

# *Catholic Parent.*<sup>®</sup> KNOWHOW

Practical  
Pointers,  
Scripture  
& More

Sample for Review Only  
Do Not Reproduce

# Bullying

## What Parents Can Do

# BULLYING

## What Parents Need to Know

Dear Parents,

In recent years, the topic of bullying has been at the forefront of our national conversation, due in part to several high profile cases in which children and teens took their own lives after being bullied. These cases underscore the seriousness of this issue and the damage bullying can do, not only physically, but emotionally as well.

Bullying is a complex issue. It can be difficult for parents to know what to do when they hear that their child is being bullied or is bullying others. This is because bullying behavior does not occur in a vacuum. It can be related to a number of variables in the bully, the victim, and their external environment.

As a Catholic child psychologist, I see firsthand the problems that bullying can cause in the lives of both victims and bullies. It is my hope that the information in this booklet, based on research and clinical experience, can help guide parents as they work to keep their children physically and emotionally safe and teach their children to respect the dignity of others.

Let us work together to build a society of justice and care for others.

Our Lady, Queen of Peace, pray for us!

Sincerely,

Joseph D. White, Ph.D.

Dr. Joseph White

### Parent's Prayer

Dear God,  
I cannot always be there to watch over my child, but I know that you are with him/her. Please keep my child safe. When threats or aggression occur, help my child defend his or her dignity and handle the situation well. Give my child an understanding of others so that he or she treats others with respect and care. Help him or her to come to me when there are problems with others, and give me the strength and grace to respond with what is most needed.

**Amen.**

*Nihil Obstat:* Msgr. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.  
Censor Librorum

*Imprimatur:*

✠ Kevin C. Rhoades

Bishop of Fort Wayne—South Bend

February 6, 2012

The *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the *Nihil Obstat* or *Imprimatur* agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

Every reasonable effort has been made to determine copyright holders of excerpted materials and to secure permissions as needed. If any copyrighted materials have been inadvertently used in this work without proper credit being given in one form or another, please notify Our Sunday Visitor in writing so that future printings of this work may be corrected accordingly.

Copyright © 2012 by  
Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division,  
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.  
Published 2012.

16 15 14 13 12 1 2 3 4 5 6

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts for critical reviews, no part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means whatsoever without permission in writing from the publisher: Contact:

Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division  
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.  
200 Noll Plaza  
Huntington, IN 46750  
1-800-348-2440  
bookpermissions@osv.com

ISBN: 978-1-61278-619-3  
(Inventory No. X1316)

Design by: Amanda Falk  
Cover photo by: Thinkstock

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# BULLYING:

## What Is It?

**THE DEFINITION OF BULLYING** has been hotly debated as awareness has grown about this issue. To some people, it may seem that bullying has such a broad definition that it could include any behavior we don't like from others. Are we being "bullied" simply when we don't get our way? Or when we aren't liked by everyone? Is the playful teasing that is common in children and teens now considered bullying? For the purposes of this discussion we will define bullying as:

Intentional written, verbal, or physical behavior that causes physical harm to another person or a person's property, or causes a person to reasonably fear physical harm to his or her person or property.

~ OR ~

Abusive or threatening behavior that is severe, persistent, and/or pervasive enough that it creates an environment that is emotionally or psychologically harmful for another person.



Some examples of **BULLYING** might include (but are not limited to):

- physical assault
- verbal teasing and/or ridiculing someone as a response to a perceived difference (for example, cultural, racial, socioeconomic, physical, or intellectual)
- demanding money, material goods, or favors from someone through intimidation or coercion
- calling someone a derogatory name meant to insult or embarrass that person
- encouraging others to commit acts of bullying
- deliberately and systematically excluding another person

SHUTTERSTOCK





## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

One study by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) found that **1 in 7 children is either a bully or a victim.** In rural schools the number is even higher. About 1 in 6 children in these areas consider themselves traumatized by bullying.

According to the Internet safety organization I-safe, **42 percent of children have been victims of online bullying.**

The same survey found that the majority of those children had not told their parents about the bullying.

Bullying can cause both school attendance and academic problems.

