

Managing Meanness through Cultivating Kindness

Children are working on developing into fully functional, well-adjusted humans who can operate independently in the world. Learning how to navigate conflict is a vital part of that process. They *need* to experience disagreements, power struggles, etc. to grow and develop conflict management and interpersonal skills!

Bullying is aggressive meanness with 3 necessary components:

- 1) The goal is gaining, maintaining or **abusing power** over the victim.
- 2) It is **intentional**.
- 3) It is **recurring**.

Attacks are aggressive and can be physical, verbal, social or online – ‘cyber’ bullying.

So something has happened at school...Parents – what can you do?

- 1) **Look for clues:** Look out for signs that your child is anxious, especially avoidance.
- 2) **Take YOUR emotion out of the equation - CALM is key!!**

Gather information:

- 3) **Start a conversation** *use a neutral activity as an icebreaker - toss a ball, play a game, even chat with a phone in hand. If all else fails, text!
- 4) **Listen** – *really* listen! Your child needs to vent and feel heard.
- 5) **BUT remember your child wants you to be on your side and humans do not have the power of perfect recall – you are almost certainly NOT getting the full, unbiased story.**
- 6) **Take notes:** gather as much *specific* information as you can and take notes!
- 7) **Ask OPEN ENDED questions** to help you understand the **Anticident**, the **Behaviour** and any **Consequences** which already occurred.
- 8) **Assess** whether what happened was at the level of conflict, meanness or bullying.

Provide emotional support – empathize!

- 9) **Validate** your child’s feelings.
- 10) Help them to **release** their perfectly natural **anger** with pillow whapping, etc.
- 11) **Share** a personal experience so they know they are not alone.
- 12) **Build back up** your child by reminding them that how they were treated is **not their fault**.
Remind them of some of the many awesome qualities you love about them.
- 13) Get them **back in the moment** using mindfulness tricks like food, music and fun.

NEVER: blame, criticize, diminish what happened, or encourage retaliation.

Problem Solve – make a plan!

- 14) Don’t try to solve your child’s problems *for* them - **Empower** your child!
- 15) Help your child see fear/anxiety as their brain getting ready to help them meet this challenge.
Courage is not the absence of fear but the *facing* of fear!
- 16) **Identify strategies and solutions**, then **practice** and **perfect** until your child feels prepared.
Address ways to **evade** AND **address** the meanness or bullying.
- 17) Help your child practice posture, body language and a tone of voice which projects **strength, assurance and assertiveness**. Practise internal **calming techniques**.
- 18) Discuss **how to get help** from adults at school – even playing *near* a teacher can help.
- 19) Discuss how to get **help from other children** – by staying with a trusted friend for example.

- 20) Help your child develop positive social relationships and skills by organizing **play dates**.
- 21) Consider including bully in a play date and engage the children in an “**equalizing activity**” where they have a common goal and can succeed together.
- 22) Explore how you could help your child attract more positive social attention at school by **sending tools** – balls, skilling ropes, sports card collections, etc.

Follow up

- 23) Let **your child’s teacher** know.
- 24) If warranted, help your child to explain to his **school/teacher** what has been happening.
- 25) When dealing with your child’s school **stay calm** and remember that it is the job of the school to advocate for ALL the children there. Keep the behavior and age of the bully in perspective.
- 26) Follow up with **your child** to see how the situation is progressing.

Tips if your child isn’t the victim but the AGRESSOR

Why do children bully?

A lack of emotional intelligence which has 4 levels:

1. Recognizing my own feelings
2. Managing my own feelings
3. Recognizing others’ feelings (compassion)
4. Helping and supporting others with their feelings (empathy)

The Aware Bully: rare, very mean, enjoys hurting others

- Often a victim of neglect, bullying, abuse and violence (real or perceived) themselves

What can be done?

- Deal with source of emotional trauma (remove from unhealthy environment if possible)
- Emotional therapy for trauma
- Behavioural therapy to unlearn unhealthy coping mechanisms and to learn new ones

The Unaware Bully: very common, usually doesn’t grasp the impact of his/her behavior as damaging

Motivated by:

- Gaining social power, making and keeping friends
- Managing real or perceived social threat
- Getting attention – from their victim as well as bystanders

Parents – what can you do?

