

SPECIAL EDITION

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SCHOOL COMBAT ZONE

What You Should Know About Female Bullies

Years ago, when asked about bullies in the school, most children pointed to the boys, a seemingly obvious choice. The truth is that girl bullying is on the rise and is becoming a big problem, especially in middle school. Check out these quick facts:

- 25% of students report that teachers intervene in bullying situations while 71% of teachers believe they always intervene. (bullybeware.com)
- The number of girls ages 10-17 arrested for aggravated assault has **doubled** over the last 20 years, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report. (Newsweek)
- A 2005 Brigham Young University study reports that girls start bullying as **young as preschool**.



Boy bullies tend to use physical means like pushing or shoving. Girls use a more discreet method known as relationship aggression. This type of bullying is defined as emotional violence and bullying behaviors focused on damaging an individual's status within the peer group. It can mean intentionally excluding a person from making

or maintaining friendships or being included into a group.

This translates into negative actions such as spreading rumors, teasing, text messaging, computer threats, taunting, ignoring or using verbal insults. These behaviors can happen over and over, or be a one-time event.

Many people who witness relationship aggression downplay it as just another part of growing up. Ignoring or minimizing bullying sends a silent, but dangerous message that this behavior is acceptable. **The bottom line is that no one deserves to be a victim.**

Take a moment and just listen to your daughter talk about other girls. Is she supportive or does she engage in "catty" behavior at the expense of a "friend?" Your child may need a pep talk or an awareness session to understand the negative affects of targeting others.

This newsletter is dedicated to understanding and confronting girl bullies. It's also about working with the many victims who are often taken advantage of by those who misuse the concepts of loyalty and friendship. Your daughter's self-concept should be tied to success, not putting down others in attempt to feel superior.

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Normal Peer Conflict vs. Bullying

• Equal Power	Imbalance of Power
• Occasionally	Repeated
• Accidental	Purposeful
• Not serious	Serious Threat
• Not seeking power	Seeks Power
• No gain intended	Attempts to gain
• Remorse	No Remorse
• Effort to problem solve	No effort to problem solve

WHO ARE THE BULLIES?

(You may be surprised!)



The student council president, the head cheerleader, the quiet girl or the star athlete. You never know who the bullies are until you really listen with an open mind.

Bullies are very slick. They don't engage in negative behavior in front of adults. They wait until no one is around. Even when you look for bullying behavior, it's often hard to spot. Bullies are very good about making their actions look like part of a game that everyone is enjoying. (Upon closer review, you will see that not everyone is having fun).

Contrary to popular opinion, bullies are not overly insecure or lack self esteem. Bullies want power and all the rewards that it brings. Since they have little remorse,



DEALING WITH BULLIES!

Bullies tend to have great communication skills and are very convincing. **Don't fall for it.** It's not part of a game, and the other person is NOT having fun. Don't be consumed by finding the root of the problem or the truth. You will just get caught up in endless layers of "he said/she said." If you observe bully behavior, firmly dole out the consequences.

Bullies also tend to have faulty belief systems. Statements such like "he made me do it" or "they exaggerate to get me in trouble" are just one of the many attempts to justify actions. When you hear faulty thinking, take time to correct it immediately.

If your daughter has hurt someone's feelings and has no remorse this is a problem. Draw out empathy for others by asking how a victim **FEELS** when they are picked on. It is important that bullies identify the feelings of others and form a solid emotional connection.

If you have an angry, potentially aggressive girl, teach her positive outlets like sports or music to channel her energy. Give her options and choices that are more positive

they see no real need to change. Once the bully is seen as a leader, her poor behavior is reinforced by her ability to control others with threats of exclusion.

If your daughter comes home and complains about a person at school that you cannot possibly believe is emotionally manipulative, think twice. Listen carefully and discuss your concerns with her teacher.

Children know who the bullies are at school. They may be afraid to tell you out of fear, but they know. Arm your child with some effective assertive skills. More importantly, teach your daughter to respect the feelings of everyone.

Bullies are great manipulators!

Don't fall for their insincere attempts to justify their actions.

rather than allowing her to take out her frustrations on others. Anger doesn't just go away, but how we teach children to deal with it is the key to positive adjustment.

Eavesdrop on your daughter's conversations on occasion to hear the tone and the content of what is being said. Don't be afraid to challenge the need to put down other girls so that she feels better about herself. Your daughter needs to be aware of pain associated with verbal attacks. Sometimes words hurt as much as physical aggression.

Cyber-Bullying and Girls

Methods used:

- Instant messaging
- Chat rooms or discussion groups
- Web pages/ blogs
- E-mails
- Text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones

Examples:

- Sending cruel or threatening messages
- Creating websites with jokes ridiculing others
- Posting and rating pictures of classmates
- Engaging someone in IM and tricking that person into revealing sensitive info, and forwarding it to others
- Taking a picture of someone in the locker room and using a camera phone and sending it to others



Who Are The Victims?

