clear rules at home.**

It is important to have consistent, clear rules that have fair and predictable consequences. Redirect your child and provide negative consequences when your child demonstrates verbal, physical, electronic or relational aggression directed at another child. Praise your child when he or she chooses not to participate in bullying behavior or when he or she helps a student who is being bullied.

### **Talk with your child.**

Ask for your child's account of the bullying incident. Be prepared to be objective and to listen carefully. Explain your understanding of the bullying incident. Clearly communicate that this type of behavior is serious and will not be tolerated.

### **Understand bullying policies and work with the school.**

All parents should be informed of the school's bullying policy and procedures. If your child is involved in bullying at school, be prepared to support the school's actions. You may wish to set up a schedule of regular meetings with school staff to gain feedback on how your child is responding to any interventions to address peer aggression.

### **Help your child connect with peers who demonstrate positive behavior.**

Peers can serve as positive role models for children and are important players in the bullying dynamic.

### **Model the behavior you expect from your child.**

Show respect to others. Solve problems without aggression. Set a good example for your child.