Gather information about your child’s behavior – as much as possible. Go in armed!

Assess: how serious is the behavior? Is this at the level of conflict, meanness or bullying?

Start the conversation: stay calm! Children’s natural reaction to anger is often defensiveness

Reflect: where has this behavior been learned?

1. Poorly managed anger/frustration
2. Fear (of becoming a target themselves, of revealing weakness)
3. Poor social skills
4. A desire for attention (positive OR negative), social power and/or social belonging
5. The craziness of puberty hormones hitting the brain (girls especially!)

Address: the specific cause of the behavior

1. Clearly identify, specifically, what behaviours are unacceptable *and why* – agree that you will work to change these behaviours together.

2. Practice ways to stay calm and deal with frustration/anger in healthy, constructive ways. Role play! Treat anger/frustration at home as an opportunity to practice.
3. Build self-esteem in positive ways.
4. Organize play dates and subtly observe your child's behavior – what social skills need to be developed? Debrief after any altercations.
5. Give your child lots of positive attention at home – make sure your child feels loved!
6. Enroll your child in a social group like scouts to give them a sense of social belonging .
7. Show your child compassion and empathy for the emotional roller coaster of puberty.

Be clear in your behavior expectations with a behavior management plan that outlines clear consequences should the negative behaviours be continued.

The key is PREVENTION through developing tolerance, compassion and empathy

At HOME this means:

- 1) **Modelling** tolerance, compassion and empathy at home. Keeping bullying out!
- 2) **Developing your children into care-standers**
- 3) **Teaching** tolerance, compassion and empathy at home. (reading, TV, & movies, visualization)
- 4) Having clear and firm **expectations** for social behavior
- 5) Having clear and even firmer expectations for **online social behavior**
- 6) **Debriefing** when your expectations have not been met, then practise the new plan!
- 7) Not expecting perfection but rather helping with **improvement**
- 8) Building social skills with siblings, participation in **social groups** like scouts, etc.
- 9) Organizing and monitoring "**free play**" social situations outside of school
- 10) **Teaching self-play**: making sure your child has the ability to entertain themselves
- 11) **Using the dinner table and family time for constructive conversation**:
 - Daily highs and lows, family warm fuzzies (recognize others' achievements)
 - "How did you help someone today? How were you a good friend?"
 - change the focus from "What did you GET from the world today?" to "What did you GIVE to the world today?" and you won't hear as much negative!

RESOURCES:

WEBSITES:

thebullyproject.com/

meanstinks.com

bullyingcanada.ca/

pacerkidsagainstbullying.org/kab/

prevnet.ca/

kidshealth.org/

<http://www.herotopia.com/> *fun game site

erasemeanness.org

stopabully.ca/

childnet.com/

kidsnowcanada.org/

stopbullyingcanada.wordpress.com/heroes/

pbskids.org/itsmylife/games/bullies_flash.html

FILMS:

Bully - this documentary tracks the stories of five different families whose children are struggling to defend themselves on a near-daily basis. On Netflix.

How to Eat Fried Worms

ParaNorman

Wreck It Ralph

For the Birds – *Pixar short film*

Bridge to Tarabithia

The Ant Bully

Happy Feet

Daisy Chain - *short film, narrated by Kate Winslet*

APPS: *This list is to give you a sense of merely SOME of the many apps available!*

Daniel Tiger's Grr-ific Feelings: helps kids identify and express emotions through fun games and songs. (\$3, [iTunes](#)) Ages: 2-5 Devices: iPad

Cool School: Where Peace Rules: a free game created specifically to teach kids how to resolve conflicts and reduce bullying. (free, coolschoolgame.com). Ages: 5+ Platforms: Mac, Windows

IF... The Emotional IQ Game: an adventure game that helps kids develop the skills that lead to emotional intelligence. (free for first chapter, [iTunes](#)) Ages: 6+ Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad

Spirits of Spring: teaches kids about weathering bullying and learning empathy. Kids play as a Native American boy named Chiwatin, (\$2, [iTunes](#)). Ages: 10+ Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad

Middle School Confidential 1: Be Confident in Who You Are: a book app about a group of friends who help bolster one another's self-esteem (\$3, [Amazon](#), [iTunes](#), [Google Play](#)). Ages: 11+

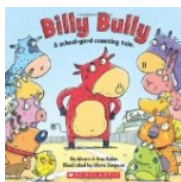
KnowBullying, a free app from SAMHSA that has simple conversation starters

rethinkwords.com When an adolescent tries to post an offensive message on social media, ReThink determines if it's offensive and gives the adolescent a second chance to reconsider their decision.

