

intimidating



MAKE TIME to LISTEN  
TAKE TIME to TALK  
— about Bullying

taking  
money

# Bullying

switching  
seats

## is Not

spreading  
rumors

name  
calling

pushing &  
tripping

# A Fact *of* Life



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Center for Mental Health Services  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

# COMMON SENSE RULES FOR PARENTS

**MUCH RESEARCH ON FAMILY CONDITIONS AND THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN HAS LED TO THIS IMPORTANT CONCLUSION:**

A lot of love and involvement from the people bringing up children, clear limits for what behavior is allowed and not allowed, as well as the use of nonviolent methods of upbringing, creates non-aggressive, harmonious, and independent children.

Here are some common sense rules for parents/caregivers who want to help children have a positive childhood.

Let your child feel he or she is important. Children have a great need to feel they are important to their parents. Children grow on love and challenges.

Laugh with and not at your child. Children are proud and can be deeply hurt when they feel you are making fun of them. Laugh with your child; humor is positive.

Do not give in to your child to avoid conflict. Children feel more secure when they have limits set for them in their everyday life, but they often cannot refrain from testing their limits.

Keep the agreements you make with your children. Children feel helpless if you break agreements without good reason. If your child isn't sure whether he or she can rely on you, whom can he or she rely on? Remember that what you do today contributes to forming the future.

Praise your child frequently. Encouragement and kind words motivate a child to cooperate. Positive support strengthens the child's self-image and creates an enthusiastic spirit. When new challenges arise, your child will be able to meet them confidently.

Do not frighten your child unnecessarily. Sometimes you may need to scare your child to keep him or her away from dangerous situations, but children should not be scared into obedience. Spare your child upsetting knowledge about things he or she cannot do anything about.

Remember that you are a role model for your child. Your child is bonded with you in the deepest love and admiration. That is why he or she wants to be like you, at least when he or she is young. Whatever you do, your child will do. Whatever you say or believe, your child will repeat.



MAKE TIME *to* **LISTEN**  
TAKE TIME *to* **TALK**  
— *about* **Bullying**

# **Bullying** is NOT a fact of life

## **Acknowledgment**

This material was prepared by Professor Dan Olweus at the University of Bergen, Norway, and adapted by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Department of Health and Human Services.

## **Access to Publication**

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## How To Use This Booklet

If you are concerned that your child might be being bullied or bullying other children, the information in this booklet can help.

### Parents –

If, after taking initial steps at home, you feel that you must enlist the help of school personnel, bring this booklet to the school meeting conference to help you advocate for your child.

### School Personnel –

If bullying may be a problem in your school, find out for sure. If the issue is a real one for your students, then a change in the school climate may be necessary.

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This booklet describes the steps that parents and schools can take, together, to help prevent bullying.

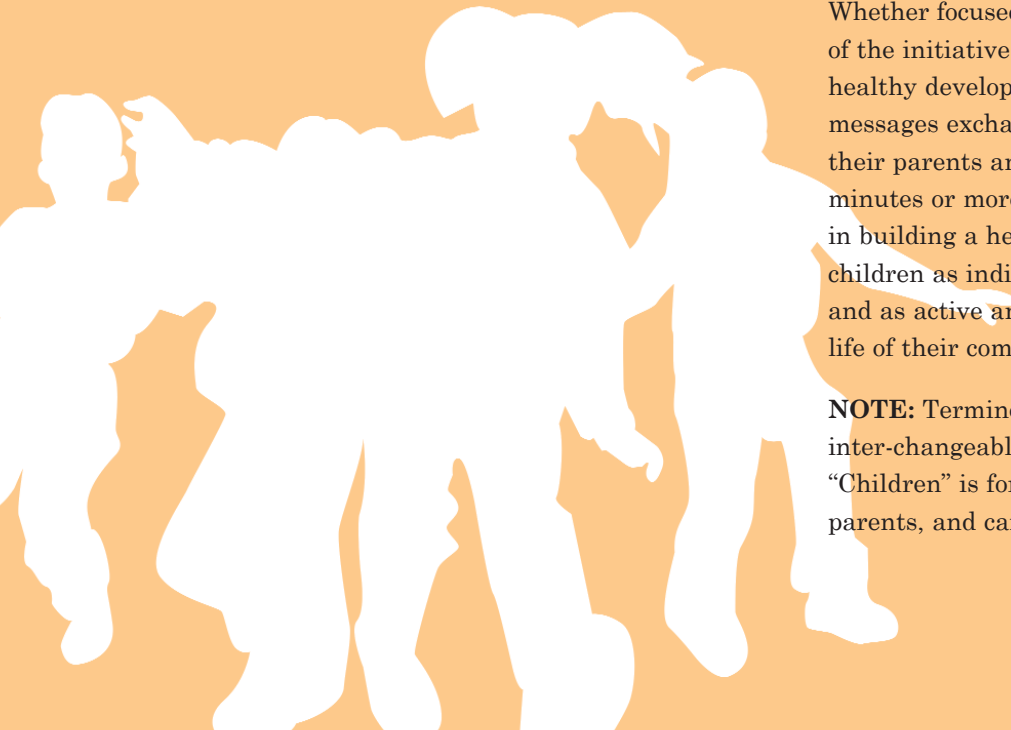
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Did you know that research has found that remarkable things can happen if parents and caregivers spent at least 15 minutes of undivided time a day listening and talking with their children? Research also tells us that children really do look to their parents and caregivers for advice and help about difficult choices and decisions.

