



Article for Murray's Bully Free Community Education Campaign

When Your Child Bullies (Part III)

By

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This is the third article in a series for parents/guardians that focuses on helping their child who bullies. In the last two articles, questions were provided to help parents/guardians explore possible causes for their child's behavior. A few strategies for helping children who bully were also provided. Since many of these strategies are preventive in nature they are appropriate for all parents. This article further discusses possible strategies parents/guardians can use to change the behavior of children who bully.

- Consider the possibility that your child could benefit from counseling. Because the school counselor often doesn't have the time to give your child the attention she needs, you may decide to secure a professional counselor. If you are a member of a religious organization, you may also want to seek pastoral counseling for her. If you decide to send your child to a professional counselor, try to prepare her for the first meeting. You do this by reviewing the following questions with her: What has happened? How often do you mistreat others? How long have you been mistreating others? When and where do you do this? Who is involved? What do the bystanders do? Do others help you? Why do you think they help you? How do you feel about what is happening? Does it make you feel good or bad? What do you think should be done to help you stop mistreating others? Who are the adults you feel could help you?
- Talk to the victim's parents and apologize for your child's behavior. You could even take your child with you and ask her to apologize to the parents and their child. Explain that you plan to do all you can to make sure the bullying doesn't happen again. Ask them if there is any information they wish to share with you. If the timing seems appropriate, share what information you have gained and then compare notes. Be prepared to hear some things you don't want to hear or find difficult to believe about your child. Just thank the parents for sharing with you. Don't stay too long. If the parents are very angry, state your apology again and tell them you'll come back at a better time.
- Promote anti-bullying activities through local PTAs (PTOs). Ask that bullying be placed on the agenda of a meeting and that a guest speaker be contacted to address the topic. Ask local parent organizations, civic organizations, or corporations to sponsor an anti-bullying workshop or to purchase anti-bullying brochures, posters, and books for the school system or school.

- Warn your child that others may encourage her to mistreat someone, especially if they know she is trying to stop. Teach her to remove herself quickly from such situations. Teach her to be assertive and to refuse to let them control her heart and behavior.
- Monitor the whereabouts of your child and increase your supervision of her activities. If necessary, go to school with your child one day or more. Sometimes this is enough to make her behave. Let your child know that you believe she can treat others appropriately and that when you see evidence of change, you will back off on your supervision; remind her, however, that you will be ready to step it up again at any moment she resumes mistreating others.
- If your child feels bad about herself, seek to improve her self-esteem. Frequently remind her of her positive characteristics and successes. Provide opportunities for success and for experiences that help her feel valued and appreciated. Most of all, remind her of your unconditional love for her. Your love for her will help her love herself and accept herself. Self-acceptance is the basis for self-improvement and self-love is the basis for compassion toward others.
- Help your child develop interests and learn a new hobby or develop a new skill, such as painting, drawing, or playing an instrument. This might help her feel good about herself. Interests that involve structured and well-supervised group activities can encourage cooperative behavior in your child.
- Examine your child's friendships and provide opportunities for her to select friends who seem to have a good reputation, who treat her and others right, and who encourage her to be the best person she can be. Develop a moral, religious, and spiritual network around your child. Psychologists and other mental health professionals have found that supportive religion can make a significant difference in the lives of children, especially adolescents.
- Help your child discover she can have power and control in doing good deeds. Involve your child in charitable and community service activities. Find opportunities for your child to help others. When you are asked to help someone, ask your child to accompany you. When your child does assist you, compliment her personally and publicly when she is present. Let her see that she has pleased you by helping others. Afterwards, discuss with her the pleasure and insights gained by being involved in helping activities.
- Ask her to monitor her behavior and report back to you. You may even ask her to keep a journal or notebook of her positive and negative interactions with others. Ask her to record her response to the negative interactions. Tell her you will be reviewing the journal with her to discuss the content.
- When you see your child exhibiting sensitivity, kindness, and empathy, reward her with a special privilege. Rewarding positive behavior is very powerful. Sometimes children learn more by being rewarded for appropriate behavior than they do from being punished for inappropriate behavior.
- Role-play situations where your child might respond inappropriately. For example, what should she do when someone accidentally knocks her books off her desk or bumps her in the hallway? This will give your child practice in controlling her anger. Role playing also teaches appropriate behavior.
- Make sure your discipline style is not too permissive or too aggressive. Your discipline must be firm, controlled, and full of love. Good discipline helps your child develop the self-control necessary for her to stop bullying.
- Examine your own behavior. Are you modeling overly aggressive behavior? Are you bullying your child? Do you frequently criticize your child? Do you use your words to build people up, to encourage and support others, or do you cut people down with your words?

