

TAKE A STAND:

Prevention of bullying and interpersonal violence

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TAKE A STAND: Prevention of Bullying and Interpersonal Violence

Bullying is something most children encounter in one form or another. Children struggle with being called names, being picked upon, being excluded, not knowing how to make friends, or being the ones acting unkindly or aggressively toward others. All forms of bullying are abusive and all are opportunities to teach children how to get along, how to be considerate people, how to be part of a community or group.

The TAKE A STAND Program is a revolutionary approach to prevention of bullying. Starting at the Kindergarten level and progressing through Grade 5, children learn about bullying, its effects, how to stop it and the importance of mutual acceptance and respect.

For the first time, schools, churches, youth groups, after school programs, etc have a tool to teach all children how to be advocates for creating a community that will not tolerate bullying behaviors; to teach children who are targeted how to stand up for themselves; and to teach the bullies themselves alternate ways of handling their own feelings of not belonging.

At the same time, teachers, school administrators and parents learn that it is possible to TAKE A STAND for having a community that will not tolerate bullying. For too long, adults have believed that bullying is just

part of growing up, that there have always been kids who are jocks and kids who are geeks; those who are "in" and those who are "out." This acceptance has prevented adults from stopping this pattern.

The TAKE A STAND Program challenges this acceptance from the earliest possible age, creating a new standard for interpersonal relationships. Just as children led the drive to use seatbelts and to reduce smoking, they are the leaders in setting a new course for how we treat one another.

The TAKE A STAND Program creates a school-wide community of interpersonal problem solving and mutual respect that has been embraced by school administrators, teachers, parents and children. If you would like this Program to be a part of your children's education, please share this information with your school, youth group or Parent Teacher organization.

Dr. Sherryll Kraizer, author of the TAKE A STAND Program, has a Ph.D. in Education with a specialization in youth at risk. She is also the author of the Safe Child Program; the REACH and CHALLENGE Programs for at-risk youth; the RECOVERY Program for previously victimized children; and a Prevention of Dating Violence Program. Dr. Kraizer is internationally recognized for her prevention programs and creating models for maximizing community-wide participation in prevention effectiveness.

The TAKE A STAND cost: \$95 includes complete set of teaching guides and training videotape.

[Available in Print VHS or CD/DVD](#)

BULLYING BEHAVIORS

Bullying can take many forms: physical, emotional, verbal or a combination of these. It may involve one child bullying another, a group of children against a single child or groups against other groups (gangs). It is not unlike other forms of victimization and abuse in that it involves:

- an imbalance of power
- differing emotional tones, the target will be upset whereas the bully is cool and in control
- blaming the target for what has happened
- lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings and concerns of the victim
- a lack of compassion

Bullies are very often children who have been bullied or abused themselves. Sometimes they are children experiencing life situations they can't cope with, that leave them feeling helpless and out of control. They may be children with poor social skills, who do not fit in, who can't meet the expectations of their family or school. They bully to feel competent, successful, to control someone else, to get some relief from their own feelings of powerlessness.

WHO ARE THE TARGETS OF BULLYING

Anyone can be a target of bullying. Not all children are equally likely to be victimized by bullying behavior. Those children who are more prone to be picked upon tend to have the following characteristics:

- low self-esteem
- insecure
- lack of social skills,
- don't pick up on social cues
- cry or become emotionally distraught easily,
- unable to defend or stand up for themselves

Some children actually seem to provoke their own victimization. These children will tease bullies, make themselves a target by egging the person on, not knowing when to stop and then not being able to effectively defend themselves when the balance of power shifts to the bully.

Children who are not bullied tend to have better social skills and conflict management skills. They are more willing to assert themselves about differences without being aggressive or confronting. They suggest compromises and alternate solutions. They tend to be more aware of people's feelings and are the children who can be most helpful in resolving disputes and assisting other children to get help.

IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

If you learn your child is being bullied, you may immediately want to protect your child and confront the aggressor. You may feel embarrassed and want your child to toughen up, to get in there and fight back. You may feel helpless yourself. None of these responses are helpful.

Get as much information as you can about what has happened. Avoid blaming anyone, including the bullying child or children. Look at your own child's behavior and style of interacting. Ask yourself what you know about your child and how you can turn the immediate situation around.

If you are going to get in touch with the parents of a bullying child, remember that they will probably feel defensive. Keep in mind that your goal is to have a safe and nurturing environment for all of the children, not to escalate an already difficult situation. (For tips on talking to parents of bullies, see [The Safe Child Book](#).)

For your own children, there are several steps you can take.

- discuss alternatives to responding to bullies.
- don't react, walk away, get help if pursued
- agree with the bully, saying "You're right." and walking away.
- be assertive.

Role-play - just as in prevention of child abuse, role-play is what makes the skills real. Actually walk through situations and have your child practice different responses. Discuss prevention techniques such as staying with other kids. Do not get involved with bullies in any kind of interchange. Don't take it personally, it's really the bullies problems that are causing the situation, not you.

IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY

What every parent doesn't want to hear - your child is behaving like a bully.

Your first response will probably be defensive. Disarm the situation and buy yourself some time to process what's being said. For example, "Instead of labeling my child, please tell me what happened." Make yourself really listen. Remember that this discussion is ultimately about the well-being of your child, regardless of how its being framed.

Even if your child is behaving aggressively or acting like a bully, remember that this behavior is probably coming from your child's feelings of vulnerability. You need to look for what is going on in your child's interactions with others and what is going on internally, causing your child to behave that way. (Also see [REACH](#) and [CHALLENGE](#) Programs.)

In talking with your child, **DO NOT BLAME**. Do not get into a discussion about the "whys" of what happened. Your discussion should focus on several key points:

- Bullying is not acceptable in our family or in society.
- If you are feeling frustrated or angry or aggressive, here are some things you can do.
- Remember to role-play, act out the new behaviors.

- Ask, how can I help you with this? Who could you go to in school if you see yourself getting into this type of situation again?
- Specify concretely the consequences if the aggression or bullying continue.
- You want to stop the behavior, understand your child's feelings, then teach and reward more appropriate behavior.

PREVENTING BULLYING

As soon as children begin to interact with others, we can begin to teach them not to be bullies and not to be bullied. We can give them words for their feelings, limit and change their behavior and teach them better ways to express their feelings and wishes. **Children do not learn to solve these kinds of problems and get along by themselves. We need to teach them.**

When preschoolers begin to call people names or use unkind words, intervene immediately and consistently. In kindergarten children learn the power of exclusion. We begin to hear things like, "She's not my friend and she can't come to my party." Respond with, "You don't have to be friends with her today, but it's not all right to make her feel bad by telling her she can't come to your party."

In the early elementary grades, cliques and little groups develop which can be quite exclusionary and cruel. Children need to hear clearly from us, "It's not all right to treat other people this way. How do you think she feels being told she can't play with you? Kids don't have to play with everyone or even like everyone, but they can't be cruel about excluding others."

Boys who are physically small or weak are more prone to victimization. Making fun, picking on and other forms of bullying need to be identified in their earliest stages. The message needs to be crystal clear: This is not okay. Think about how he must feel. How could you include him and let other kids know it's not all right to treat others this way?

Children who are not bullies or victims have a powerful role to play in shaping the behavior of other children. **Teach your children to speak up on behalf of children being bullied.** "Don't treat her that way, it's not nice." "Hitting is not a good way to solve problems, let's find a teacher and talk about what happened."

For more examples and role-play situations, or for coaching on talking to parents or teachers about bullying, please refer to The [Safe Child Book](#).