NearParent: allows families to build a trusted network of adults who can assist children when they are in need. Includes an option for tracking for both parents and kids



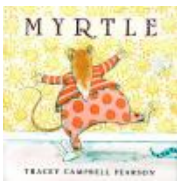
Bully
age 3+
By Laura Vaccaro Seeger



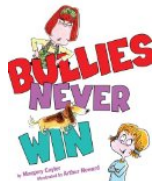
Billy Bully
age 3+
by Alvaro & [Ana Galan](#)



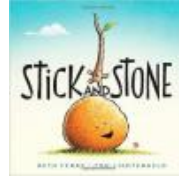
Llama Llama and the Bully Goat age 3+
By Anna Dewdney



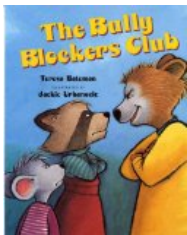
Myrtle age 4+
By Tracey Campbell Pearson



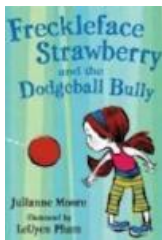
Bullies Never Win age 4+
by [Margery Cuyler](#)



Stick and Stone
age 4+
By Beth Ferry



The Bully Blockers Club age 5+
by Teresa Bateman



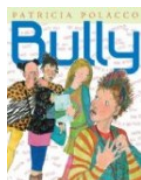
Freckleface Strawberry and the Dodgeball Bully
age 5+
By Julianne Moore



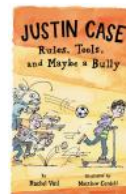
Super Fly: The World's Smallest Superhero!
age 5+
By Todd H. Doodler



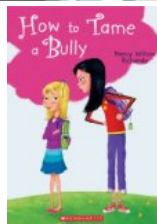
Bluebird
age 6+
By Bob Staake



Bully
age 7+
by [Patricia Polacco](#)



Justin Case: Rules, Tools, and Maybe a Bully
age 7+
By Rachel Vail



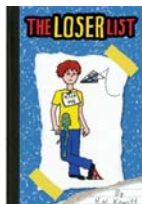
How to Tame a Bully
grades 2-3
by Nancy Wilcox Richards



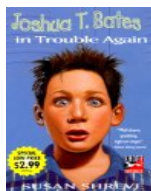
Song Lee and the "I Hate You" Notes
grades 2-3
by [Suzy Kline](#)



Jake Drake Bully Buster
grade 2-4
by [Andrew Clements](#)



The Loser List
age 8-12
by Holly N. Kowitt



Joshua T. Bates in Trouble Again
grade 4+
by Susan Shreve



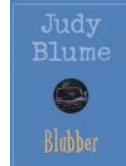
The Boy in the Dress by [David Walliams](#) and illustrated by Quentin Blake



About Average
age 8+
By Andrew Clements



Runt
age 8+
By Nora Raleigh Baskin



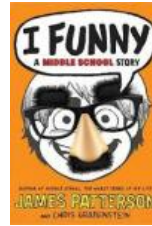
Blubber
age 9+
By Judy Blume



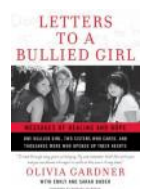
Middle School: How I Survived Bullies, Broccoli, and Snake Hill
age 9+ By James Patterson, Chris Tebbetts



Princess Labelmaker to the Rescue: Origami Yoda
age 9+ By Tom Angleberger



I Funny: A Middle School Story
age 10+
By James Patterson, Chris Grabenstein



Letters to a Bullied Girl: Messages of Healing and Hope
age 12+ By Olivia Gardner, et al.



Orbiting Jupiter
age 12+
By Gary D. Schmidt



Playground
age 12+
Rap star's moving novel about a bully redeemed.



