



eyes on bullying

**Eyes on Bullying in**  
**EARLY**  
**CHILDHOOD**





# Eyes on Bullying in Early Childhood

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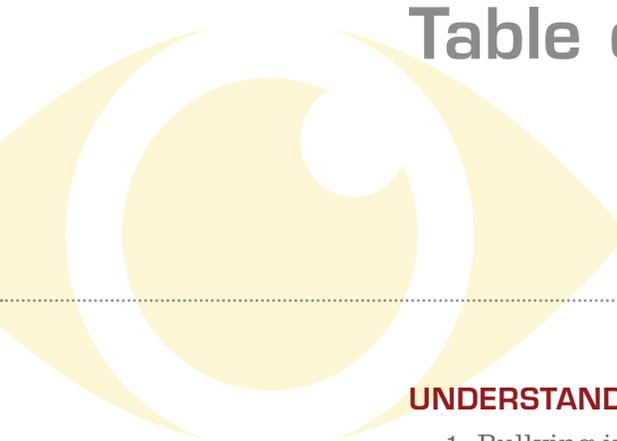
# BULLYING BASICS

## in Early Childhood

- > Bullying can emerge in early childhood.
- > If you don't know that bullying happens among young children, you won't see it or stop it.
- > If you don't stop bullying, it will grow and spread.
- > When early childhood educators are prepared, they can nip bullying in the bud.
- > Find out how to stop bullying before it starts.



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# Understanding BULLYING

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# 1

## UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

# Bullying in Early Childhood

### **BULLYING CAN EMERGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD.**

Children as young as age 3 can and do participate in bullying.<sup>1</sup> We often see the emergence of bullying in early childhood settings, such as daycare, preschool, home care groups, play groups, and kindergarten classrooms.



**Early childhood settings provide an opportunity for educators to effectively prevent and stop the emergence of bullying behavior and to foster the development of positive social interactions.**

### **IF YOU DON'T KNOW THAT BULLYING HAPPENS AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN, YOU WON'T SEE IT OR STOP IT.**

Teachers in early childhood settings often overlook bullying, for a variety of reasons. They may think that young children are too naïve and innocent to bully and that they are incapable of deliberate behaviors that are intended to harm other children. They may dismiss or ignore unacceptable behaviors, saying, “Kids will be kids” or labeling particular children as “challenging.” Teachers may also fail to see the bullying because there is inadequate supervision or because it happens when adults are not watching. They may fail to understand that early or “pre-bullying” behaviors will turn into bullying.



**When early childhood educators have a clear understanding of bullying in young children, this opens their eyes to dealing with it effectively.**

### **IF YOU DON'T STOP BULLYING, IT WILL GROW AND SPREAD.**

If bullying in the early years is overlooked or not stopped, young children who bully will continue to bully as they get older, and children who are victimized will continue to suffer. In fact, bullying may spread as other

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<sup>1</sup> Vlachou, M., Andreou, E., Botsoglou, K., & Didaskalou, E. (2011). *Bully/victim problems among preschool children: A review of current research evidence*. *Educational Psychology Review*, 23(3), 329.

children see opportunities to engage in bullying. If left unchecked, patterns of bullying and victimization will persist into adolescence and even adulthood, resulting in abusive teen dating relationships, and eventually domestic violence or other criminal activities.



**The good news is that bullying is preventable.**

### **WHEN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ARE PREPARED, THEY CAN NIP BULLYING IN THE BUD.**

When teachers of young children are prepared to address bullying effectively, they can create bullying-free learning environments. Based on research and best practices, we now have the knowledge and the strategies to keep children safe in early childhood settings.



**Teachers can help children build the social skills to interact in positive ways and to develop resilience against bullying.**

### **FIND OUT HOW TO STOP BULLYING BEFORE IT STARTS.**

To effectively help prevent and stop the emergence of bullying in early childhood settings, there are specific things that educators need to understand and be prepared to do. This ***Eyes on Bullying in Early Childhood Toolkit*** is designed to help early childhood educators:

- Understand bullying
- Learn what they can do to prevent bullying
- Use activities to build children's social skills
- Develop an action plan for intervention

# 2

## UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

# What is Bullying?

Early childhood educators need to understand bullying within the context of their early childhood settings.

Bullying is a form of emotional or physical abuse that has three defining characteristics:

- **Deliberate** – A bully’s intention is to hurt someone.
- **Repeated** – A bully often targets the same victim again and again.
- **Power imbalanced** – A bully chooses victims he or she perceives as vulnerable.

There are three main types of bullying: (1) physical bullying, such as hitting and pushing, (2) verbal bullying, such as yelling and name-calling, and (3) relational bullying, such as excluding or getting others to hurt someone. Note: A fourth type of bullying—cyberbullying—involves using the Internet, cell phones, or other digital communication devices to post or send hurtful text or images. Although cyberbullying can become an issue for older children, it is not yet a concern for preschoolers.