The document in your hands right now and other companion materials about bullying are part of 15+ Make Time to Listen – Take Time to Talk, an initiative developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, to promote healthy child development and to prevent youth and school-based violence. The initiative builds on both the value children place on the advice they get from important adults in their lives and the benefits of those special 15 minutes each day. The listening and talking theme, however, also can be adapted by teachers, counselors, and other adults who are involved in the lives and futures of children.

Whether focused on bullying – as is this module of the initiative – or on general principles of healthy development and behavior, the messages exchanged between children and their parents and caregivers in just these 15 minutes or more a day, can be instrumental in building a healthier and safer future for children as individuals, as family members, and as active and engaged participants in the life of their communities.

**NOTE:** Terminology in this booklet is inter-changeable. “Your child” is for parents. “Children” is for schools, communities, parents, and caregivers.



## Foreword

**E**very day in our schools (and communities) children are teased, threatened, and tormented by bullies. Bullying has been identified as a problem that creates a climate of fear, affecting the whole school. Those who fail to recognize and stop bullying behavior as it occurs actually promote violence. If we fail to stop the behavior, we send a message to the bully that “You have the right to hurt people,” and a message to the victim that, “You are not worth protecting.” This message needs to be changed and changed now.

**Bullying is a form of ABUSE, HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE.** Harassment and abuse are more accurate names for it. Parents and school personnel should no longer consider bullying “just a part of growing up.” It is harmful to both the perpetrators and the victims and is responsible for behavioral and emotional difficulties, long-term negative outcomes, and violence.

The National Institutes of Health (2000) recently reported that in the United States alone, bullying affects more than 5 million students in grades 6 through 11. One out of 7 students reported being victimized. The violence that erupted at several schools in highly publicized

shooting incidents in the late 1990s spurred several State legislatures to propose laws requiring schools to adopt anti-bullying policies. By 2001, New Hampshire, West Virginia, and Colorado had passed laws, while others are pending in Illinois, New York, and Washington.

The severity of the problem has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), and other agencies. In response to this critical issue, SAMHSA/CMHS is launching a Bullying Prevention Initiative with the help of prime-time television, public service messages, and bullying prevention educational materials. This on-going multi-media communication Initiative – titled **15+ Make Time To Listen, Take Time To Talk... About Bullying** – will bring this critical message directly to the children, parents and schools affected by these issues.

This booklet, for parents and schools, is a part of that Initiative. We hope that they and all adults who supervise children will learn what can be done, together, to take seriously their responsibility to prevent bullying among our youth.

# MOST PEOPLE KNOW WHAT BULLIES ARE.

They even know what problems victims of bullies sometimes face: years of constant anxiety, insecurity, and low self-esteem.



## YET BULLYING PROBLEMS OFTEN ARE IGNORED OR DENIED

Large numbers of students have been bullied over long periods of time while nobody paid any attention! Today, however, more people are recognizing that it is a basic democratic right for a student to feel secure at school and not to be

troubled by offensive and humiliating treatment. Because of highly publicized school incidents, we now know that ignoring bullying can lead to violence or make a victim feel so overwhelmed that he or she sees suicide as the only way out.

THE 15+ MAKE TIME TO LISTEN – TAKE TIME  
TO TALK INITIATIVE HAS TAKEN THE STAND

No student should be afraid  
to go to school because of  
bullying, and no parent  
should be worried that  
their child may be bullied.



MAKE TIME *to* **LISTEN**  
TAKE TIME *to* **TALK**  
— *about* **Bullying**

Some

# FACTS

About Bullying among Children and Young People



## **GENERALLY, WE CALL IT BULLYING**

when one or more persons repeatedly say or do hurtful things to another person who has problems defending himself or herself. Direct bullying usually involves hitting, kicking, or making insults, offensive and sneering comments, or threats.

Repeatedly teasing someone who clearly shows signs of distress is also recognized as bullying. However, indirect bullying—the experience of being excluded from a group of friends, being spoken ill of and being prevented from making friends—can be just as painful.

Most bullying takes place at the same grade level. However, many times older students bully younger students. Although direct bullying

is a greater problem among boys, a good deal of bullying takes place among girls. Bullying between girls, however, involves less physical violence and can be more difficult to discover. Girls tend to use indirect and subtle methods of bullying, such as exclusion from a group of friends, backbiting, and manipulation of friendships. Far more boys than girls bully, and many girls are mostly bullied by boys, but both can be victims of bullying.

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**DIRECT BULLYING USUALLY INVOLVES HITTING, KICKING, OR MAKING INSULTS, OFFENSIVE AND SNEERING COMMENTS, OR THREATS.**



These three conditions create a bullying situation:

1

Negative or malicious behavior.