Among fourth- to eighth-graders, **22 percent report academic difficulties** due to bullying, and **14-18 percent** of eighth- to twelfth-graders **report that bullying diminishes their ability to learn at school.** Chronic victims of bullying miss more school, either through deliberately avoiding school to escape the bullying or due to physical symptoms caused by stress, such as stomach problems, headaches, etc.

## WHO ARE THE BULLIES?

A variety of kids and teens can be bullies, and there is no one particular pattern that makes a bully. However, some trends may be observed in certain types of bullying. Bullying that includes physical abuse or sexual harassment is more often perpetrated by males. Girls who bully tend to do so in more subtle, psychological ways, for example, through social isolation and exclusion, and spreading rumors. However, it's important to realize that bullies can be anyone. They are not necessarily the biggest and strongest children. They are children who, for some reason or another, have a need to feel powerful. This is sometimes because they themselves are being bullied or have been bullied in the past.

Certain characteristics common to children who become bullies include the following:

- **Too little supervision.** Significant adults in the bully's life often have no idea that the child is engaging in this behavior and may react with surprise, shock, or disbelief when told about the behavior.
- **Harsh physical punishment.** Several studies have shown that children who are disciplined through severe physical punishment or children for whom corporal punishment is the primary type of discipline are more likely to bully other children.
- **Negative bias.** Children who tend to see the world through a negative and/or suspicious lens, or tend to interpret vague or ambiguous situations in negative ways, are more likely to bully others. An example of this would be a child who is accidentally bumped by another child and, assuming that it was purposeful, reacts in anger.
- **Domestic violence.** Children who observe aggressive behavior in the home are more likely to bully others because this behavior has been modeled for them as a way to feel powerful or solve problems.
- **Constant negative feedback.** Children who frequently hear negative things from others about themselves may compensate for the insecurity they feel by behaviors designed to tear others down as well.
- **Abusive peers.** Children who have a peer group that bullies others are more likely to bully. This may be due in part to the example set by those around them and feelings of peer pressure, but as previously mentioned, also may be because these children are also bullied by their peers.



SHUTTERSTOCK

SHUTTERSTOCK

# Risk Factors FOR VICTIMS

**B**ullying behavior is always wrong, so we should not blame victims for bullying. However, knowing what characteristics might place children at risk can help us prevent bullying behavior and intervene appropriately when it occurs. Certain types of differences seem to incite bullying. Children are sometimes bullied when their behavior is annoying to peers, age-inappropriate, or otherwise unusual or difficult for peers to understand. Children who dress differently from their peers, have unusual physical features, or have a unique personal style are frequently bullied. Also, children of low social status often can be the targets of bullying. In fact, some children see teasing or excluding children of low social status as a way of establishing their places in the social “pecking order.” This can happen even among “friends” who still may be jockeying for social status.

Children who are chronically bullied are not *always* different in any obvious way from their non-bullied peers. Their reactions to the bullying behavior often *are* very different, however. The way chronic victims respond to bullying may make bullies more likely to come back for more. Chronic victims may be passive and fearful, anxiously giving in to threats and intimidation from bullies in order to avoid further conflict. Or, chronic victims may be hotheaded and react angrily to taunts from the bully, and even may seem to purposely provoke the bully. In either case, the bully is provided with a way to feel power over the victim. In the first situation, the bully sees that he or she can overpower or intimidate the victim (or get a favor or material possession from him or her). In the second situation (the hotheaded victim), the bully sees that he or she has emotional control over the victim because he or she can make the victim lose his or her temper and/or get in trouble.

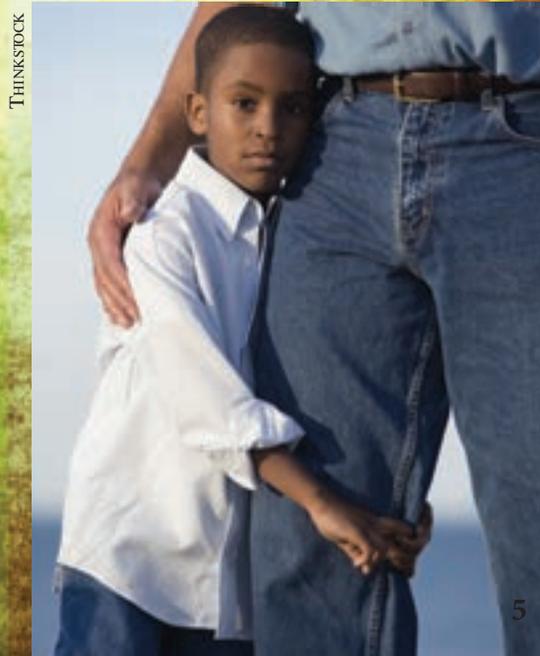
In all cases, victims of bullying need help and support. Children who are victims of bullies are more likely to be victims of other bullies in the future. They are also more at risk for depression and suicide.