How does the definition of bullying apply to the wide variety of behaviors that young children show in early childhood settings?



**Young children’s bullying often looks different from bullying among older children. Understanding the variety of ways that young children may become involved in bullying in early childhood settings can help educators prevent and stop bullying.**

Young children typically experiment with different ways of behaving, and it’s important for early childhood educators to recognize that some of these behaviors may be precursors to bullying. For example, young children may make mean faces, say threatening things, grab objects, push others aside,

falsely accuse others, or refuse to play with particular children. These pre-bullying behaviors, while hurtful, are not considered bullying because they are not done to deliberately and repeatedly hurt another less powerful child. However, if they are allowed to continue, these behaviors are likely to turn into a pattern of bullying.

The good news is that such behaviors are easier to stop in the early stages. Young children usually adjust their behavior depending on the responses of their classmates or teachers. If they are re-directed, they change their behaviors and try out new ones.



**When early childhood educators recognize and stop harmful pre-bullying behavior, they can stop the trajectory of bullying before it escalates.**

As Dan Olweus, a leading bullying prevention authority, advises, “It’s better to intervene too early rather than too late.”

### **WHAT PARTICULAR BEHAVIORS SHOULD EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS PAY ATTENTION TO?**

- Shouting “Mine!” while grabbing a toy is a typical behavior of young children that is not usually considered bullying. However, if educators allow this behavior to be directed repeatedly and intentionally toward a targeted child without intervention, it can lead to verbal and physical forms of bullying.
- Young children like to whisper secrets and call each other silly names. But when whispering spreads rumors or private information, when silly names become hurtful name-calling, and when one child repeatedly becomes the target, these childhood games should be considered bullying.
- Children’s make-believe play provides opportunities for some children to manipulate and assert power over their playmates. Children who take charge of assigning the roles of mother, father, baby, and dog in a make-believe family are not yet bullying. But when these children consistently assign one child to play the less desirable roles (e.g., the dog, the baby, or the bad guy), don’t permit playmates to switch roles, and even control the child’s actions (demanding that the child bark, cry, or go to jail), they are deliberately and repeatedly using their power to take advantage of a vulnerable child—a key component of bullying.

### Vicky's Story<sup>2</sup>

Five year-old Vicky waited for all her friends to get their lunches and sit at the table. Then she asked them to raise their hands if they liked chocolate. She raised her hand, and everyone followed. Next she said, "Raise your hand if you like spaghetti." She raised her hand, and once again so did everyone else. Finally she said, "Raise your hand if you like Carmen." She didn't raise her hand, and neither did any of the other girls at the table. Carmen, who was seated near the end, began to cry.

- Children who say, "You can't play with me," may not yet be deliberately excluding selected classmates, but this behavior can easily develop into relational bullying and escalate into the more sophisticated forms of social exclusion used by older children (e.g., "You can't be my friend if you're friends with her"). Even five year olds have been observed manipulating their classmates to single out and exclude a vulnerable peer.

With an understanding of the variety of ways that young children engage in different forms of bullying, early childhood educators can be prepared to address bullying through prevention, intervention, and follow-up. (See 5. [Take Charge.](#))

### **IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER**

- Bullying among young children may look different from bullying among older children.
- Hurtful pre-bullying behaviors may lead to bullying when they become repetitive and intentional and involve an abuse of power.
- Early intervention can prevent pre-bullying behaviors from developing into bullying.
- Stopping bullying immediately can prevent it from escalating and spreading.

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<sup>2</sup> Kaiser, B., & Rasminsky, J. S. (2012). *Challenging behavior in young children: Understanding, preventing, and responding effectively* (3rd ed., p. 236). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

# 3

## UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

# How Does Early Bullying Develop?

### ORIGINS



**Bullying does not suddenly and mysteriously appear full-blown among children.**

As young children enter early childhood settings, they bring with them a history of experiences with family, media, and other children. These experiences prepare children to be more or less likely to engage in bullying-related behavior.

In some families, children experience or observe family violence, physical punishment, or the use of verbal or physical aggression to control others. These family experiences may lead children to initiate aggressive behaviors and become involved in bullying in early childhood settings. In contrast, when children grow up in less punitive and more caring families and learn positive social skills, they are less likely to initiate bullying in early childhood settings.

Media experiences also influence children's potential involvement in bullying. Children may learn bullying-related behaviors by watching television and movies that glorify violence and by playing violent video games that reward violent behavior. In contrast, educational media can guide children to initiate helpful behaviors and interact cooperatively with their peers.

