



Article for Murray's Bully Free Community Education Campaign

Help Your Child Be Bully Free in the Community

By
Allan L. Beane, Ph.D.

In recent years, much has been written about preventing and stopping bullying in our schools. Every state has mandated that schools have policies and procedures for reporting it and for responding to it. However, neighborhood or community bullying hasn't received the attention it deserves. Bullying can occur everywhere in the community. Bullying is a *community issue* and all the resources of the community should be used to prevent and stop it in the schools and everywhere in the community. When a child is bullied, it impacts the entire family, especially the parents. The following tips are provided to help parents of children who are bullied in the community. Some of the tips focus on prevention, some on helping bullied children cope with their hurt feelings, and some focus stopping the bullying. These tips are appropriate for all forms of bullying: physical, verbal, social/relational, written, and cyber bullying. Additional helpful information for parents and children can found at www.bullyfree.com, under "Free Resources."

- Let your child know that no one deserves to be bullied. Some bullied children have been convinced they deserve to be bullied. Some are convinced they are defective.
- Explain that some children who bully may seek to hurt and control because they have problems, are angry, are depressed, are jealous, lack self-control, feel they are better than others, lack self-control because they have not been disciplined, lack empathy, have aggressive parents or siblings, and have not been taught the Golden Rule. They may be victims of mistreatment themselves and take their hurt and anger out on others.
- Stay calm even though you are concerned about your child's safety. When you get mad and excited, it concerns your child. He will feel that you are not capable of handling his situation appropriately and might make it worse.
- Be sensitive to the fact that your child may feel embarrassed and shame because you have taught him to stand up for himself and he can't because there is a power imbalance. The bully may have physical and/or psychological power over your child and/or your child may be out numbered.
- Express confidence that you, with the help of others, will find a solution. Don't promise that you will not tell anyone. You may need help. Involve your child in discovering solutions.
- Involve your child in service projects and helping project. Serving and helping others can have a healing effect on his emotions.

- Help your child develop a “best friend.” Your child doesn’t need several friends. Children who have one best friend are bullied less often, cope better emotionally with the bullying, and have less anger and resulting behavior problems resulting from the mistreatment.
- Help your child develop a skill or hobby that can serve as an emotional and expressive outlet. This can boost your child’s confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to better deal with the bullying.
- Wherever your child is bullied, increase adult supervision. If you can’t provide supervision, ask someone in the family or a trusted friend in the neighborhood to supervise, not just in your neighborhood but in various community locations. When you leave your child someone, emphasize your expectation of quality supervision.
- If you can’t supervise your child after school, enroll him in a quality youth program well supervised by adults with good morals. This may also increase the likelihood of good friends.
- Tell your child to never walk alone and, when possible, have older peers with him who will protect him by being assertive on his behalf. Ask siblings who are older and bigger than the bullies, to supervise their brother or sister. If needed, they could recruit some of their friends to assist them.
- Ask an older student or students with good morals to mentor and supervise your child. You could even pay them to supervise your child in the neighborhood, when you are unable to do so.
- Ask your child to avoid individuals who bully, when possible. Your child shouldn’t go where bullies hangout.
- Don’t tell your child to ignore the bullying. Ignoring them usually doesn’t work.
- If your child is bullied, ask him to give you a report everyday regarding his treatment. If your child is bullied at school or in a community sponsored activity, ask your child to report to an adult how they are being treated. They may make such a report once a day or twice a week, whatever seems most appropriate.
- Monitor your child’s whereabouts and his friendships. Ask questions: What did you do today? Who did you sit with today? Who did you play with today? Was everyone nice to you today? Where you nice to others today?
- Inform your neighbors about the bullying and ask them to be observant, alert, “withit.” Form a Neighborhood Watch Program. Encourage neighbors to keep video cameras near their window to record bullying in the neighborhood.
- Keep a log of information regarding the bullying. Do not interrogate your child, but conversationally ask questions to determine what has happened, who was involved, when it happened, and where it happened. Also find out who witnessed the bullying. Get their names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Look for patterns in this information. Ask yourself: “What locations need to be avoided? “What time periods need to be avoided?” This is information you will need to share with the school, law enforcement, or court officials designated to who work with juveniles.
- Take pictures of all injuries and hold a ruler next to the injuries to show their sizes and keep a record of all medical treatment and counseling expenses, as well as related travel expenses.
- Take your child to the doctor in order to have an official record of the injuries.
- If your child is being harassed or physically attacked, file a report with the appropriate juvenile authority. Since juvenile law varies from state to state, the parent should do their research to determine to whom to report. Include the photographs and your log of information.
- Law enforcement officers can be very helpful. Assault and harassment laws apply to people of all ages.