2

Behavior repeated over a period of time.

3

A relationship in which there is an imbalance in strength or power between the parties involved.

## Fact: How Much Bullying Goes On?

**MAJOR STUDIES IN NORWAY** in the 1980s and 1990s with more than 150,000 students found that about 15 percent of students in primary and lower secondary school, or approximately one in seven students, were involved in bullying with a degree of regularity—as a victim, as a bully, or both. At least 5 percent (more than 1 in 20) of all students were involved in more serious bullying at least once a week.

In the United States in 1998, the prevalence of bullying was found to be even more substantial. A study carried out with a national sample of more than 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10 found about 30 percent of the sample reported

moderate or frequent involvement in bullying—as a bully, as a victim, or both. Students in middle school (grades 6 through 8) reported greater frequency of bullying than did students in grades 9 and 10.

Similar results were obtained in another study of more than 6,000 middle school students in rural South Carolina. About 23 percent reported that they had been bullied by other students “several times” or more frequently during the past three months.

Approximately 20 percent reported that they had bullied other students with the same frequency.

## Fact: Where Does Bullying Take Place?

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**THE CLAIM IS SOMETIMES MADE THAT** most bullying takes place on the way to school, not at school. However, research shows that two to three times as many students are bullied at school compared to those who are bullied on the way to school. Approximately 40 to 75 percent of bullying takes place during breaks—in the schoolyard, in the corridors, at recess, or in more secluded places, like bathrooms. It can also take place during classes unless the teacher is attentive and cracks down on any tendencies toward bullying. Without a doubt, school is the place where most bullying occurs. This puts particular responsibility on school leaders and teachers. It is clear that the behavior, attitudes, and routines of teachers and other

school personnel have a decisive effect on the extent of bullying in the individual school or class. Of course, parents, caregivers and supervisors in many other places—in kindergartens, playgrounds, and sports and youth clubs, for example—also need to be alert to detect bullying or tendencies toward bullying.

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**IT IS CLEAR THAT THE BEHAVIOR, ATTITUDES, AND ROUTINES OF TEACHERS... HAVE A DECISIVE EFFECT ON THE EXTENT OF BULLYING IN THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL OR CLASS.**



## **Fact:** Who Gets Bullied?

### **RESEARCH GIVES A FAIRLY CLEAR PICTURE OF THOSE WHO ARE POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF BULLYING.**

They tend to have at least one, or usually several, of the characteristics listed below. These lists only indicate main trends; in some cases, victims may be quite different. Potential victims of bullying can be divided into two main groups:

#### **— The passive or submissive victim**

Most children in this category are not aggressive or teasing in their manner and usually do not actively provoke others in their surroundings. However, passive victims of bullying generally signal, through their behavior and attitudes, that they are a bit anxious and unsure of themselves.

Detailed interviews with parents of bullied boys predominantly of the passive/submissive type indicate that these boys were

characteristically rather careful and sensitive from an early age. Having this kind of personality (possibly in addition to physical weakness) may have made it difficult for them to assert themselves in their group of playmates, which may have contributed to these boys becoming victims of bullying. At the same time, it is obvious that long-term bullying probably increased their anxiety, insecurity, and negative self-image.

The features that can be seen in long-suffering victims of bullying may be both a cause for, and a result of, being bullied.

**These students are usually quiet, careful, sensitive, and may start crying easily.**

**They are unsure of themselves and have poor self confidence (negative self-image).**

**The boys in this group do not like to fight, and they are often physically weaker than their classmates, especially the bullies.**

**They have few or no friends.**

## **The provocative victim**

This category is less common and accounts for only about 10 to 20 percent of the victims.

A class with a provocative victim of bullying generally has somewhat different problems than a class with a passive victim. It is more common that a number of students, sometimes the whole class, may be involved in harassing the provocative victim.

They can be quick tempered and may try to retaliate if they are attacked or harassed, but often without much success.

They are often restless, clumsy, immature, unable to concentrate, and generally considered difficult.

They may themselves try to bully weaker students.

Some may be characterized as hyperactive (unsettled and restless because of concentration difficulties) and often have reading/writing problems.

They may also be disliked by adults—their teacher, for example—because of their irritating behavior.

## Fact: Who Bullies?

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE** potential bullies have a number of common features. Again, it must be emphasized that these points are just the main trends. All the same, it is likely that an active bully will have one or more of the following characteristics.

It has often been presumed that bullies are anxious and unsure of themselves underneath their tough surface. However, research finds that bullies are characterized by either unusually low or about average levels of anxiety and insecurity. Their self-image is also about average or even relatively positive.

Some bullies are popular, others are not. A bully will often have a group of two or three friends who provide him or her with support

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**IT HAS OFTEN BEEN THOUGHT THAT BULLIES ARE ANXIOUS AND UNSURE OF THEMSELVES UNDERNEATH THEIR TOUGH SURFACE.**

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and often join in the bullying. However, the popularity of the bully lessens at the higher class/grade levels.