Children's direct and observed experiences with siblings and other children also influence how they will interact in early childhood settings. Those who experience aggression and bullying-related behaviors by siblings or other children in the home or neighborhood may imitate and experiment with these behaviors in their early childhood settings.

In addition to these childhood experiences outside the classroom, bullying may also originate within the early childhood setting as young children observe or interact with other children who are engaged in bullying-related behaviors.

### **DEVELOPMENT**

In early childhood classrooms, aggression and bullying-related behaviors emerge and develop in relatively well-defined ways. Young children (ages 2–4) may begin using aggressive or early bullying behaviors to defend their possessions, territory, and friendships. Older children (ages 4–6) begin to use aggressive and bullying-related behaviors to threaten or intimidate other children.

These aggressive and early bullying behaviors develop systematically depending on the response of the target. For example, if a targeted child cries, submits, and yields the toy, the aggressive child is likely to select and target the same child again, and the bullying behaviors will continue. Sometimes, the submission of the targeted child may become rewarding in and of itself, and the aggressive child may smile and take pleasure in hurting another child on purpose. Allowed to continue, these behaviors may lead to full-blown bullying—hurtful behavior that is done repeatedly and deliberately to a selected, less powerful, and vulnerable peer.

### **CONTAGION**

When other children in the classroom observe a bullying child’s “successful” display of power and dominance over a victimized child, they may join in—dominating the same victim repeatedly or using similar tactics to target and dominate victims of their own. If these early forms of direct bullying are allowed to continue over several months, power hierarchies may form, with groups of dominant children regularly bullying others who give in to their demands by crying and yielding. As bullying further develops, it can take more varied and sophisticated forms.

### **GENDER-SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT**

In their efforts to stop and prevent the development of bullying, early childhood educators need to be aware that both girls and boys engage in a

wide variety of bullying-related behaviors. However, boys and girls begin to show differences in their primary forms of aggression and bullying-related behaviors by about age 3.

For boys, it is more common to deliver and receive direct forms of physical and verbal aggression related to issues of power and dominance. These behaviors, which demand immediate intervention, are relatively easy to detect and observe.

Girls, in contrast, often begin to deliver and receive more sophisticated, subtle, and indirect forms of relational bullying associated with patterns of affiliation and exclusion. For example, girls begin to manipulate relationships, exclude classmates, spread rumors, tell secrets, and threaten not to play if their demands are not met.



**Educators need to be aware of and to look out for young children involved in relational bullying, as it can be more difficult to detect but can hurt as much or even more than more direct forms of bullying.**

# 4

## UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

# Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders

Preventing bullying in early childhood settings involves more than focusing only on the child who is doing the bullying.



**The emergence of bullying is based on the formation of specific relationships among children who bully, children who are bullied, and children who observe the bullying—the bully, the victim, and the bystander.**

A child who bullies selects from his or her group of classmates a potentially vulnerable child to target for bullying. If the targeted child responds submissively by silently yielding, crying, or running away, the bullying child has achieved “success,” and the targeted child is likely to become a victim again and again.

In group situations, other children are often watching the bullying unfold. These bystanders to bullying learn who’s involved and which behaviors are permitted and rewarded. They may become fearful of the bullying child, rejecting of the victimized child, and passively accepting of a climate where bullying behaviors are permitted. They may also be enticed to join in or try out the bullying themselves.

Early childhood educators need to understand the dynamics of these three roles and to recognize when individual children begin to step into a particular role. Early intervention and guidance can prepare children to prevent or stop the bullying behaviors and establish an atmosphere in which bullying is not permitted.

## **BULLIES**

Young children bully in a variety of ways in early childhood settings. Most children who bully use direct physical aggression (e.g., hitting, shoving, pinching, or throwing objects) or direct verbal aggression (e.g., yelling,

threatening) to take away a toy, make someone do something against his or her will, or just to intimidate. They may also use more subtle or indirect forms of physical aggression, such as hiding a favorite toy, taking someone's winter jacket, or destroying someone's artwork. They may use relational aggression to ignore or exclude a child by whispering, spreading rumors, or saying, "You can't play." They may isolate a target by running away from him or her and encouraging others to join in the excluding. Young children who bully become adept at identifying easy targets, often choosing children who lack friends and who respond to the bullying with passive acceptance or uncontrolled outbursts. Bullies know how to hide their bullying behavior from adults or to quickly blame the victim in response to an adult's inquiry.

***Who's at risk?***

Children who bully tend to be friends with other children who bully or to encourage other children to join in their bullying game. They may be leaders in their social group, though they also tend to be less cooperative and to engage in fewer prosocial skills, such as helping behaviors.

***Effects of bullying on bullies***

Children who bully can easily become involved in fighting and disruptive behavior that may lead to trouble with classmates and even removal from the school. If not stopped, they may develop strong and persistent patterns of bullying behaviors that carry over into elementary, middle, and high school and beyond.