- Purchase a miniature video camera for your child. Show him how the camera can be hidden and aimed at individuals who are mistreating him.
- With your child's permission, examine the journal for consistency in what he has told you and what he has written. Let your child know it is normal to feel hurt, fear, and anger. Help him express these in appropriate ways.
- Ask your child to write what happened in a journal and the feelings they have about what happened. This can be healing to your child's emotions.
- Talk to individuals in the community and find out what you can about the bullies and their families. This may give you some insight to their behavior.
- Talk to other parents. Perhaps their children are bullied by the same individual(s). Ask them to keep a log of the mistreatment. Determine what they have done to prevent and stop it. Brainstorm ways you can ban together to protect your children in the community. Perhaps there is action you can take as a group.
- Inform your child's school about the bullying. If the bullies attend your child's school, they need to monitor their interaction with your child. Ask them to appoint someone in the school to whom your child can report to on a daily basis. The reporting could be weekly for a while and then monthly.
- Use your own judgment about contacting the parents of the bullies. Some parents of bullies are terrific parents and will deal with the problem, but sometimes they just defend their child.
- Don't tell your child to retaliate or fight. He may try to equalize the power imbalance with a weapon. Since bullies are often bigger and stronger than your child, he may get injured. He may also get expelled. Such a recommendation communicates to your child that violence is the way to deal with violence. It also tells him that he is alone in dealing with the situation – adults need to be involved.
- Teach your child to be assertive, but not aggressive. To learn more about this, visit www.bullyfree.com and click on "Free Resources." Please keep in mind these strategies may not work unless you have taught them well to your child and your child has the necessary confidence to do them right. Select those who feel are best for your child and his situation, including the nature of those who are mistreating your child. Use them with caution.
- Involve your child in activities away from neighborhood bullies. This will give him an opportunity to develop supportive friends.
- Bullied children are hesitant to report being bullied. They often wait until they feel helpless or hopeless. Therefore, watch for signs of depression and anger. Do not hesitate to seek professional counseling for your child.
- Build your child's body strength, self-confidence and self-esteem. Teach him to walk upright and to avoid looking like an easy target.
- Monitor your own child's behavior. Sometimes bullied students get angry and mistreat others. Let them know their behavior is inappropriate. Teach them how to appropriately release his anger.
- Ask yourself, "Is there something my child is doing to provoke the bullies? Is there something that my child needs to stop doing?" However, remember no one has the right to break laws or rules to mistreat your child. Also, the Golden Rule doesn't say, treat others the way you want to be treated if they don't irritate you.
- Host a meeting in your neighborhood on bullying prevention. Discuss the nature of bullying, its destructiveness, why it must be prevented and stopped, and what role the neighborhood should play.

Consider inviting law enforcement officials, school personnel, representatives of the faith-based organizations, and others to the meeting.

- Consider teaching children in the neighborhood to ban together and protect each other in non-violent ways. They can be “empowered bystanders.” If other children are witnessing the bullying and ignoring it, they are part of the problem. For ways children can be empower bystanders, visit www.bullyfree.com and click on “Free Resources.”
- Find community programs that seek to help troubled youth that can reach out to children who bully. They also need help. They often grow up and abuse their spouses, their children, their pets, and their co-workers.
- Ask the schools to implement an anti-bullying program and to have an expert on bullying to speak to students, parents, and teachers.
- Every day, tell your child that you love them and give them lots of hugs. Spend time with him and ask about their day.
- If you’re a religious person, pray for your child and pray for change in children who bully. Ask others to pray for your child.
- Ask local faith-based organizations to place the issue of bullying on their prayer lists. Ask them to address bullying and to drive home the importance of obeying the Golden Rule. Also ask them to have a “Bully Free Month” emphasis.
- When necessary and after you have gathered the facts and documentation/evidence, get the advice of an attorney. You have to protect your child.

Bullying often happens because adults have not taken the necessary steps to prevent and stop it. Adults must get involved. Parents and adults in the community must provide quality supervision and communicate that bullying will not be tolerated. Parents and children should never feel they are alone in dealing with bullying. We know how to help them. We must continue to look for new solutions to this community problem that is so destructive to children and causing a crisis in families and in communities.

About the Author: Allan L. Beane, Ph.D. is President of *Bully Free Systems, LLC*, www.bullyfree.com, (270) 227-0431, located in Murray, Kentucky.