They view violence more favorably than most students do.

They are often aggressive toward adults, both parents and teachers.

They have a marked need to dominate and suppress other students, to assert themselves by means of force and threats, and to get their own way.

Boys in this group are often stronger than their peers and, in particular, their victims.

They are often hot-tempered, impulsive, and not very tolerant of obstacles and delays (frustrations).

They find it difficult to fit in with rules.

They appear to be tough and show little sympathy toward students who are bullied.

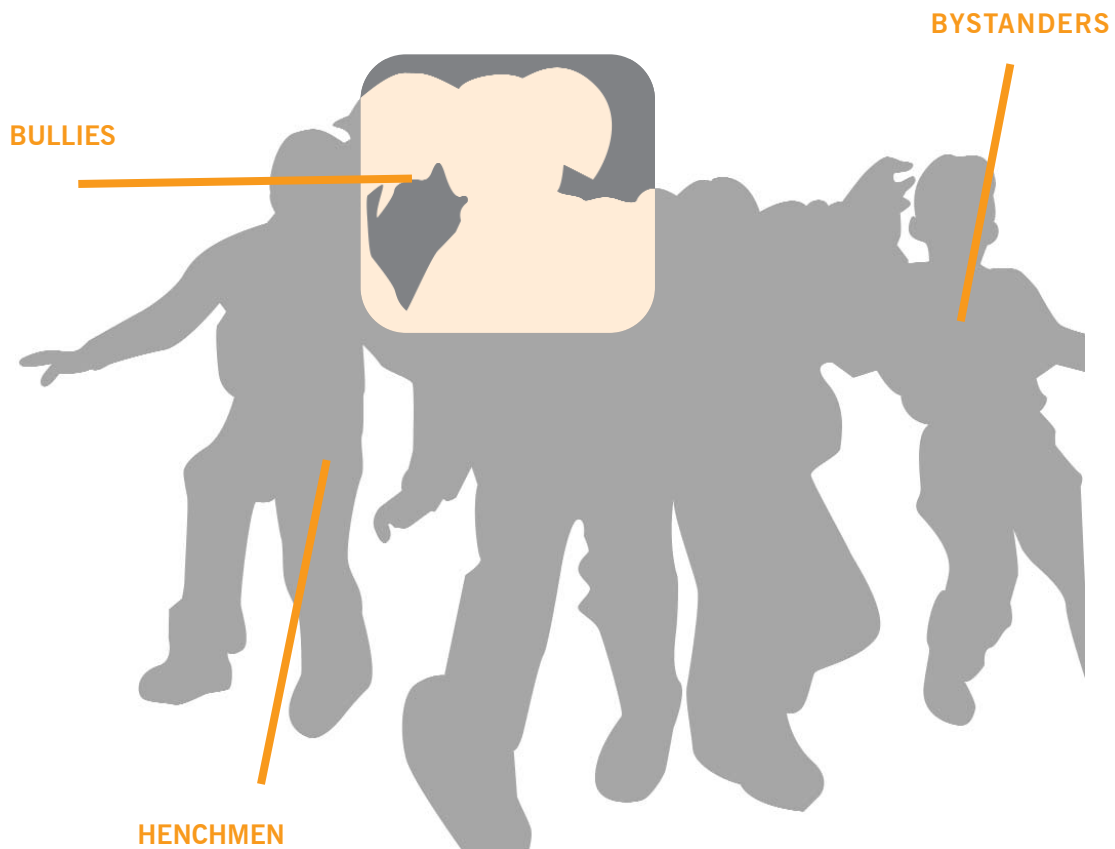
They are good at talking their way out of difficult situations.

## “The Real Story”

For 2 years, Sam, a quiet 13-year-old, was a human plaything for some of his classmates. The teenagers badgered Sam for money, forced him to **swallow weeds** and **drink sour milk**, beat him up in the rest room, and tied a string around his neck and led him around as a “pet.” When Sam’s torturers were asked about the bullying, they said they pursued their victim because “**it was fun.**”

## Fact: Group Bullying

**BULLYING MAY ALSO BE A GROUP PHENOMENON WITH PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS.** This means that there are a number of children and young people who may at times be involved in bullying, but who would not usually take the initiative themselves. These are called **passive bullies, henchmen, or bystanders**. The group of passive bullies is quite mixed and may include uncertain or anxious students.





## SOME OF THE MECHANISMS THAT MAY BE ACTIVE IN GROUP BULLYING ARE:

### **Social contagion**

Some students may be influenced to take part in bullying if the student leading the bullying is someone they admire. Children or young people who are themselves somewhat insecure and who want to assert themselves are mostly the ones who join in.

### **Weakening of normal controls**

If neither the teachers nor the other students try to stop bullying, the bully or bullies are rewarded through their “victory” over their victim. This can contribute to weakening the controls against the aggressive tendencies of neutral students and may contribute to their participation in bullying.