***Learning needs***

Children who bully need to develop social skills, such as cooperation and empathy. Children who engage in cooperative behaviors are more likely to include other children in their activities. Children who can empathize understand that bullying hurts; they are less likely to bully and more likely to help children who are bullied. (See [8. Empathy Activities](#).)

***Intervention***

When adults watch a child engaged in bullying and don't intervene to stop the bullying, that child is likely to continue to bully in subsequent play sessions. Intervention will prevent the bullying behavior from continuing and escalating. Intervention also lets children know that bullying is not allowed and will not be tolerated. (See [12. Teachable Moments](#).)

## **VICTIMS**

Some children passively accept a bully's provocations, whereas others respond by fighting back.

Passive victims tend to be shy and less socially experienced than other children. They may have a strong desire to fit in but have difficulty making friends and entering social groups. They may feel that they are treated badly or excluded by their peers, but they don't know how to improve the situation. They tend to be submissive and lack the assertiveness to say "No" or "Stop that." They may be unsure of the best ways to react to bullying and are reluctant to retaliate. Some young victims may not even recognize that they are being bullied. Young children who are bullied often prefer to play alone—they have not yet discovered the benefits of being part of a social group. Although victims may possess specific social skills, such as cooperative behaviors, they often lack the skills needed for making friends and being a leader.

In contrast, more aggressive children who are victimized tend to fight back, both verbally and physically. These children often form friendships with more aggressive children and alliances with other children who bully. These children are sometimes referred to as "bully-victims."

Once children become repeated victims of bullying, other children often show a dislike for them and don't want to be their friend. Children avoid or exclude victimized children because they want to maintain their position in the social hierarchy and fear becoming targets themselves. Victims of repeated bullying often become withdrawn, isolated, and reluctant to join social groups.

### ***Who's at risk?***

Although all children are potential targets of bullying, some children are more likely to be targeted because they appear small, weak, insecure, sensitive, or "different" from their peers. Early childhood educators need to look out for young children who are most at risk for becoming involved in bullying. It's important to pay attention to the following signs: children who are withdrawn, sad, or upset or who don't want to participate in activities; children who have trouble making friends or entering social groups;

and children who get excluded from social groups or who are the targets of other children's hurtful behaviors.

***Effects of bullying on victims***

Children who are bullied may have physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches; they may feel sad or depressed; and they may refuse to go to school or to stay in school once they are there. They may develop patterns of aggressive or submissive behaviors that persist as they get older, resulting in low self-esteem and difficulties with social relationships.

***Learning needs***

Young children who are bullied often need help making friends and joining social groups. They also need to develop, practice, and use assertiveness skills. Children who are assertive know how to respond to a bully in effective, non-aggressive ways and are less likely to be targeted by bullies in the first place. (See [9. Assertiveness Activities](#).)

***Intervention***

When victims ask for help, teachers need to respond in ways that support the victim. Victims need to know that adults care about their situation and that they can help. They need to know that bullying is not allowed and will not be tolerated. They also need adult guidance to respond assertively and effectively to the child who is bullying, such as by standing tall, looking the bully in the eye, and calmly saying, "No, it's my turn to play with this toy." (See [12. Teachable Moments](#).)

**BYSTANDERS**

When bullying occurs in early childhood settings, all the children watching become bystanders to bullying. Bystanders learn about bullying from observing the behaviors of the children who bully and the children who are victims. Often bullying is intentionally displayed in front of others to get their attention and solicit their support.

***Who's at risk?***

Depending on the circumstances, all children have the potential to be bystanders who contribute to bullying. Young children who observe an incident of bullying simply may not know what to do to help, or they may do

nothing out of fear that they will be the next victim. In addition, some children may have become desensitized to bullying, based on their experiences with violent media and their home environment. They may passively accept bullying, or they may think it is none of their business.

***Effects of bullying on bystanders***

Children who do nothing to help the victim may feel bad or guilty about it later. Bystanders who laugh or join in the bullying are at risk for becoming bullies themselves.

***Learning needs***

Children who are bystanders need to understand that they have the power to stop the bullying. They need help in developing and practicing the problem-solving and assertiveness skills they need to stand up for their peers and feel safe. Children who learn how to solve problems constructively will know how to help their peers without responding aggressively. (See [10. Problem-Solving Activities](#).) Once children have learned how to help stop bullying, they will feel proud of themselves for helping another child in need.

***Intervention***

Children who watch bullying happen may think that bullying is an acceptable behavior and a good way of getting what they want. This is especially true if adults or other children don't express disapproval or step in to stop the bullying. Sometimes the best way to prevent bullying or to intervene when it occurs is to involve the bystanders—all the children who are not directly involved in bullying but who are available to help stop it. (See [12. Teachable Moments](#).)

