

# helping our kids live violence free



a parent's guide for  
children in grades K to 7



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Education

# Protecting our children.

Were you ever bullied as a child? Then likely, you can still recall the pain it caused.

As parents we all want to protect our children and see them grow into healthy, well-adjusted adults. But bullying can undermine this, weakening self-esteem and school performance, and scarring our children for years.



**All bullying is painful. But some bullying is hard to detect because it doesn't leave physical bruises.**

## How do you spot bullying?

When a child is continually put down, they're being bullied.

But that doesn't mean it's easy to spot. Some bullying leaves bruises we can see, while other types of bullying leaves emotional scars.

Essentially, bullying falls into three categories: *physical*, *emotional* and *social*.

## Sticks and stones may break your bones...

Just as the name implies, *physical bullying* harms a victim's physical self or personal property. It may start with threats but, like all types of bullying, unless someone intervenes it can escalate into pushing, shoving, and fighting. Other forms of physical bullying includes extortion, so if your child comes home hungry or missing personal possessions, there's a chance he or she is being bullied.

...but names will never hurt you.

Forget the old idea that names will never hurt you.

*Emotional bullying* can be devastating.

Insulting remarks, name calling and dirty looks may seem like child's play, but they're not. Emotional bullying is demeaning, upsetting and frightening.

There are three types of bullying:

**Physical:** where a person or his or her property is physically harmed.

**Emotional:** where a person's feelings are hurt through insults and name calling.

**Social:** where a person is shunned and excluded from groups and events.

Who ever said gossip is harmless?

*Social bullying* is the most difficult type of bullying to detect. After all, there are no scars, no destroyed or stolen property to help a parent discover that their child is being bullied. Social bullying may start with a dirty look. From there, ignoring, gossiping and spreading rumours usually follow. Then children may find that their classmates have shunned them entirely by no longer inviting them to birthday parties or to play at other children's homes.

All types of bullying contain elements of physical, emotional and social bullying. It can be obvious or very secretive and, if adults do nothing, it will escalate.

## Differences between girls and boys...

Studies show that both girls and boys bully. Boys generally tend to rely more on verbal and physical intimidation. Girls generally use tactics like teasing, gossiping, insulting, or excluding their victims from social events. Bullying can be extremely painful and needs to be taken very seriously by both the parents and the school.



## How much harm can it really cause?

The issue of bullying has to be taken seriously. Victims of bullying can develop severe depression and if it continues into their teen years, it can even lead to suicide. Plus studies reveal that bullies are four times more likely to become adult criminals.

And bullying grows. What starts out as name calling and school-yard brawls in elementary grades can lead to severe brutality, sexual assault, and even murder in later years. It's time for all of us to take action against bullying now, before it grows.

## Why care when your child isn't involved?

Studies reveal that people who have witnessed bullying and didn't intervene felt more fearful and lived with a sense of shame. To say the least, bullying affects everyone.

Silence only perpetuates the problem. Encourage your children to tell you about any bullying they may be aware of. If you're aware of an incident yourself, talk to the school. You can even do this anonymously.

At home, talk about bullying with your children. Ask them how they would deal with bullying if it happened to them, or to others. Discussions like these can be the first step in changing things for the better.

It's important that we break the code of silence about bullying and harassment.

***Bullying is serious stuff. Studies show that the majority of bullies end up in jail by their mid 20s. And victims can suffer from low self-esteem and depression throughout their adult lives.***

## How violence grows

*As a preschooler Hayley would often exclude other children at her playgroup. Since no adults stepped in, her behaviour continued so that by the time Hayley reached Grade 2, social bullying had become habit. She would whisper about other children, and tell her friends who they could or could not play with. It gave Hayley a sense of power and control.*

And so the stories go. Children who are bullies generally have a history of this. In other words, it didn't happen overnight. As early as preschool, children may have learned how to take unfair advantage of a weaker child through minor acts such as a mean look or whispers. Without intervention bullying can grow into fighting, alienation, and even weapon use in later years.