“Children who are victims of bullies are more likely to be victims of other bullies in the future.”



## THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO BULLYING

Scripture teaches us that God is just and desires that people not be oppressed and mistreated by others. Ezekiel 45:9 states, “Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness.” God calls us to defend those who are bullied and to make peace where there is violence. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). God calls us to make peace, prevent bullying, and intervene when we see that harm done to others.



THINKSTOCK

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY CHILD IS A BULLY?

None of us wants to hear something negative about our own child, especially that he or she is bullying someone. But it's important to take accusations of bullying seriously. We know from experience that our children sometimes act differently when we are not looking, and the feedback we get from other caregivers can be an important tool in helping us raise our children to be all they can be. Here are some keys to prevention and intervention:

- **Help children build emotional intelligence.**

Children who bully others often don't have a good sense of how their behavior really feels for the other person. You can help to build emotional skills like empathy by talking about feelings with your child. When appropriate, talk about your own feelings (but be careful not to unload about adult issues and worries). Reflect your child's feelings when you are talking with him or her. For example, if your child is talking in an angry tone about a conflict with a friend, you can say, "I can tell that made you really mad." You can also help build empathy skills by asking about the feelings of characters in books, TV shows, and movies. When reading or watching a show with your child, stop at times to ask, "What do you think she's feeling right now? Why?"

- **Let your child know bullying is not acceptable.** Make sure your child hears, in no uncertain terms, that you do not approve of bullying and that there will be serious



consequences if it continues. If your child denies the behavior and you were not there to witness it, ask your child why someone might say something like that about him or her and why the adults in question found the accusation believable. Plan with your child how to make sure he or she has a reputation for kind behavior toward others.

- **Act swiftly if you see your child engage in bullying behavior.** When you see bullying behavior firsthand, there's no denying it, and no excuse is sufficient. Let your child know physical and verbal

aggression are not the ways to solve problems with others and you are serious about intervening if he or she is bullying someone else.

- **Seek professional support if necessary.** Without the proper intervention, some bullies go on to engage in more serious actions later, sometimes with severe consequences. If you hear repeated reports of bullying behavior, consider professional counseling with a child psychologist or counselor to assist your child in making the necessary changes in his or her behavior.

- **Follow up/check in.** Ask your child again about the bullying behavior to let him or her know that you are still alert to the situation. Follow up as well with the adults who reported the bullying to ensure that the problem is not continuing.

- **Take action if your child is being bullied.** As previously mentioned, many bullies have been victims of bullying themselves. If your child is a victim, intervene quickly to make sure he or she doesn't repeat this cycle with others.

# HELPING CHILDREN WHO ARE (OR MAY BE) VICTIMS OF BULLYING

## Recognize the signs.

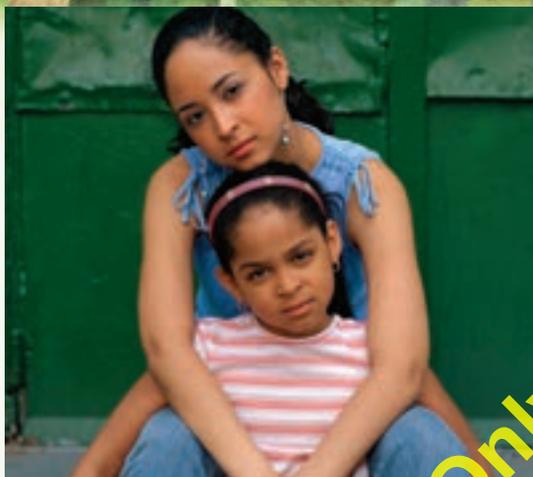
Make sure you are alert to indicators that your child may be a victim of bullying. These can include being suddenly fearful or avoidant of school (or other places where the bullying might be happening), becoming depressed or withdrawn, a sharp decline in academic performance, low self-esteem or negative self-statements, and signs of physical altercations (for example, unexplained bruises or scrapes, torn clothing, etc.).