**BULLIES, VICTIMS, AND BYSTANDERS: WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO**

Early childhood educators need to be prepared to identify and help all three players in a bullying situation—the bully, the victim, and the bystanders. The behaviors underlying each role can be modified through prevention, immediate intervention, and continued support. (See [5. Take Charge](#).) In addition, all children need to develop the social skills necessary to prevent

and respond to bullying. Repeated bullying occurs only in early childhood settings that tolerate bullying behaviors and fail to teach social skills:

- Children who bully need to learn to stop bullying, engage in more cooperative behaviors, and develop empathy and social problem-solving skills.
- Children who are targets of bullying need to learn how to respond to bullying with assertiveness, rather than by submitting or counter-attacking.
- Bystanders need to learn that they have the power to stop bullying and how to use problem-solving strategies to help prevent and stop bullying.

(See [Activities for Building Children’s Skills: 7. Teaching Social Skills, 8. Empathy Activities, 9. Assertiveness Activities, 10. Problem-Solving Activities.](#))



# What YOU CAN DO

5

[Take Charge](#)

6

[Talk About Bullying](#)

# 5-6

# 5

WHAT YOU CAN DO

## Take Charge

Early childhood educators play a critical role in determining whether bullying develops and escalates in early childhood settings, or whether it is stopped and prevented. Educators can prevent bullying before it starts, intervene when it happens, and follow up to make sure it doesn't continue. They can encourage children to engage in healthy, cooperative interactions, and discourage bullying behaviors intended to hurt and exclude targeted classmates. They can also help children learn and practice the skills and strategies needed to become resilient against bullying.



**Early childhood settings are where many children first observe or experience early forms of bullying behavior. If educators don't intervene to stop bullying, children learn that bullying is an acceptable way to behave.**

Children who bully will continue to bully; they won't understand that bullying hurts, and they won't learn how to engage in helpful, supportive, and inclusive interactions. Children who are victimized will continue to be victims; they won't learn how to stand up for themselves, be self-confident and socially competent, and ask for help from friends and adults. Without intervention by educators, patterns of bullying and victimization may grow and persist, not only within early childhood settings, but also into later childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood.

Early childhood educators have an exceptional opportunity as well as an important responsibility. Since bullying is primarily learned, it can be "unlearned"—or conditions can be changed so that it is not learned and allowed to happen in the first place. Educators can make sure that children don't develop patterns of behavior that lead to continuing problems with bullying and other violent behavior. They can also make sure that children in early childhood settings learn and practice the skills they need to become resilient against bullying.

How can early childhood educators prepare themselves to help young children develop resilience against bullying?



**A key to success lies in advance preparation to deal effectively with bullying before, during, and after it occurs.**

Early childhood educators can prepare and empower young children to help stop and prevent bullying by taking the following steps:

- Understand that bullying behaviors emerge in early childhood settings and that these behaviors are preventable. (See [1. Bullying in Early Childhood.](#))
- Recognize the different forms of pre-bullying and bullying behaviors that may occur in early childhood settings—if you can't see bullying when it happens, you won't be able to do anything about it. (See [2. What Is Bullying?](#))
- Understand how bullying develops among young children. (See [3. How Does Early Bullying Develop?](#))
- Recognize when individual children begin to step into the roles of bully or victim. Identifying children who bully and children who are victimized helps educators intervene in appropriate ways. Understand that children who are bystanders play a powerful role in bullying situations. (See [4. Bullies, Victims, and Bystanders.](#))
- Talk with young children about bullying. Dealing with bullying directly and openly lets everyone know that bullying is an important concern, that it will not be tolerated, and that everyone needs to work together to stop and prevent it. (See [6. Talk About Bullying.](#))
- Teach and guide children in practicing the social skills they need to help stop and prevent bullying. (See [7. Teaching Social Skills.](#))
- Engage children in activities to develop the social skills they need to help stop and prevent bullying, including empathy (see [8. Empathy Activities](#)), assertiveness (see [9. Assertiveness Activities](#)), and problem-solving (see [10. Problem-Solving Activities](#)).
- Work to develop and maintain a common vision of a bullying-free environment. (See [11. Shared Vision.](#))

- Prepare to take advantage of teachable moments, and intervene immediately and effectively whenever children engage in pre-bullying and bullying behaviors. Intervention is most effective when it includes all children: children who bully, children who are victims, and children who are bystanders to bullying. (See [12. Teachable Moments.](#))
- Engage parents in bullying prevention initiatives by helping them talk to their children about bullying and teach their children social skills for preventing bullying. (See [13. Involving Parents.](#))
- Use a variety of resources that have been specifically developed and chosen to help early childhood educators stop and prevent bullying. (See [14. Adult Resources and Children's Books.](#))

# 6

WHAT YOU CAN DO

## Talk About Bullying



**Talking directly and openly about bullying with children lets them know that the adults who care for them take bullying seriously and will make sure that bullying does not happen in their early childhood classroom.**

Talking about how adults and children can work together to stop and prevent bullying lets children know they are part of an environment that is safe, cooperative, and inclusive.