## Why do some kids bully?

Everywhere in our society we witness the imbalance of power. Having it infiltrate our children's lives should really come as no surprise. The imbalance of power is at the very root of a bully/victim conflict. This power gives a child control over others, which builds self-esteem and social stature amongst peers. However, it's important to note that many bullies may have been victims themselves. They've learned that in order to "win" they have to "beat" someone else.

A bully's power comes from many sources. It may be that the bully is physically stronger, has superior intelligence, especially in the form of "street smarts", or has power through group affiliation.

## Bullies are poor students... and other myths.

At one time bullies were thought to have a low sense of self-esteem, but now studies show that bullying builds self-esteem. Children who bully are not loners; most have a small, close group of friends who witness and support their behaviour. Bullies need an audience.

Bullies are found in all economic, social and racial groups. Bullies aren't poor students; most achieve average grades. Finally, "once a bully always a bully" is another myth. Bullying is learned behaviour that can be unlearned.



## So, where do kids learn to bully?

*Ever since Jackie could remember her mom had a tendency to blow her top and punish her over simple things, like spilling a glass of juice. It was no surprise then that Jackie expressed her anger and frustration by harassing smaller and weaker kids at school. Jackie learned early in life that bigger is better.*



Kids who bully aren't living in a vacuum... they learned their behaviour somewhere. Many bullies are victims themselves. For example, there may be a significant power imbalance where one parent or a sibling is consistently dominant over others.

***Bullies are often victims too. They may have learned their behaviour by being bullied themselves by another child, sibling, or even a parent, teacher or coach.***

Some bullies lack empathy or compassion. They believe that their victims had it coming to them, and therefore feel very little guilt for hurting others.

Bullying can be a vicious cycle where victims often turn to bullying others out of frustration. The sooner we take bullying seriously, the sooner the cycle will be broken.

## Is my child a bully?

In reality, bullies are hard to spot, because they've learned to bully when adults aren't watching. However there are some signs to watch for. Children who have trouble concentrating in class, get into frequent fights, don't listen to adults, and are insensitive to the feeling of others, may have a tendency to bully.

### **Signs your child is bullying others:**

- ***Comes home with "gifts" from other children***
- ***Insensitive to others' feelings***
- ***Gets into frequent fights***



Even more disturbing is when a child reacts to disappointments and criticism with extreme anger, blame or revenge, and is cruel or violent toward pets. This signifies a need for professional help.

Bullying isn't always obvious. Sometimes children who consciously ignore or whisper about another child are bullying. A more obvious sign could be when a child shows up at home with "gifts" from another kid.



## What can a parent do?

*When Michael's parents received a call from the school telling them their child had been bullying others, they were tempted to deny it. Instead they remained calm and listened to both sides of the story. By doing so, they discovered that Michael was having trouble making friends and was bullying out of frustration. Michael received help in learning to socialize better. In the end, Michael made friends and the bullying stopped.*

If you suspect that your child is bullying others discuss your concerns with your child. You may discover the reason for the bullying is that he or she is being victimized by someone else.

If your child is accused of bullying, don't threaten punishment; this just keeps the cycle going. Instead talk about how his or her words or actions can hurt others. Then decide on a logical consequence—for example, apologizing to the child who's been hurt.

### **If your child is accused of bullying:**

- **Stay calm**
- **Don't deny it**
- **Listen to both sides**
- **Try to be helpful**
- **Let your child know that bullying is unacceptable**

## Parents have rights too!

As a parent you have the right to be informed of your child's behaviour and to have access to your child's student records. And as a parent you have the right to appeal any decision made by the school that adversely affects the education, health or safety of your child. If your child is arrested and detained in custody under the Young Offenders Act, the police must notify you of the arrest and must also notify you of any summons and appearance notices issued to your child.

## Every bully needs a victim...

The fact is bullies have no power without their victims. Research reveals that there are two types of victims, *passive* and *provocative*.

*Passive* victims are the most common. Often smaller in stature than their bullies, they tend to be shy and have fewer friends. They spend their energy trying to avoid bullies.