## Ask them.

Children are often embarrassed about being bullied, so they may not voluntarily tell parents and other caregivers. If you suspect your child may be a victim of bullying, ask him or her about it. It sometimes helps to ask indirect questions, like, “Is there anybody in your class who picks on other people a lot?”

## Determine what may make your child a target.

If your child frequently says or does things that might make him or her a target for bullies, (gently) make sure he or she is aware of it. Your child might need help in changing the behavior or at least recognizing that he or she is making a conscious choice to risk some ridicule from kids who do not understand. Children who are the “hotheaded” type of victims often don’t realize that their over-



emotional reactions make them a target for bullies. If this description fits your child, talk with him or her about not letting others take control of his or her feelings, and practice some ways to stay calm.

## Teach assertiveness and bully-resistance skills.

Scripture teaches us not to let others demean us because of our age or size. 1 Timothy 4:12 says, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Role-play effective eye contact, confident posture, and problem-solving skills that make children more difficult targets for bullies. Ignoring teasing or using humor to deflect it can also make children “less fun to tease” for a bully. Practice these skills together.

## Encourage your child to make friends with other kids who don’t bully.

There’s power in numbers, and it also helps to have the right allies. Strategize with your child about how to connect with others,

especially those who might be strong allies against a bully.

## Contact the adults at the place where the bullying is occurring.

Never directly confront the child who is bullying your child. This almost never goes well, and may even lead to accusations of bullying on the part of the parent and/or an escalation of the conflict.

When talking with the adults about the bullying, try to avoid being accusatory, even if your child said they are “not doing anything about it.” Most adults who work with children would never want a child to be emotionally or physically harmed in their care. Sometimes, they are not fully aware of the situation, or may lack sufficient evidence to intervene aggressively. Report what you have heard and seen, and express your willingness to work together to ensure that the problem is remedied.

## Get involved with the school and other activities.

Children are less likely to bully your child if they know you are close by and might be watching. Volunteer to help at your child’s school or activity where the bullying is occurring, and keep an eye out for signs of trouble.

## Follow up and check in.

Ask your child about how things are going and whether or not the bullying has occurred again.

# CYBERBULLYING



Cyberbullying may be defined as using electronic means to bully another person. This includes abusive behavior via text messaging, social media, video-sharing sites, or email. Cyberbullying can be particularly damaging for the following reasons:

- **SCOPE:** Messages or videos posted online can be viewed quickly and easily by large numbers of people, and sometimes these others also join in the bullying behavior, even if they do not know the individual being bullied.
- **ANONYMITY:** The unique nature of online communications allows a degree of anonymity that can cause people to feel less responsible or accountable for their behavior. This can lead some people to be more abusive online than they might be in person.
- **PERMANENCY:** Messages and videos often are available for years after they are posted online.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD IS **BULLIED** ONLINE

- **Be aware.** It's important that parents know what their children are doing online – first and foremost for their children's protection. Let your child know that you will be monitoring his or her online activities. If you allow your child to have a Facebook page or other social-media involvement, insist that you be designated as a "friend" with total access to view what is posted, and moderate it if necessary. This helps protect against online predators as well as bullies.
- **Teach your child to "stop, block, and tell."** Stopcyberbullying.org advises that when children are targeted by a cyberbully they "stop" (take time to calm down to avoid responding in anger, which could escalate the problem); "block" (block the cyberbully from further communication using the privacy settings on the sites he or she is using); and "tell" (tell an adult they trust who can help with the problem and make the appropriate reports of abuse to site administrators or other authorities).

For More Information Go to: [www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org)

## Our Sunday Visitor

*Bringing Your Catholic Faith to Life*

**1-800-348-2440**

[www.osv.com](http://www.osv.com)

[www.teachingcatholickids.com](http://www.teachingcatholickids.com)

Inventory No. X1316

US \$1.95

ISBN 978-1-61278-619-3

5 0 1 9 5



9 781612 786193