- Ask an older child or young adult who has good morals to mentor your child. Mentoring can be effective. The mentor can go places with your child and do a lot of fun things with her. She can also provide guidance on what is right and wrong and show your child how to have power and control by doing good.
- Make sure you have set realistic behavioral change goals for your child and given her time to change. Her inappropriate behavior did not develop overnight. She will therefore need time to learn to manage her feelings, thoughts, and actions. Continually encourage her as she strives to improve her behavior.
- If the bullying happened at school, you should talk to school personnel and let them know that you are aware of your child's behavior and that she is willing to improve (if this is the truth). Make an appointment with your child's teacher and make a factual report, using your log of the occurrences of reported bullying. Most of the time, it is difficult to reach a teacher immediately, but you can sometimes get a number or an e-mail address from the school Web site or office and leave a message. When you make contact, briefly explain why you wish to meet with them and suggest a time after school. If you wish, briefly describe what is happening. You want to be able to collaborate with the teacher, so try to create a working relationship with her. Give her time to prepare for the meeting.
- At the meeting, review your child's situation. Discuss who is involved; what has happened; the dates, times, and locations of the events; who *seems* to be the victim or victims; who are witnesses; and so on. Explain your understanding that some of the information may need to be confirmed and the accuracy checked. Express that you are concerned about your child's behavior and that you need the school's assistance to help her change her behavior. Ask the teacher for suggestions and ideas. Be sure to give her time to talk. At this point, she may not be able to explain what is happening, but at least you have made her aware of the problem. If you wish, schedule a follow-up meeting for the purpose of developing a plan of action. When the meeting is over, thank her for taking time to meet with you.
- After the meeting, send a letter to the teacher thanking her again for meeting with you. The letter should also list the agreed-on actions to be taken and the date and time of the follow-up meeting to develop a plan of action. If you wish, send a copy of the letter to the principal. However, make sure you are complimentary of the teacher's professionalism, sensitivity, and concern, if this seems appropriate.
- If it appears that the teacher is unable to help your child, even after two or three revisions of the plan of action, schedule a meeting with the principal. Explain that the teacher has been professional and cooperative, but needs some assistance. Ask the principal to make a commitment to take action and ask her to recommend the next steps. If you agree on the steps, ask for a time frame in which they will be implemented. Then schedule a follow-up meeting with the principal to discuss the effectiveness of the implementation and what should be done next.
- Ask for the appropriate school personnel to assist you in applying consequences for inappropriate behavior and to reward appropriate behavior seen in your child. Don't give up. Most school personnel will respond favorably to your concerns. However, if someone ignores you, don't let them brush you off. Don't let anyone minimize your child's behavior or make you feel as though you are taking up too much of their time. Your child's safety and health must be a priority—some victims retaliate. By stopping bullying, you are helping your child, other children, and the school.
- As strategies are implemented, schedule follow-up appointments with the appropriate school personnel to assess whether action taken by the school has been successful. Try to be patient, but expect action to be taken by the school in a timely manner. Seriously consider any

suggestions school personnel give you. Expectations at home need to be consistent with expectations at school.

- Ask that there be an adult (that is, a support teacher) to whom your child can talk every day to give an update on her behavior. If the teacher is not responsive, speak to the principal. You must bring this unhealthy situation for your child and other children to an end. Be persistent. Ask the principal to implement an anti-bullying program and provide anti-bullying training for the teachers, bus drivers, counselors, and other adults in the school. School personnel also need to learn how to prevent and stop bullying, how to help victims, and how to change bullies. Ask them to visit www.bullyfree.com for helpful information. All school personnel need to know how to create schools where all students feel accepted and have a sense of belonging.

The next three articles in this series will focus on workplace bullying. I will discuss what it is, what it looks like, and what you can do about it.

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