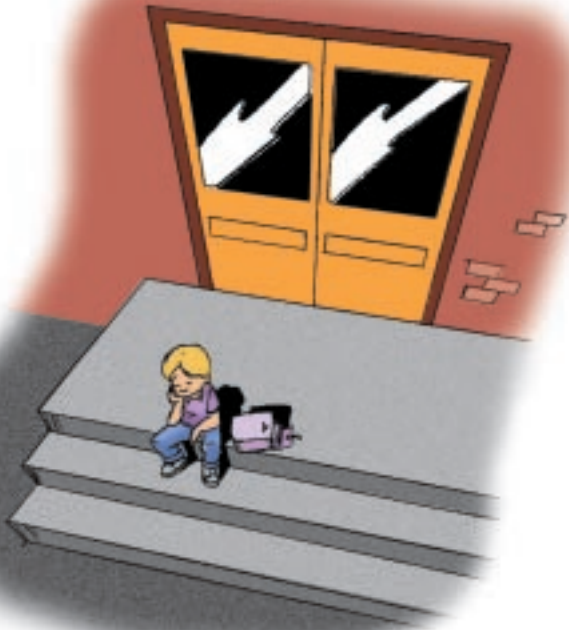
*Provocative* victims are rarer and often thought to be bullies themselves. They regularly pester others, are quick tempered, have problems socially interacting and are willing to fight back.

All victims who are bullied live in fear and silence, and need our help to deal with the trauma.

***There are two types of victims:***

- ***Those who are shy and small in stature.***
- ***Those who provoke others and have trouble socializing.***

***Both types need our help.***



## Is your child a victim?

*In Grade 4, Baldeep suddenly found herself at the brunt of racist slurs and comments by children she once considered friends. Eventually the bullying escalated. Baldeep's lunches were stolen and her school books were defaced. Normally an exuberant child, Baldeep became quiet and sullen. When her parents expressed concern, Baldeep covered up the bullying with lies. She was afraid that if she told the truth, the bullies would retaliate.*



As children get older, they become more reluctant to tell you that they're being bullied. There's a strong code of silence around bullying, even among children in the elementary grades. If your child is avoiding school, complaining of tummy aches or headaches, has changed the route to school for no apparent reason, returns home from school disheveled or extremely hungry, or is missing personal possessions, he or she may be a victim of bullying. Other signs include crying, sleeplessness or sleeping much more than normal.

Trust your instincts. If your "parent radar" is telling you something's wrong, you're probably right.

### **Signs your child is being bullied:**

- **Upset stomach**
- **Sleeplessness**
- **Sulkiness**
- **Avoiding school**
- **Coming home disheveled or hungry**
- **Missing personal possessions**
- **Invitations to events like parties drop off**

## How can a parent help?

It's tempting to tell your child to stand up to a bully. The fact is, such action usually creates a far more dangerous situation. Bullying is real and must be treated seriously, right from the start. So never blame your child for the bullying, and never tell your child to deal with it on his or her own.



Listen closely to your child without interrupting. While it's great to help your child problem-solve, chances are he or she has tried everything.

Encourage your child to have friends over after school or on the weekend. Just one friend can go a long way in keeping self-esteem intact.

Get your child involved with something he or she is good at and enjoys such as art classes, music lessons, sports, or groups such as Brownies and Cubs. It will help build their self-confidence.

- DO**
- *Take bullying seriously*
  - *Listen to your child*
  - *Help your child problem-solve*

- DON'T**
- *Blame your child for the bullying*
  - *Expect your child to deal with it on his/her own*

# Should a parent intervene?

Intervention is vital. But how you intervene is just as important.

Generally it's not recommended that you contact the parent of a bully. Instead talk with your child about reporting the bullying to the school. The older your child is the more resistance you'll get, so remind him or her that there's a difference between "reporting" and "tattling" or "ratting". Reporting is done to keep someone safe. Tattling is done to get someone in trouble.

When you talk to the school ensure that it has a plan to address bullying, and that it will keep your child's identity confidential. If you're getting little response, call your local school district office and ask to speak to someone responsible for this area.

If the bullying continues, document the incident(s). This helps to identify a pattern and provide some objectivity.

