

# What can Parents do about Bullying?

## Building a bully-free future

Even though bullying has existed in schools for decades, that is no excuse to continue to allow children to be bullied. Many parents don't think that bullying is as big a problem as bringing a weapon to school or drug use but its effects can be severe and long lasting. Researchers have gained new understanding of the dynamics of bullying and the roles of all those involved. Every day, nearly 160,000 children miss school because they are scared of bullying, according to the [National Education Association](#). The long-term negative outcomes of children who are bullied are too serious to ignore. For example, the CIA has reported that fully two-thirds of recent school shooting incidents in the United States were committed by youth who had experienced severe bullying by their classmates.

Parents, teachers and administrators hold the power to work together to put an end to bullying and provide a safe learning environment for all children. In communities where children feel protected from bullying, they are free to spend their days learning, building friendships, and dreaming about all the possibilities for their lives.

## What is Bullying?

What was once defined as "kids will be kids" behavior has escalated into one of the most significant problems of school violence in American schools. Repercussions of bullying, even when it doesn't escalate into violence, rarely confines itself to the classroom, school or to the victims alone. It is the whole community's responsibility to provide a safe place for children to grow and prosper. It is a proven fact that bullying rarely stops without adult intervention. In our community our schools are not taking it lightly. Trainings for teachers have been provided at every school throughout the district. The Mariposa County Unified School District and Mariposa County Board of Supervisors have adopted resolutions to show administrative support for these efforts. In September, our two demonstration sites, Mariposa Elementary and Lake Don Pedro Elementary, attended a training administered by Committee for Children. Teachers, yard duties, bus drivers, and administration from these two schools attended this training, as well as a teacher representative from every other school in MCUSD. The two demonstration sites also have Project Respect coaches on campus to help facilitate anti-bullying strategies. The MES coach is Monica Nelson and Lake Don Pedro has Kim Martin. Students will receive the [Steps to Respect](#) or the [Second Step Curriculum](#) in their elementary and middle school classrooms. Ask your teacher which curriculum they are implementing in your child's classroom!

So what exactly is bullying? The Steps to Respect definition: Bullying is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose. Bullying can include: Physical, social, and emotional harm, name-calling, teasing, or hurting another person to get something. It can also involve an imbalance of power, such as size or popularity.

## Signs that a child might be a victim of bullying:

Kids who are bullied are more likely to have low self-esteem, be depressed or turn to violent behavior to protect themselves or get revenge on their bullies. Victims may act moody, sullen, or withdrawn from family interactions. They can lose interest in school work, or their grades may drop. Kids who have been bullied might lose their appetite or have difficulty getting to sleep. Parents may see unexplained bruises or the child may arrive home with torn clothes. Fearful children may ask for extra money for school lunch or supplies, or extra allowance to "pay off" the bully. Victims might refuse to go to school (15 percent of all school absenteeism is directly related to fears of being bullied at school) or want to carry a protection item, such as a knife.

Being victimized by a bully can have short and long term effects. Being a victim is very stressful for children. Many children develop a strong dislike of going to school, especially times like recess or gym class. Many victims begin to distrust all their peers at school and have problems making friends. Many victims report having few or no friends and being alone at recess and lunch. In extreme cases victims can develop depression or physical illness. Ten percent of children could be considered extreme victims who have been the victim of bullies at least once a week for a long period of time. Being labeled a victim is likely to follow children around from year to year. These children may go on to be victims of domestic violence or strike out in violence themselves.

## Characteristics of bullies:

Kids who bully are more likely to do poorly in school. Are often defiant, have a lack of respect for authority, are impulsive, and are easily incited to anger. Bullies might have low motivation, low frustration tolerance, be disruptive and overly emotional. They may act out with physical aggression, be oppositional or inattentive. They may lie, steal, and vandalize. Bullies may have legal problems such as truancy, smoke or drink alcohol, use drugs, and are likely to commit crimes in the future. Bullying doesn't only negatively affect its victims, but also the bullies themselves.

## What parents can do:

Teaching the 'Golden Rule' is a priority in order to create a safe and caring environment in homes, school and our community. A first step is to learn empathy. Empathy is taught in the first lessons of the Steps to Respect curriculum. Empathy is the ability to understand, predict and relate to someone's feelings. Without the ability to empathize, children will have a difficult time resolving problems in peaceful ways. If we cultivate empathy when our children are young it will become natural for them. Parents should model empathy and the Golden Rule at home as often as possible.

Listen; really listen, to what your child has to say. Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about school, social events, their classmates, and any problems they have. Teach kids to solve problems without using violence and praise them when they do. Give children positive feedback when they behave well to help their build self-esteem. Help give them the self-confidence to stand up for what they believe in.

Provide choices and allow choices to be made. Avoid power struggles and choose your battles carefully. Providing a child the opportunity of choosing between two options helps them to feel empowered. This may be as simple as asking them which they prefer; changing into pajamas and brushing teeth, before an hour of television or after. This may seem like a small thing, but the more choices they are allowed to make the less resistance there will be when choice is not an option.

Children can be prepared to make good choices when they learned options. In the primary classrooms at MES children have been taught "Kelso's Choices" (Kelso is a frog who gets into situations that he needs to make choices about how he behaves). When conflict happens they have the tools to work out their problems, some of Kelso's choices are: talk it out, go to another game, tell them to stop, apologize, wait and cool off, make a deal, share and take turns or ignore it. As a parent you can talk to your child about the choices they can make when they have problems.

