

## **Bullying**

In my first year of teaching fifth grade, I had a bully who picked on everyone. He was large, muscular, and ready for a fight. After the umpteenth time of hearing “he hit me,” “he pushed me,” “he called me a bad name,” I impulsively responded, “give it back to him and he’ll stop.” Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! The bully proceeded to beat the “stuffins” out of the smaller guy, who then wound up at the clinic. I wound up in the principal’s office, and an irate parent was waiting for me. Lesson learned: try conflict resolution, counseling resources, using “I messages” or behavior modification, but *never* invite the victim to “give it right back.”

Carole Kurtines-Becker  
Assistant Professor of Education  
University of North Carolina at Asheville

The writer C. S. Lewis characterized sin as an effort to get a good thing in a bad way. Operating on Lewis’s assumption, I found a response to bullying that worked for me. As is the case with many bullies, “Jimmy” was being bullied himself. His father and an older brother physically abused him. By going on the offensive and bullying smaller, weaker boys at school, Jimmy acquired a sense of control in his environment which enabled him to feel safe.

Control and safety are *good things*, so I provided *good ways* for Jimmy to experience control and safety. When our class had guest speakers, I asked him to serve as their escort to our room. When we had assemblies, I asked him to go to the auditorium a few minutes early to reserve a front row seat for “Carl,” a visually impaired classmate. On field trips, I asked Jimmy to let me know if he happened to see anything that might be a problem for Carl. Because control is an issue for bullies, I always *asked* Jimmy if he would do these things.

When he was in situations in which someone depended on him, Jimmy experienced control and safety, as well as the satisfaction of helping a person who was at a disadvantage in some way. I cannot prove that a relationship exists between my strategy with Jimmy and his current work as a police officer. I do know that it worked for me.

Max Malikow

Assistant Professor of Education  
Le Moyne College, Syracuse, NY

Bullying is a social issue that permeates our society. Whether it is aggressive behavior on our nation's highways, inappropriate behavior at public events, or obnoxious behavior on TV sitcoms, bullying is rewarded.

The bullying behaviors students demonstrate in schools vary from exclusion to physical violence. Establishing a school climate where appropriate behavior is expected is critical. As teachers, we need training to recognize the signs and symptoms of bullying, and then further training to implement solutions in our classrooms. We then need to train our students how to respond—not react—to inappropriate behaviors.

Francie Keller Lindner Shafer  
Instructor, Southern Illinois University–Carbondale

In addition to submitting her own response, Francie Keller Lindner Shafer posed the bullying question to her students. Some responses from her class follow.

Usually bullies have a situation happening in their lives that causes their actions. If we figure out what that cause may be, then we will be able to handle the student better.  
James Colyer

Stan Davis (2005) suggested creating a school (and ideally a home) environment characterized by:

- warmth, positive interest, and involvement by adults;
- firm limits to unacceptable behavior;
- non-hostile, nonphysical, negative consequences consistently applied in cases of unacceptable behavior;
- adults acting as authorities and positive role models;
- specified behavior expectations;
- working with parents; and
- maintaining a positive tone.

If we can keep these tips in mind, then maybe we can help to prevent bullying from occurring so much.

Davis, S. 2005. Stop bullying now! Available at: [www.stopbullyingnow.com/powerpoint/sld001.htm](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/powerpoint/sld001.htm).

Megan Perryman

There are a couple of ways to deal with bullies in the classroom. One way is to reinforce consequences consistently. If reinforcement is sporadic, the child won't learn his or her lesson and will continue the behavior. Another way is to teach social skills to the students, such as how to have friends and deal with others. If this area is a problem, a counselor can help with aggression intervention.

Tiffany Sellers

A bully is someone who harasses or is manipulative of other students. Though bullying may occur in an elementary to high school age group, it does not have to be limited to the physical location of the school. Often, bullying is hidden from teachers. Generally, it takes the form of bothersome or demeaning actions that might be verbal or mocking. Bullying is not easy to spot, especially with the amount of joking that goes on. Distinguishing between the jokes and the bullying can be difficult. Bullying usually results in suppressed anger; when it is bottled to a point of explosiveness, violence may be observed.

Benji Pakter

It's no secret that bullying is present in middle schools. It might come in the form of physical aggression, verbal harassment, gestures, or even cyberbullying. Because of its detrimental effects, it must be dealt with effectively. Some ideas include: taking students' reports of bullying seriously; establishing a reputation for being a dependable, responsive adult; teaching coping strategies through discussions and role-play activities; and teaching exit strategies for when students find themselves being confronted by a bully.

Jennifer Abate-Barrett

The biggest weapon in a bullying situation is to make the bully feel as though he or she is acting irrational and immature. When bullies are allowed to make that realization, perhaps they will stop the harassment.

Cassi Kloss

If it was my child, I probably would tell him or her to let it go and try to ignore the bully. If that didn't work, I would let a teacher or guidance counselor know.

Kentyl Edwards

My daughter ran into an incident where students at the school she was attending tried to bully her. She stood up to the girls and told them she was not going to be pushed around. Then she told me about the situation. I talked to her school social worker about the incident and asked her to keep an eye out for the girls who were trying to bully my daughter. We did not say anything to the girls; we just watched their behavior. After a few days, everything blew over and those girls and my daughter became really good friends.

Tiffany Burris

Bullies often perform their cruel actions for attention; by responding to them, they get what they desire—negative attention. Ignoring a bully tells that person that he or she will not receive the craved attention; therefore, he or she will move on.

Melissa Willing

One way to handle a bully is to give the bully the attention that he or she is seeking in a positive form. If a teacher can show or teach a student how to attain the attention he or she craves in a positive, non-hurtful way, then the student will lessen the amount of bullying that he or she does. Thus, the bully eventually will eliminate the unacceptable behavior, replacing it with a positive one.

Donna Evitts

For bullies, any attention is better than no attention at all. A teacher should address the negative behavior, not draw attention to it. First, employ subtle management

techniques, such as standing by the bully's desk; then progress to words. Speak with the student individually, address the action, and come up with alternative actions to improve behavior. It is important to give attention to those students displaying appropriate behaviors. Not all cases can be solved this way, thus consequences should be enforced.

Kristen Shreffler