Tell children that it's okay and important to talk about bullying. Encourage children to talk with their teachers if they have any particular concerns about bullying in their classroom. Listen carefully, validate feelings, ask for details, say you can help, talk about solutions, and follow up.

Group meetings, such as morning meetings or circle time, are good times to talk with children about bullying and to ensure that everyone knows the expectations of your setting. Engage all children as active bullying preventers by involving them in setting classroom rules, identifying and solving bullying problems, becoming helpful bystanders, engaging in acts of kindness, and making sure that all children feel safe and included. Encourage all children to participate in the discussions, and make opportunities to talk about bullying throughout the year.

## Activities for Talking About Bullying

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### ACTIVITY **1**

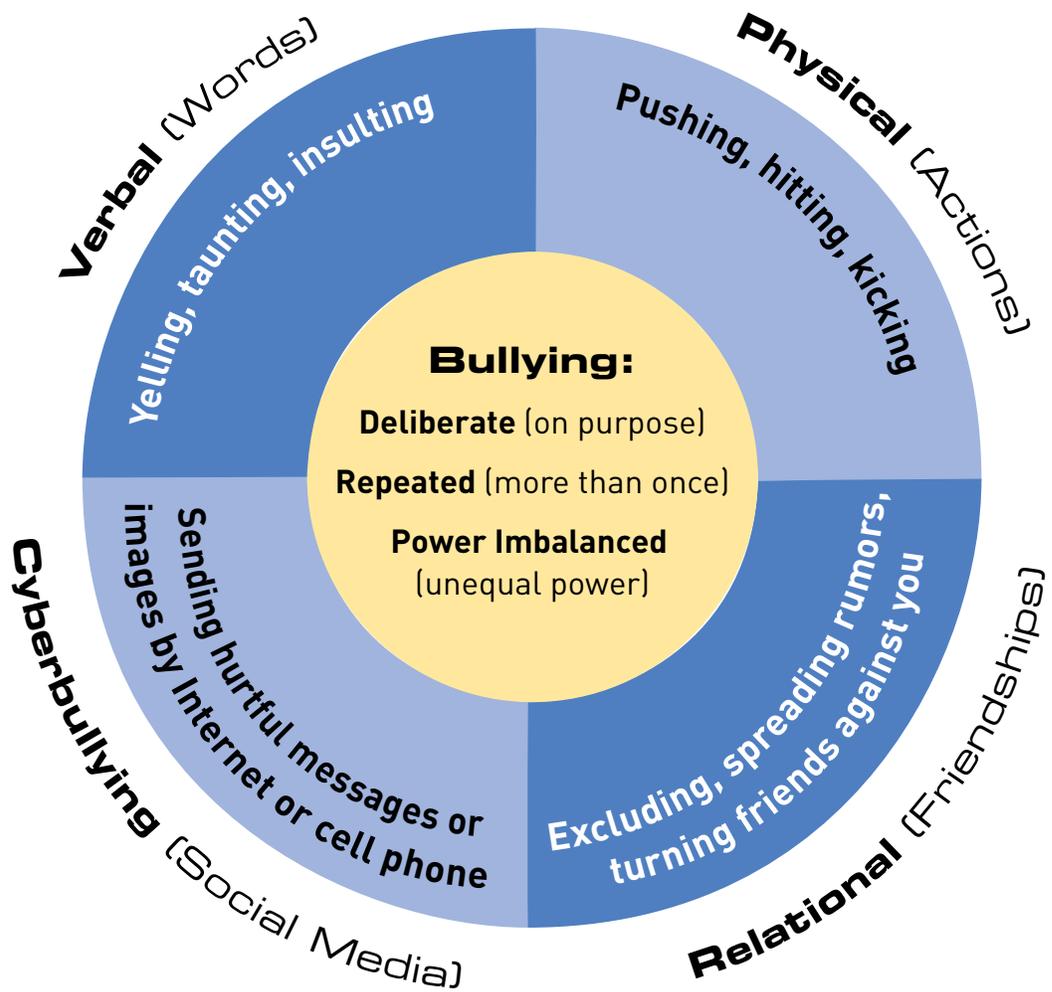
#### WHAT IS BULLYING?



Children who understand what bullying is and the different forms it takes are better able to recognize bullying when they see it or when they become involved in it.



Children who understand that bullying hurts and why it's not permitted are more likely to respond appropriately and ask for help in bullying situations.