Develop a clear and simple system of family rules. Offer frequent praise and reinforcement. Use non-hostile, negative consequences for violations of rule-following behavior. Consistently enforce the rules. Appropriate consequences for aggressive behavior might include the loss of privileges (e.g., television or computer game time). Follow through with appropriate consequences for your child's misbehavior. **Do not use physical punishment**, as doing so will only reinforce your

child's mistaken belief that it's acceptable to bully those who are weaker to get what one wants. Use natural or logical consequences. Give options for consequences. Remain calm. It takes two to fight. **Do not argue** (arguing with your child teaches that arguing the way to solve problems). When children say something in a disrespectful way, stop and ask them if they can think of a better way to say it. Have them rephrase the statement in a respectful way. Once they get the idea you can say "I will only listen when you talk respectfully." And ignore them until they say it nicely. Discuss with children why it is important to apologize. Kids need to know that they have the right to feel upset when someone treats them in a disrespectful way. Apologizing is not an easy thing to do, especially when you feel very angry. It is important to allow them time to calm down before attempting an apology and forgiveness. Spend more time with your child and monitor his activities closely. Reward your child for positive, caring actions and for peaceful problem solving. Reinforce children each time they engage in some degree of caring or pro-social behavior. It will be easier to establish more appropriate rules for interaction after they learn that there are more positive ways to gain attention and affection.

Build on your child's talents and strengths. Find out who his friends are, where they spend their leisure time, and what activities they usually engage in. Is your child in "bad company" or "good company"? Limit his exposure to a negative peer group and provide opportunities to become involved with more pro-social peers. Social organizations such as sports, girl/boy scouts, church youth activities or ----- can help kids practice social skills. Often children who are having a hard time relating to other children can learn some social skills with pets. Under close supervision, bullies may learn to care for and show affection to a dog or cat.

### **If Your Child is Bullied:**

Create a safe environment for your children to tell you about being bullied. The fact that victims are usually warned by bullies not to tell anyone makes it difficult for them to talk with parents and teachers. Many times kids are embarrassed to tell their parents what happened, thinking that their parents will blame them. A parent can ask "*Sometimes kids at school pick on other kids or say mean things to them. Does this ever happen to you at school?*" Reinforce the idea that if they are being bullied, it is not their fault. Don't make your child feel like a wimp. "*The person that is picking on you is the one with a problem, not you. Bullies pick on people for no real reason, but it is just because they have problems of their own, not because of anything you have done.*" Don't teach your kids to hit or fight back; it will only make things worse. Here are five steps that are good to suggest: *ignore, move away, ask to stop, tell firmly to stop and tell an adult.* Teach your child safety strategies; encourage your child to walk away and tell an adult if he feels someone is about to hurt him. Brainstorm and practice strategies with your child to avoid further victimization. Educate your child about bullying and bullies. Help him put the problem in perspective and not to take it personally. Teach your child how to walk in a confident manner. Encourage your child to make new friends. Encourage him to make contact with calm and friendly students in his school. Encourage your child to participate in physical training or sports, even if he's reluctant. Physical exercise can result in better physical coordination and less body anxiety, which, in turn, is likely to increase self-confidence and improve peer relationships. Support bully prevention programs in your child's school. Keep your child's teacher informed of any incidences of bullying.

### **What you can do to stop your child from bullying**

Parents of children who bully others should understand that children who aggressively bully peers are at increased risk for engaging in antisocial or criminal behavior in the future. It is therefore important to try to help bullies change their negative attitudes and behavior toward others. If you see any bullying, stop it right away. Take it seriously. Don't treat bullying as a passing phase. Even if you're not worried about long-lasting effects on your child, another child is being hurt. Talk to your child to find out why he or she is bullying. Often, children bully when they feel sad, angry, lonely, or insecure and many times major changes at home or school may bring on these feelings. Help build empathy for others and talk to your child about how it feels to be bullied. Ask

a teacher or a school counselor if your child is facing any problems at school, such as if your child is struggling with a particular subject or has difficulty making friends. Ask them for advice on how you and your child can work through the problem. Ask yourself if someone at home is bullying your child. Often, kids who bully are bullied themselves by a parent, family member, or another adult.

Parent of bullies tend to use inconsistent discipline and little monitoring of where their children are throughout the day. Sometimes parents of bullies have very punitive and rigid discipline styles, with physical punishment being very common. Bullies also report less feelings of closeness to their siblings. Bullies are motivated by power and want to win in every circumstance. Provide opportunities for your child to succeed. Encourage your child to keep talking to you. Reward your child for positive, caring actions and for peaceful problem solving. Spend extra time with him. Provide constant support and encouragement, and tell him that you love him often!

Finally, be aware that bullying prevention programs in schools are often a very effective way to stop bullying. Keep communication open with your child's teacher, administrators and if you are at MES or LDP you can contact your site's Project Respect Coach to work with you and your child. Support your school and community's anti-bullying efforts. MES families will receive information on Reader's Theater from their children soon; a "Project Respect" program designed to help gain confidence and develop new skills with a performance to take place on Dec. 11<sup>th</sup>.