Keep in mind, kids often bully others in response to their own victimization.

So by addressing the situation, both the victim and the bully can get the help they need.



## ***Here's how to intervene:***

- ***First, get your child's OK to report. Explain that reporting is done to keep people safe.***
- ***Ensure the school protects your child's identity before discussing the problem.***
- ***Document the incidents.***
- ***Call your school district office for more help.***

## An ounce of prevention...

*Sam's parents were careful of the toys, television shows and video games they allowed in the house. They were conscious that violence often leads to violence. But when they had the occasional bout of road rage, they never thought much of it. That is, until Sam's parents learned that he had been found berating other children whenever he became frustrated.*

### **Help prevent bullying by:**

- **Modeling anger management**
- **Accepting differences in others**
- **Monitoring television use**
- **Knowing your children's friends and whereabouts**
- **Having limits but providing choices**

Day to day there's a lot we can do to help prevent bullying. First, talk to your child about what it means to be a friend. Discuss and model non-violent ways to cope with anger.

Teach acceptance and the value of differences. Avoid stereotyping others through jokes and comments.

Get to know your child's friends. Invite them into your home. When your child is away, know where and with whom. Discuss what he or she sees in the media, and monitor the use of television, violent games and toys.

Talk to your child about how words and actions can hurt others. Teach empathy by discussing "what if" scenarios where your child imagines how it feels to be in a victim's shoes.

Set age-appropriate limits, but also allow children to make some choices within those limits. For example while the rule is that your child must clean his or her room, when to do this task is his or her choice. Finally, avoid using physical punishment; instead consider means such as withdrawal of privileges.

## Get involved with your child's school.

Under the School Act, every parent has the right to form or join a PAC (Parent Advisory Council). Find out if your child's school has one. PACs are specifically created for parents and can provide a forum for their views, arrange for public speakers, and set up workshops.

Bullying usually occurs when children are on their own. A parent's presence at special events such as school concerts and field trips, or even during recess and lunch hours can be helpful.



**A great parent resource is The B.C. Safe School Centre. Call 1-888-224-SAFE.**

## What are B.C. schools doing?

Many schools have implemented anti-bullying strategies and all B.C. teachers have access to anti-bullying training programs and information. Students are learning more about living together violence-free through "841-KOZ", a workshop sponsored by the B.C. Ministry of Attorney General.

An invaluable resource for parents is The B.C. Safe School Centre.

## It's up to everyone.

We all want our children to live in a safe, caring and non-violent world. Everyone – from parents, to schools, to the community at large – has a role to play in creating a positive place for our children to learn and grow.

## Resources

**For information on violence prevention  
Call: Live Violence Free 1-888-606-LIVE (5483)**

**The B.C. Safe School Centre  
Call: 1-888-224-SAFE (7233)  
<http://www.safeschools.gov.bc.ca>**

**B.C. Youth Against Violence Line  
Call: 1-800-680-GANG (4264)**

**Racism Information  
Call: B.C. Ministry Responsible for  
Multiculturalism & Immigration  
(604) 660-4068  
<http://www.mrmi.gov.bc.ca>**

**Sexual Assault and Family Violence Crisis Line  
Call: Victim Information Line  
1-800-563-0808**

**Parent Information & Support  
Call: B.C. Confederation of  
Parent Advisory Councils  
1-888-351-9834**

**For family violence information and education  
Call: B.C. Institute Against Family Violence  
1-877-755-7055 or in Vancouver: 669-7055  
<http://www.bcifv.org>**

## Recommended Reading

**"The School-Yard Bully"**

By Kim Zarzour

Publisher: HarperCollins, 1999

**"How Parents Can Take Action Against Bullying"**

By Cindi Seddon, Gesele Lajoie, Alyson McLellan

Publisher: Bully B'ware Productions, 2000

**"Sex, Power & the Violent School Girl"**

By Sibylle Artz

Publisher: Trifolium Books Inc., 1998

**"Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill"**

By Dave Grossman, Gloria DeGastane

Publisher: Canadian Manda Group, 1999