Resource: *Eyes on Bullying Toolkit*, p. 9

Use the *What Is Bullying?* chart (see previous page) to help children understand the definition of bullying and the different forms it can take. Help children understand the three characteristics of bullying:

- » **It's on purpose.**
- » **It happens over and over again.**
- » **It involves the abuse of power to hurt others.**

Help children understand the different ways that bullying can happen:

- **Verbal:** Using words to hurt (e.g., name calling, taunting, threatening)
- **Physical:** Using actions to hurt (e.g., hitting, kicking, pushing)
- **Relational:** Using friendships to hurt (e.g., excluding people, spreading rumors, saying someone can't be your friend, turning someone's friends against that person)

*Relational bullying* may be a new concept for children. Talk to children about how telling a classmate that he or she can't play or telling other children not to play with you is a form of bullying when it's done intentionally and repeatedly to hurt someone.

It's important to clarify that children don't need to include everyone in their play and activities every single time. There may be instances when it's really not a good time for someone else to join them. Practice how to say no, kindly and sensitively. For example, they could say, "Sorry, we're right in the middle, but we're almost done—you can play with us as soon as we finish this."

Young children may overgeneralize the concept of bullying by applying it to all forms of aggression, conflicts, and unpleasant behaviors.



**Make sure children know that even if it's not bullying, hurting others by using words, actions, or relationships is not okay and needs to stop.**

ACTIVITY **2** **STORY SWAP**

Children may be reluctant to talk about bullying for a number of reasons, for example:

- » They don't have the words and concepts to describe it.
- » They think it isn't important.
- » They are afraid, embarrassed, or ashamed.
- » They think that no one will care or be able to help.

*Story Swap* can give them some helpful language, validate their experiences, reassure them, and direct them toward help.

Start by sharing a story about when you were bullied or witnessed bullying. Hearing a story about an adult's bullying experiences may move a child to reveal his or her own experiences.

Ask the children to share some stories about bullying that happened outside the classroom—something that did not involve their own classmates. Ask them not to use real names.

Acknowledge that it's okay to talk about bullying because it affects everyone, whether we were the bully, whether the bullying happened to us, or whether we watched it happen. Discuss how the stories made them feel—to tell and to hear. Tell children that bullying is always wrong, and it *should not happen*. Using the stories as examples, help children brainstorm suggestions for what can be done to stop bullying.

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ACTIVITY **3** **TEASING OR TAUNTING?**



**Playful teasing among friends is okay, but teasing that hurts is called *taunting*—and if it's repeatedly used to hurt a targeted child, it is a form of bullying.**

To help children understand the difference between teasing and taunting, talk with them about how nicknames can sometimes be fun and sometimes be used to hurt and bully someone. Present the following examples (or

come up with your own) and have the children decide whether each nickname is playful teasing or hurtful taunting:

- » **Scott runs very fast, so the kids call him “Rocket Scott.”**
- » **Jeremy is always last in a race, so the kids call him “Snaily Jerry” or “Slow Poke.”**
- » **Steve is small and cries a lot, so the kids call him “Baby Stevie.”**
- » **Maria is strong, so the kids call her “Wonder Girl.”**
- » **Natalia is smart, so the kids call her “Smarty Pants.”**
- » **Madeline is the biggest kid in the class, so the kids call her “Big Bad Mad.”**

When discussing each nickname, ask the children:

- How can you tell whether a name is playful or hurtful?
- What is the intent of the name-caller? (Is the name-caller trying to be nice or mean? What if the name-caller hurt the child’s feelings but didn’t intend to be mean?)
- How do you think the child with the nickname feels?

Conclude the activity by asking the children for ideas about how to make sure they don’t call classmates hurtful names.

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ACTIVITY **4** **ON PURPOSE?**

This activity helps children understand the difference between making a mistake and hurting someone “on purpose.” We all make mistakes—adults and children alike. We bump into someone by accident, for example, or leave our backpacks where someone could trip. But sometimes people do things that are *intended* to hurt others—things that are done “on purpose” and not by accident. Bullying is an example of an “on purpose” action because it involves intention: A child who bullies is intentionally trying to hurt someone.

Present the following examples (or come up with your own) and ask children to decide if it's a mistake or if it was done on purpose:

- » **Jake steps on Ray's toe by accident and says, "I'm sorry."**
- » **Tony is mad at Robert and stomps hard on his toe.**
- » **Tanya doesn't see Eddie's tower of blocks and knocks it over.**
- » **Christine doesn't like Jane, so she scribbles all over her picture.**
- » **Marco drops his backpack in the hallway and runs out to play. When Anne runs outside to join Marco, she trips over his backpack.**

When discussing each example, ask the children:

- How can you tell whether something is done by accident or on purpose?
- Is the person trying to be nice or mean?
- How do you think the other person in the story feels?