### **Decreased sense of individual responsibility**

Social psychology notes that a person’s sense of individual responsibility for a negative action such as bullying may be considerably reduced when several people participate. In this way, students who are usually nice, but easily influenced, can at times take part in bullying without particular misgivings.

### **Gradual changes in the perception of the victim of bullying**

As a result of repeated attacks and degrading comments, the victim will gradually be perceived as a fairly worthless person who almost “begs to be beaten up.” This also results in lesser feelings of guilt in those who are taking part in the bullying and may be part of the explanation of why other students do not try to stop the harassment of the victim.



## HOW DO I FIND OUT IF MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

### FIRST:

You need to have frequent conversations with your child or adolescent to ask about what happens at school. Establishing a relationship helps you keep the lines of communication open and gives you a sense of context for what your child or adolescent experiences day-to-day.

### SECOND:

If you get a note from your child's school saying that he or she is being bullied by the other students, take it seriously. The problem is, however, that you cannot always be sure that the school/teachers will discover that your child is having this sort of problem or that they realize how serious a situation is. Neither can you expect that your child will necessarily talk about problems of this nature to you. There can be various reasons

for this. Your child may feel that being bullied is a personal defeat, or he or she may have received threats from the bullies. The child may have tried before to tell an adult about the bullying and may not have been given any real help. He or she may be afraid that involving adults will make the bullying even worse. Therefore, you must be particularly sensitive to signs and changes in your child.

It is important that you do not try to explain away your child's problems and hope that they will go away by themselves. It has been clearly documented that bullying can negatively impact a child's formative years as well as later adult life. Research suggests that systematic bullying can leave deep psychological scars which can lead to depressive attitudes and a tendency toward negative self-image, even years after the bullying has ended.

# Q&A: What are the Warning Signs?

## YOUR CHILD—

Comes home with torn, dirty, or wet clothes or damaged books, or “loses” things without being able to give a proper explanation of what has happened.

Has bruises, injuries, cuts, and scratches and cannot give a credible explanation for what caused them.

Loses interest in school and gets poorer grades.

Does not bring classmates home and rarely spends time with classmates after school.

Seems afraid or unwilling to go to school in the morning.

Chooses an “illogical” route to and from school.

Seems unhappy, downhearted, depressed, or has mood swings with sudden outbursts of irritation or anger.

# WARNING SIGNS

Often has little appetite, headaches, or stomach aches.

Sleeps restlessly with nightmares and possibly cries in his/her sleep.

Steals or asks for extra money from members of the family (to soften up the bullies).



## HOW DO I FIND OUT WHETHER MY CHILD IS BULLYING?

**IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO DISCOVER AND** to acknowledge that your own child is a bully. Bullying other students is obviously not something a child will talk about at home. But if several of the points described under “Who Bullies?” fit your child, you should take this seriously and look more closely into the matter.

Bullying can be seen as a part of a general pattern of anti-social and rule-breaking behavior. Children who are bullies during their school years are at a much higher risk of later becoming involved in crime, misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. If your child is bullying others, it is important to break this pattern, not just for the sake of the victim, but also for your own child’s sake.

## Who Bullies?

**YOUR CHILD—**

Is aggressive, nasty,  
spiteful, and generally  
in opposition.

Has a marked need  
to dominate or  
manipulate others.

Seems to like to  
insult, push around,  
or tease other  
children.

**WARNING SIGNS**

## What Can **PARENTS** Do?



**IF YOU SUSPECT OR IT IS OBVIOUS THAT YOUR** child is being bullied by other students and the school has not already informed you of the situation, then it is important that you contact the school immediately. Parents should have the right to expect the school to take this seriously and to investigate the facts in the case. This will usually involve talks with you and your child, with the suspected bully or

bullies and with other students in the class. Also, if appropriate, talks with a number of other parents (for example, the parents of the bullies) who may have important information to contribute.

Once the facts are on the table, a detailed plan must be drawn up of how you and the school together can put an end to the bullying.

**PARENTS AND SCHOOLS SHOULD  
TAKE “BULLYING” SERIOUSLY,  
INVESTIGATE THE FACTS, AND  
WORK TOGETHER FOR  
A HEALTHY SOLUTION.**

Although it is important that home and school work together in cases of bullying, it must be emphasized that the school should take the main responsibility to initiate and coordinate the work involved in counteracting bullying in school.

Some parents who have approached schools with their worries and suspicions about their child being bullied have had the door closed in their faces with comments such as “there isn’t any bullying at our school” or “you are worrying about nothing.” If you are reasonably sure that your child is being bullied, a good starting point for taking up the situation with the school can be to ask your child (along with you, if it seems appropriate) to keep a concise log book describing the incidents of harassment or bullying—when they occurred, who took part, and what was said and done. Then you can make a more concrete presentation when you contact the school. It can be a good idea, too, to discuss the situation with the parents of other children in the class. If they have also reported problems with bullying, it will, of course, be easier to urge the school to act.

## NOTE:

Additional information for how schools can be involved in bullying prevention programs is described later in this booklet. Please read all the information and share with your school officials.