A person who...

- Can be overly shy, anxious and insecure
- Can impulsively egg on a fight and then claim to be a victim
- Can be victimized by watching others get mistreated
- Lacks social skills
- Has little or no support group
- Is constantly at odds with peers for saying or doing inappropriate things due to poor impulse control.
- Does not understand friendship so lets herself be manipulated and used in effort to stay in the group



I won't let others treat me poorly, because I feel good about who I am. I am not going to give anyone the power to take away my self-respect.

Myth:

Victims are chosen randomly.

Not true. Victims are usually selected ahead of time due to the appearance of being weak and vulnerable.

WORKING WITH THE VICTIMS

If you know that your daughter is being victimized, the first rule of thumb is to let her know that it's alright to be afraid. Be supportive and make a concrete plan for dealing with the bullies. **Role play different scenarios and discuss assertive responses to various situations.**

Keep the lines of communication open and encourage reactions that are not at the expense of someone else. Problems can escalate if the victim challenges the bully in some way. The key is to let the bully know in a clear, calm and confident manner that their behavior is unacceptable

Knowing when to walk away and when to get adult help is also important. In school, student conflicts happen all of the time, so knowing what to let go and what to confront is critical. Sometimes, ignoring attempts for attention is the most effective approach.

If a physical threat is made, or even implied, your child needs to go directly to an adult for assistance. Talk about this and explain what type of language suggests aggression.

One of the best strategies you can teach your child is the power of choice. Eleanor Roosevelt once said,



"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Everyone has a choice in terms of their response to bullying. Also note that how someone reacts will determine the bully's next action. If the reaction is submissive, weak or cowering, the bully will be happy to have found a new victim.

Everyone has certain "hot" emotional buttons that others can press to get a response. Talk about those triggers and how they can set the stage for an angry reaction. These statements could be about race, gender, sexual preference or any other issue that could potentially lead to a conflict. Instead of waiting until anger hits it's peak and common sense disappears, discuss how to recognize the bully's bait and avoid conflict.

Children who are seen as weak and isolated from others are the biggest targets. Connect your child to a positive peer group. This allows for a needed support group and a "defense" to be reckoned with.

In addition to a verbal defense, keep an eye on body language. Avoid the hunched over victim stance. Head high, chest up and good eye contact suggests a confident person. This self-assured body language lets bullies know that being picked on will not be tolerated.

EMPOWER THE "CARING MAJORITY"

Take a stand! Research tells us that 15% of a school population is either a bully or a victim. That leaves 85% of the children who are neither, making them a very valuable asset. Teach this group to take a stand against aggression. They can become the first line of defense in the classroom. Some key lessons to instill in the bystanders are:

- Refuse to be the bully's audience
- Don't engage in gossip or rumors
- Walk away and get adult help for someone if needed
- Don't laugh when someone is being picked on



Bystanders can go from the "silent majority" to the "caring majority," with some support and preparation from adults. If your child sees someone being bullied, teach them that he/she has the power and the strength to intervene. It could be as simple as asking the victim to sit at a group table for lunch or just stand in close proximity. Another approach is to befriend the target of

Why they don't get involved

- Fear of retaliation
- Don't know how
- Afraid they'll make things worse
- Worry about losing social status
- Don't believe adults will assist them

bullying while they are being picked on with words like: "Hey, I am glad I caught you! Do you want to go to the playground with me?"

If a girl is being emotionally blackmailed by her "friends," someone should stand up to the leader of the group. This takes courage, and unconditional support from adults. Sadly, in a circle of girls, each member takes a turn being ostracized and made fun of at the whim of the bully.

One day a girl is part of the "cool crowd," and the next day she is crying because no one likes her. Ironically, the person who is crying has no problem hurting someone else when the group takes her back in.

The important lesson for bystanders is to connect to the victim. Teach your daughter what makes a true friend and what loyalty is really all about. To stand up for someone leads to empowerment. The message is: **Bullying is NOT tolerated!** School is supposed to be a safe place and "well meaning" bystanders can reach out to help in places where adults are not found.

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions when helping girls begin to build a positive belief system that takes others' feelings into account

1. Is it okay to talk bad about someone and spread rumors? What if someone else started it first, should you repeat it?
2. Is it okay to make fun of someone and laugh at her?
3. Is it okay to do nothing and watch as someone else gets excluded or made fun of?
4. Is it okay to not let someone sit by you or join your group?
5. Is it okay to boss someone around and say, "If you don't do it my way, then I'm not going to be your friend?"
6. Is it okay to ignore someone who is your friend, just so you can be in the "popular" group?
7. Is it okay to be cruel to others because you feel that you have been treated unfairly?

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