

Dealing with Bullying

By Cheryl Coon

Consider a common experience of elementary school children—teasing and bullying. A teacher or parent can choose from a wide variety of good books on this topic for any age group, whether the books are for individual children or for an entire classroom. Some of my favorites include

- *King of the Playground* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. Ages 4-7. A young child who encounters teasing and bullying on the playground might respond positively to this lively story, written by a well-loved author of books for older kids. Here, a young boy named Kevin is bullied on the playground by another child, Sammy, who calls himself King of the Playground. Sammy threatens Kevin with fantastic and unlikely consequences if he dares to play on the playground. But after Kevin confides in his father, he begins to see that Sammy's threats are not real, and he gains the courage to respond to Sammy with an invitation to play together.
- *Bully on the Bus* by Carl Bosch. Ages 6-9. Perhaps a child has encountered bullying on the school bus. If so, then this simple problem-solving story is worth considering. The story invites the reader to consider the alternatives and consequences for a young boy who is bullied on the school bus. Readers choose from a menu of approaches, including talking to the bus driver, asking advice of a teacher, fighting the bully, or ignoring the bully; the consequences of each choice are explored. This is an intriguing format that many kids enjoy.
- *Ada Potato* by Judith Caseley. Ages 7-10. An older child may be teased about her appearance or about an activity she participates in at school. In this book, Ada loves playing the violin in the school band (which includes string instruments), but kids tease her, calling her Ada Potato, Queen of the Mob, and say that she has a machine gun in her violin case. Ada stops playing the violin; her mother asks her why; and Ada confides in her. Her mother shares a teasing experience from her own childhood that gives Ada an idea for dealing with the kids who are teasing her.
- *The Meanest Thing to Say* by Bill Cosby. Ages 8-11. Sometimes children find themselves a part of the very group that is doing the teasing. This story is excellent for encouraging discussion. Little Bill learns a game called Playing the Dozens from a new boy at school. In the game, each person has 12 chances to say something mean to someone else, and the person who says the meanest thing wins. After experiencing a round of the game, Little Bill is furious and awaits his own turn. But his father suggests to Little Bill that the most effective response is simply to say, "So?" to every mean thing that is said. Little Bill tries it and finds that the technique works.

Taken together, these books offer a variety of ideas for kids to talk about and to try when confronted with teasing or bullying:

- Making a friend of the bully (*King of the Playground*)

- Asking for help from an adult (*Bully on the Bus*)
- Standing up to the bully (*Bully on the Bus*)
- Getting other kids on your side (*Ada Potato*)
- Saying, "So what?" (*The Meanest Thing to Say*)

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