

Parents, school staff, and other caring adults all have an important role to play in preventing bullying and equipping children to manage challenging situations in their daily lives.

That is a big job Where does one start?

We want to share a three-step plan of action that will offer a starting point and provide strategies for the prevention of bullying and equipping children to manage challenging situations in their daily lives.

The Three Steps:
Educate, Empower, and Enact

Educate

****Introduce healthy friendships and conflict resolution strategies.**

What can/should be expected from a friend or classmate? There are many behaviors that look like bullying but require different approaches. Peer Conflict is a common behavior that needs to be considered. It is not bullying when two children without a power imbalance fight, have an argument, or disagree. Conflict resolution or peer mediation may be appropriate for these situations and are important tools for providing a safe environment for disagreements to be resolved. Anytime a behavior is mean, hurtful, or uncomfortable, it should be addressed. Learning to resolve conflicts is a life long skill and can be very time consuming to teach and practice. As adults we need to step back and give children an opportunity to work through non-bullying conflict situations.

****Give children tools they can use to manage uncomfortable feelings in their daily life.**

All feelings are “ok”, what we do with those feelings can create a problem for us. Anger, fear, worry are feelings that can move

someone to make positive changes in their life or on the negative side, create paralyzing feelings of despair. Learn to use I messages when talking about your feelings and help children do the same. I feel ... when you Remind them often that no one chooses how we feel. Help students own the idea that they should never let anyone “make them” feel bad about themselves or have a bad day.

****Help children understand bullying behaviors vs. classmate and/or friendship quarrels.**

This is very difficult. It is hard to explain why ignoring can be a great tool when someone is teasing you; however, if the teasing is in a bully situation ignoring can actually encourage the bully behavior to continue.

Talk about, and let it be known that bullying behaviors are unacceptable. Not in school, the classroom, or home. Watching videos and reading books are great ways to help children experience a bully situation without actually being bullied or showing bullying behaviors. This offers an opportunity to identify/discuss/role play behaviors and tools that can be used to change bully situations. Practice, practice, practice.....

Make sure children know multiple options of trusted adults they can go to for help. Teach them they need to keep asking for help until the situation feels safe to them. This may require going to different adults.

****Help students learn to invest in each other's lives.**

Bystanders are the students and adults who see bullying behaviors occurring, but often let it happen without taking steps to help. Students may see bullying but not know what to do to stop it. Introduce strategies and options to help them feel safe when stepping in. There are many ways your child can help address bullying when they see it happening without putting themselves in harm's way. Video and books are very useful for helping children actually see how a bystander can make a

difference in a bully situation.

Just as mentioned above... Make sure children know multiple options for trusted adults they can go to for help. Teach them they need to keep asking for help until the situation feels safe to them. This may require going to different adults.

Our schools, classroom, and homes need to be filled with learning avenues that allow us to role model and actively teach these prosocial behaviors. Time is usually our biggest obstacle to overcome. Role modeling and practicing are very powerful teaching tools but do require a lot of time.

Educate now so our children will have the skills needed to enact when needed. Watch for and take advantage of those teachable moments and “windows of opportunities” for a lesson or skill to be learned and practiced.

Empower

****Build a healthy self-esteem.**

Encourage children to do what they love. Special activities, interests, and hobbies can boost confidence. Help children find ways to volunteer and support service projects. These activities teach children to serve others and appreciate that everyone faces challenges.

****Keep the lines of communication open.**

Check in with children often. Listen to them. Know their friends, ask about school, and understand their concerns. Work at ways to spend quality time together as a family. Have classroom/family meetings to give all a chance to “have a voice”. As the adult, provide a safe environment with written expectations and follow through with consistent consequences as needed. Children usually respond best when they know what to expect and expect consistent follow through.

****Children learn from adults' actions.**

By treating others with kindness and respect, adults show the children in their lives that there is no place for bullying. Even if it seems like they are not paying attention, children are watching how adults manage stress and conflict, as well as how they treat their friends, colleagues, and families. They also watch and see how healthy boundaries we set for ourselves helps us keep healthy relationships.

Enact -Student

Stop Bullying on the Spot

Be calm

Stand up tall and look the bully in the eyes•

Remember to use words that are honest and respectful.

Never believe what a bully says about you

Be brave – show confidence

Make a joke – use humor

Change the subject

Pretend to agree with the bully

“Take-up” for yourself

Avoid the bully

Stay close to where adults can see you

Stay with friends or a group

Tell an adult – keep telling different adults until you get the help you need to feel safe

Enact -Adult

Stop Bullying on the Spot

When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior they send the message that it is not acceptable. There are simple

steps adults can take to stop bullying on the spot and keep children safe.

Do:

- Intervene immediately.
- Separate the children involved.
- Make sure everyone is safe.
- Stay calm.
- Reassure the children involved, including bystanders.
- Model respectful behavior when you intervene.
- Seek additional adult help.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Don't ignore it.
- Don't think children can work it out without adult help.
- Don't force other children to say publicly what they saw.
- Don't question the children involved in front of other children.
- Don't make the children involved apologize or patch up relations on the spot.

Get the Facts

- Keep all the involved children separate.
- Get the story from several sources, both adults and children.
- Listen without blaming.
- Don't call the act "bullying" while you are trying to understand what happened.

Support Children Who are Bullied

Listen and focus on the child. Learn what's been going on and show you want to help. Assure the child that bullying is not their fault. Know that children who are bullied may struggle with talking about it. Consider referring them to a school counselor seek a referral for outside counseling.

Give advice about what to do. This may involve role-playing and thinking through how the child might react if the bullying occurs again. Work together to resolve the situation and protect the bullied child.

The child, parents, and school or organization may all have valuable

input. It may help to:

- Ask the child being bullied what can be done to make him or her feel safe.
- Develop a game plan. Maintain open communication between schools, organizations, and parents. Discuss the steps that are taken and the limitations around what can be done based on policies and laws.
- Be persistent. Bullying may not end overnight. Commit to making it stop and consistently support the bullied child.

Avoid these mistakes:

- Never tell the child to ignore the bully. (Peer conflict, yes-bullying, no)
- Do not blame the child for being bullied. Even if he or she provoked the bullying, no one deserves to be bullied.
- Do not tell the child to physically fight back against the kid who is bullying. It could get the child hurt, suspended, or expelled.

Follow-up

Show a commitment to making bullying stop. Bullying is a behavior that repeats or has the potential to be repeated, it takes consistent effort to ensure that it stops. Create ways for the child to be a part of a group and to feel safe. Encourage other students to be involved in including the child in a natural, but pre-determined plan when away from the class/home.

Address Bullying Behavior

Make sure the child knows what the problem behavior is. Young people who bully must learn their behavior is wrong and harms others. Show children that bullying is taken seriously. Calmly tell the child that bullying will not be tolerated. Model respectful behavior when addressing the problem.

Work with the child to understand some of the reasons he or she bullied. Sometimes children bully to fit in. Other times children act out because of something else—issues at home, abuse, stress—is going on in their lives. They also may have been bullied.

Consequences that involve learning or building empathy can help prevent future bullying. Activities like volunteering, service projects, or reading/writing about the benefits of teamwork. Working through a

“Think About It” sheet. The goal is to help them see how their actions affect others.

Follow-up

After the bullying issue is resolved, continue finding ways to help the child who bullied to understand how what they do affects other people. Encourage acts of kindness or talk about what it means to be a good friend. Help the child find a group that will set a good example of teamwork and not be intimidated by future bully behaviors. Work at recognizing positive behavior choices.