**PREVENT  
BULLYING**

## Parents: Don't Give Up!

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**SOMETIMES BULLIED STUDENTS DO NOT** want their parents to talk with school officials. Victims often do not want to be the center of attention and are afraid of getting the bully into trouble by telling adults about what is going on. In many cases, these children have also been threatened with increased bullying if they tell. Threats cause many victims of bullying to suffer in silence or to pressure their parents not to contact the school.

In most cases, however, you are doing your child a dis-service if you do not pursue the issue. If your child will not agree to your suggestions out of fear, you must still take responsibility for sorting out the problem. Most bullied children eventually feel a great sense of relief when the situation finally comes out into the open. From a long-term perspective, it is also detrimental to the bullies when their behavior is overlooked. If the situation is properly dealt with, the bully will be helped, too.

**MOST BULLIED CHILDREN  
EVENTUALLY FEEL A GREAT  
SENSE OF RELIEF WHEN THE  
SITUATION FINALLY COMES OUT  
INTO THE OPEN.**



## Parents: Let the School Arrange a Meeting

**ONCE BULLYING HAS BEEN DISCOVERED,** the school should contact the parents of both the victim(s) and the bullies to inform them and to try to establish constructive cooperation. Since a victim's parents usually should not contact the bully's parents directly, the school could arrange a meeting at which the students, as well as their parents, are present. The aim of such a meeting is to bring about a thorough discussion of the situation and to arrive at a concrete plan of action. If the bully has damaged the victim's clothes or other possessions, it would be reasonable to bring up the question of compensation. Another aim must be to try to establish a collaboration with the parents of the bully/ies and to get them to exert their influence over their children in a purposeful way.

Many parents of students who bully others have little idea of what their child has been doing at school. When the situation is clarified for them, a number of parents want to contribute to bringing about positive changes. On the other hand, some bullies' parents try to play down the problems and generally take a defensive stand. They may not even come to meetings designed to address the problem. Even if it is not possible to establish any reasonably positive communication with some parents, a serious attempt to do so must still be made. In any

case, the bully's parents must be kept informed about the situation.

The initial meeting should not be a one-time event. It should be followed up with more meetings so that the development of the situation can be further evaluated and information can be exchanged between parents and teachers. It is, of course, also important to check that any decisions that have been made are being put into action. Under favorable circumstances, relatively positive relations can develop between the parents of bullies and the parents of the victim. This can be an important step in putting an end to the bullying.

**MANY PARENTS OF STUDENTS WHO BULLY OTHERS HAVE LITTLE IDEA OF WHAT THEIR CHILD HAS BEEN DOING AT SCHOOL.**

Sometimes, however, it is clear in advance that the relationship between the bullies' and the victim's families is tense and hostile. In such situations, it is sensible to hold meetings with one family at a time before possibly arranging a joint meeting, and it may be necessary to involve the school social worker, counselor, or psychologist.

## Parents: Make Sure the Bullied Child Gets Effective Protection

**ONE THING MUST BE MADE ABSOLUTELY** clear when an attempt is being made to resolve a bullying situation—the victim of bullying must be guaranteed effective protection. Close follow-up is needed until the danger of new attempts at bullying has passed. Teachers and school administrators have a special responsibility to safeguard the victim at school. The bullied student must be able to trust that the adults are both willing and capable of

providing the help he or she needs. If bullying problems are taken up in class in a rushed or casual manner, without ensuring that the victim is given solid protection against further harassment, the situation will almost always become worse. In order to provide the bullied student with sufficient security, close cooperation and frequent exchange of information is usually needed between the school and the student's family.



Having a child who is bullied means seeing your child become an outcast, frozen out, and completely isolated. Most of what you read is about bullies and victims who are boys. Bullying is also found among girls, but it is not so obvious from the outside. It is not usually a matter of damaged clothes or bruised arms and legs. Bullying among girls bypasses physical pain and goes right into the soul. Bullying among girls is less concrete or visible.

How can I as a mother, accuse the girls bullying my 14-year-old daughter for having **stopped phoning**, for not saying hello, for speaking badly of her behind her back, **for changing places in the classroom**, for always commenting on and making fun of what she says, etc. **Nothing they do (or don't do) is against the rules.**

As a mother, I have a great sense of grief and helplessness in the face of what my daughter has to go through. In desperation, I have tried to talk to the mothers of two of my daughter's previous friends. It wasn't particularly helpful; some parents just can't accept that their children are criticized by outsiders. They defend their children at any cost, no matter how ridiculous this may be.

I wouldn't wish the grief and helplessness I feel on any parents, but I wish you and your children could actually feel just for a short time what my daughter and our family have had to live with for the last 6 months or so. Then perhaps you would understand.

**Signed: Despairing Mother**



## Parents: What Can You Do If Your Child Is A Victim?

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**MANY STUDENTS WHO BECOME VICTIMS OF** bullying would probably develop quite normally if they did not have to face aggressive fellow students. An essential part of counter-acting bullying in school is to stop or change the bullies' and their accomplices' behavior. The parents of children who are victims of bullying should not view bullying as an unavoidable part of growing up.

