

BULLYING - How to Safeguard Your Children
With DOONE ESTEY ONSAP 2013

1. Bullying is a learned behavior
2. Punishment does not solve the problem
3. Teaching empathy, empowering and encouraging self-esteem in our children can prevent most aspects of bullying.

Bullying is a *learned behavior* and stems from how the bully is treated. This can be at home - and that means us and brothers and sisters and of course at school – and that means teachers, coaches and friends.

The airs of superiority *mask feelings* of inadequacy and a sense of not belonging. Everybody wants to belong and feel part of the group. Everybody wants to feel in control and powerful.

Bullies feel unconnected and invisible. They want social status, to impress others, to be accepted and to belong. They can come across as confident and in control but underneath they are suffering. They act tough and nonchalant but underneath they are hurting. In order to feel powerful, they have to pick on someone less powerful.

Bullies and Cliques

Girls gossip all the time. They discuss who is friendly with whom, they compete for status. They want to be in the in group and belong. It is up to us to teach our girls not to be cruel. Tell them they have the power to influence how others feel.

When they are gossiped about:

1. Confront the girl, acknowledge her power, ask for her help
2. Ask the teacher for help
3. Call the parents and ask for their help

Children who feel good about themselves do not bully. Everyone can have a bad day and say mean things, but **children who are free and strong do not need to humiliate others.**

Let's take a look at the bullied child. The bullied:

- are ashamed
- are afraid of retaliation
- think no one can help
- think no one will help
- often turn into bullies

What to look for? Look for *abrupt lack of interest* in school, taking a different route, drop in grades, *withdrawal* from activities, disappearing money, *unexplained injuries* or stress related symptoms, among other things.

Usually the bullied child is chosen because he is vulnerable, not powerful. It is hard to fight back. They need lots of support. They need help with social skills, self-esteem and sometimes mental health problems, which can be both cause and effect.

Everybody else - Bystanders/Onlookers/Witnesses:

- Experience a decreased sense of individual responsibility – crowd mentality.
- Do not intervene because they are afraid and do not know what to do
- Feel impotent and that they can't make any difference, feel uncomfortable and guilty. Some witnesses do actively enjoy watching.

Bystanders can do something about it. They can stop it 50% of the time. They need to know that adults will back them up and listen to them.

How did you feel when you were punished as a kid?

Punishing bullying makes it worse by increasing aggression and inhibiting empathy. Punishing drives the behavior underground, where adults cannot see it or on the internet. Do not embarrass, humiliate, shame or isolate the bully – it does not solve the problem.

Bullies are trying to fit in, to belong, to be important, to have power, to feel superior. They want to feel connected. (Family dinner is important – even family snack time!)

Bullies are not empathetic; they don't care about harming others.

Generally speaking this is because people have not listened to them, have not empathized with them.

If we yell, and criticize and punish our children, they will do the same to others. We are role modeling adults out of control and they do what we do. We must treat our children better.

How many here have been bullied at work, by relatives, by rude drivers? How do we act when we have a bad day?

We need to be role models who respect each other, our children and ourselves.

Addressing Bullying:

We can teach the bully to want to do good, to have *inner discipline* and to have a *strong sense of self* by:

- showing what he has done wrong
- asking him to take ownership – no excuses
- restitution (fix it)
- resolution (do not do it again)
- reconciliation (make up)

Show her how she *can be good, be helpful, and be empathetic* ('how did you feel when?', 'how do you think she felt when?'). *Model doing the right thing*, monitor and discuss screen violence, find *alternate positive activities*. Tell her how much *power she has over others*.

When helping the bullied child:

- listen carefully, do not blame
- do not judge, do not rationalize
- mirror, empathize
- discuss ways to solve it

If the child cannot resolve it on his own, report it to the school and maybe the parents. Be cautious here – many parents of bullies are unaware and in denial. If your child has been bullying, (and most children do at some point) tackle it head on at the outset.

Protective factors:

- strong sense of self
- positive self-talk
- being a friend
- having a friend
- getting into a peer group

Talk to your kids about difficult situations – ignoring them will not make them go away. Let them know you are open to discussion – the earlier the better. Do not wait for them to come to you. Say I read this or I heard that – have you heard of it?

Onlookers should be encouraged to be witnesses:

- recognize bullying
- refuse it
- report it

Show them how they are responsible for their actions, model it, discuss it and give them the confidence to do 'the right thing'.

Encouraging bystanders to help can go a long way to reduce bullying.
Encourage your kids to tell – lots don't tell. Don't blame them, don't overreact.

Adapted in part from *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* by Barbara Coloroso and *Queen Bees and Wannabees* by Rosalind Wiseman