At the same time, it is also clear that many victims of bullying are unsure of themselves and somewhat anxious by nature, with relatively low self-confidence and few or no friends. So in some cases, it may be sensible for you to try to help your child adapt better to school life and other environments—maybe regardless of the actual bullying situation.

**THE PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF BULLYING SHOULD NOT VIEW BULLYING AS AN UNAVOIDABLE PART OF GROWING UP.**

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Help your child strengthen his or her self-confidence, for example, by stimulating the development of any talents or positive qualities.

Help your child join other groups of children of the same age (who preferably are not in the same class at school) in sports, music, or other leisure time activities. Physical training in particular, if your child has the interest or ability, results in the child “giving out different signals” to those around him or her.

Encourage your child to make contact with (and perhaps bring home) a friendly student from the same class, or from another class. As socially excluded children often lack relationship-making skills, it is important that you, or perhaps the school counselor, help your child with concrete advice on how to go about making friends with peers.

It is important that you consistently support your child’s contacts and activity outside of the family. Try to avoid being over-protective, but keep an eye on what is going on and arrange situations that can bring about positive development.

Sometimes a child (especially the provocative victim of bullying) behaves in a way that irritates and provokes those around him or her. In such cases, you have the task of carefully, but firmly and consistently, helping your child find more suitable ways of reacting and interacting in friendship groups.

If your child exhibits some hyperactivity, it may be necessary to get extra help from a mental health professional.

## Parents: What Can You Do If Your Child Is a Bully?

**YOU WILL NEED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH** the school to resolve the situation. Being informed by the school or another source that your child is bullying other students may be a difficult fact to face. Making excuses and playing down your child's behavior will not

**YOU SHOULD ACT QUICKLY FOR THE SAKE OF THE VICTIM AND FOR YOUR OWN CHILD'S FUTURE.**

help him or her. On the contrary, you should act quickly for the sake of the victim and for your own child's future. As mentioned earlier, children who are aggressive toward their peers are at high risk for what is known as anti-social development, including criminality and misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs at a later stage in their lives. It is, therefore, important to take time now to guide your child on to positive paths.

### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Make it quite clear that you take bullying seriously and will not accept the continuation of this behavior. If both you and the school show consistently negative reactions to the child's bullying, the chances that your child will change are increased.

Try to set up some simple rules for family interactions. Whenever your child follows the rules, praise him or her. If your child breaks the rules, consistently enforce some kind of negative consequence (for example, the withholding of allowance or other benefits/privileges).

# MAKING EXCUSES AND PLAYING DOWN YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR WILL NOT HELP HIM OR HER.

Spend 15 minutes or more of quality time with your child every day. Gain thorough knowledge into who he or she is spending time with and what they are doing. It is easier for children or young people to change their aggressive behavior if they feel they are reasonably well liked and listened to by their parents/caregivers.

Help your child use his or her energy and need to dominate in a more positive way, for example, by encouraging him or her to participate in a sport like basketball or soccer, in which one must play by the rules. Explore any particular talents your child may have that can be further developed to enhance his or her self-esteem.

If these kinds of measures, and the plan that has been set up with the school, have not resulted in noticeable changes in your child's behavior after some time, then you should get in touch with a mental health professional for more help.

# What Can Schools Do?



Bullying in schools is not a problem that can be solved once and for all. Therefore, schools should maintain constant readiness to counteract any tendencies toward bullying in the school environment. This can best be achieved by having a good bullying prevention program as a standard element in the school environment. Although there are other anti-bullying programs available, the most noted program is the one developed in Norway by Dr. Dan Olweus at the University of Bergen.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been used and evaluated in large-scale studies with quite positive results in several countries, including the United States, and it has a strong research base.

The following are core elements of the Olweus program that you might want to consider when requesting, promoting, implementing, and evaluating a bullying prevention program in your school.

**SCHOOLS SHOULD MAINTAIN  
CONSTANT READINESS TO  
COUNTERACT ANY TENDENCIES  
TOWARD BULLYING IN THE  
SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.**



# A Model Bullying Prevention Program

## PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS

What helps make the Olweus program a model is that it builds on a few key principles that have been found to be important in research on the development and modification of problem behavior, especially aggressive behavior, like bullying.

**First, it is important to create both a school and home environment characterized by warmth, positive interest, and involvement with adults.**

**Second, firm limits against unacceptable behavior need to be established.**

**Third, non-physical, non-hostile negative consequences (sanctions) must be applied if a youth breaks the rules that have been agreed upon.**

**Fourth, it is expected that the adults in the school and at home act as authorities, at least in some respects. The program is based on an authoritative (not authoritarian) model for the relationship between adults and children, where teachers are expected to be authorities with responsibility for the students' total situation, not just their learning.**

For  
additional information  
[www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov](http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov)

# The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

## Subgoals

**1 Increase awareness and knowledge of problems related to bullying as well as dispel a number of myths about the causes of bullying.**

The use of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire in an anonymous survey is an important step toward the acquisition of more concrete information about the occurrence and forms of the problem in the individual school.

**2 Get teachers and parents actively involved.**

This means that the adults must take responsibility for controlling what is going on among the students in the school, at least to a certain extent. One aspect of this is organizing good supervision of break times. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to intervene in situations that arouse suspicion and to give a clear message to the students: **We will not accept bullying in our school, and we will make sure it's stopped.** Teachers should initiate serious discussions with victims of bullying, bullies, and their parents if a problem has been identified or is suspected. Parents and teachers must closely follow up and monitor the measures taken. Otherwise, the situation of the victim can easily decline from "bad to worse."

**3 Develop clear rules against bullying. The following rules have proven to be very useful:**

**We will not bully other students.**

**We will try to help students who are bullied.**

**We will make it a point to include students who become easily left out.**

**When we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell a teacher and an adult at home.**

These rules can provide the basis for class discussions about what bullying is and what negative consequences should be put into effect when students break the rules. Regular class meetings are a good forum for evaluating how students relate to the set rules and whether the planned measures are working. It is important that the teacher enforce the rules consistently and also give plenty of praise when the rules are followed.

## Olweus Bullying Prevention Program Key Components

### **4 Provide support and effective protection to the victim.**

If the rules are followed, students who are easily bullied usually are provided reasonably good protection. In addition, the teacher can enlist “neutral” or “well-adjusted” students in different ways to improve the situation for victims of bullying. The teacher can use his or her imagination to help bullied students stand up for themselves in appropriate ways and make themselves useful and valuable in their classmates’ eyes. The parents of bullied children can motivate them to make new friends and show them how to get to know others and how to maintain good relationships with friends.

Even though many of the measures in this school-based program do not directly involve parents, parents should know that this kind of intervention program exists and that it works. This bullying prevention program does not require large-scale investments of time or money. It is first and foremost a question of the attitudes, behaviors, and routines of the teachers and school administrators. A dramatic reduction in the extent of bullying can be achieved with a relatively simple, but carefully developed bullying prevention program.

#### **General Prerequisites**

- Awareness and involvement on the part of adults

#### **Measures at the School Level**

- Questionnaire survey (answered anonymously by the students)
- Improved supervision of break time
- School conference day
- Establishment of one or more teacher discussion groups (at each school)
- Formation of a coordinating group

#### **Measures at the Classroom Level**

- Class (or school-wide) rules against bullying
- Regular class meetings (teacher and students)
- Class parent/teacher meetings

#### **Measures at the Individual Level**

- Individual meetings with children who bully
- Individual meetings with children who are targets of bullying
- Teacher and parent use of imagination to help solve the problem.

It's  
**Time**  
to Make a  
**Commitment**



MAKE TIME *to* **LISTEN**  
TAKE TIME *to* **TALK**  
— *about* **Bullying**

How much bullying takes place in our schools and other youth environments depends on the role that **committed adults** will play in their schools, their families, and their communities.

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# COMMON SENSE RULES FOR PARENTS

MUCH RESEARCH ON FAMILY CONDITIONS AND THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN HAS LED TO THIS IMPORTANT CONCLUSION:

A lot of love and involvement from the people bringing up children, clear limits for what behavior is allowed and not allowed, as well as the use of nonviolent methods of upbringing, creates non-aggressive, harmonious, and independent children.

Here are some common sense rules for parents/caregivers who want to help children have a positive childhood.

Let your child feel he or she is important. Children have a great need to feel they are important to their parents. Children grow on love and challenges.

Laugh with and not at your child. Children are proud and can be deeply hurt when they feel you are making fun of them. Laugh with your child; humor is positive.

Do not give in to your child to avoid conflict. Children feel more secure when they have limits set for them in their everyday life, but they often cannot refrain from testing their limits.

Keep the agreements you make with your children. Children feel helpless if you break agreements without good reason. If your child isn't sure whether he or she can rely on you, whom can he or she rely on? Remember that what you do today contributes to forming the future.

Praise your child frequently. Encouragement and kind words motivate a child to cooperate. Positive support strengthens the child's self-image and creates an enthusiastic spirit. When new challenges arise, your child will be able to meet them confidently.

Do not frighten your child unnecessarily. Sometimes you may need to scare your child to keep him or her away from dangerous situations, but children should not be scared into obedience. Spare your child upsetting knowledge about things he or she cannot do anything about.

Remember that you are a role model for your child. Your child is bonded with you in the deepest love and admiration. That is why he or she wants to be like you, at least when he or she is young. Whatever you do, your child will do. Whatever you say or believe, your child will repeat.



**MAKE TIME to LISTEN**  
**TAKE TIME to TALK**  
*— about Bullying*

**LOCAL INFORMATION**

**1-800-789-2647**  
**www.samhsa.gov**  
**www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov**  
**CMHS-SVP-0052 – “Bullying Is Not A Fact of Life”**

Call for additional 15+ information

**CMHS-SVP-0051 – “Bullying Prevention Conversation Cards”**  
**CMHS-SVP-0056 – “Take Action Against Bullying”**

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