Conclude the activity by reminding children that all of our actions, whether we do them by accident or on purpose, can have an effect on others.

.....

ACTIVITY **5**

**"YOU CAN'T SAY YOU CAN'T PLAY"**

Talk with the group about how every child deserves to be treated with respect and included in activities. Discuss why the saying "You can't say you can't play" (a concept developed by Vivian Gussin Paley)<sup>3</sup> is important and helps everyone feel included. Explain that sometimes children engage in *relational bullying*—intentionally and repeatedly excluding certain children from their play groups—and this behavior is unacceptable.

<sup>3</sup> Paley, V. G. (1993). *You can't say you can't play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Have the children brainstorm ways they might respond when someone tells them they can't play or tells others not to let them play. If the children get stuck, you might suggest the following responses:

- Ask if you can play in a little while.
- Say that you will feel sad or angry if you can't play.
- Get other children or an adult to help.

Have the children role-play different scenarios. With an adult playing the child who says, "You can't play with us," have the children practice using the responses they brainstormed.

Then have the children brainstorm and practice things that someone watching the bullying—a bystander—could say or do to help a child who is being excluded. Do the role-playing again, this time focusing on the bystander's response.

Conclude by explaining that children don't need to include everyone in their play and activities every single time. However, they do need to be friendly and courteous to all their classmates; for the most part, the whole class should be included in play groups and activities.

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ACTIVITY

**6**

**STORY TIME**

Reading books out loud to children about bullying provides opportunities to talk about how other children experience and respond to bullying, and how they themselves might respond in similar situations. Here are some questions to get children started talking about a story that involves bullying:

- » **What was the story about?**
- » **Who was doing the bullying?**
- » **Who was getting bullied?**
- » **Who was watching the bullying?**

WHAT YOU CAN DO » **Talk About Bullying**

- » **How did the bullying stop?**
- » **What else could any character have done to help?**
- » **What would you have done?**
- » **Have you ever been in a similar situation?**
- » **How did you feel? What did you do? What helped or didn't help?**

See 14. [Adult Resources and Children's Books](#) for recommended children's books about bullying.



# Activities for Building CHILDREN'S SKILLS

- 7 [Teaching Social Skills](#)
- 8 [Empathy Activities](#)
- 9 [Assertiveness Activities](#)
- 10 [Problem-Solving Activities](#)

7-10

# 7

ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING CHILDREN'S SKILLS

## Teaching Social Skills

For young children to prevent bullying and develop friendships, they need to learn and effectively apply a variety of social skills. Early childhood settings offer a natural learning environment and a potentially safe haven in which children can learn and practice social skills.



**Early childhood educators can teach, model, and prepare young children to practice the skills they need to develop friendships and help stop and prevent bullying.**

Social skills can be taught through presentations, modeling, discussion, storytelling, videos, role-playing, puppetry, games, and curricular activities, tailored to the age and developmental level of the children you work with. Young children are particularly eager to learn and practice social skills when they are given concrete examples they can understand and apply.

Early childhood educators can also take advantage of opportunities throughout the day to allow children to practice what they have learned and to coach them by providing them with cues, encouragement, and feedback. (See [12. Teachable Moments](#).) As children begin to learn new strategies in these ways, early childhood educators can reduce their level of support.

Three of the most important social skills involved in bullying prevention are empathy, assertiveness, and problem solving:

- **Empathy.** Children who can empathize respond caringly to what others think and feel. They understand that bullying hurts. They are less likely to bully and more likely to help children who are bullied. Early childhood educators can protect young children from becoming bullies by helping them understand how children who are bullied might feel and how they themselves would feel if they were bullied.

- **Assertiveness.** Children who are assertive can stand up for themselves and others in fair and respectful ways. They know how to respond to a bully in effective, non-aggressive ways and are less likely to be targeted by bullies in the first place. Early childhood educators can help young children use assertiveness to prevent bullying behaviors and to stand up to bullying when it occurs.
- **Problem solving.** Children who are problem-solvers know how to analyze and resolve social problems in constructive ways. Early childhood educators can help young children understand the problem of bullying and how to use a variety of constructive, non-aggressive problem-solving skills to help stop and prevent bullying.

To teach and help children practice the skills of empathy, assertiveness, and problem solving, early childhood educators can engage children in a variety of interactive skill-building activities. (See [8. Empathy Activities](#), [9. Assertiveness Activities](#), and [10. Problem-Solving Activities](#).)

# 8

ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING CHILDREN'S SKILLS

## Empathy Activities

One of the most important social skills involved in bullying prevention is empathy—understanding and responding with caring to what others think and feel. Children are less likely to hurt and more likely to help someone if they can imagine themselves in that person's place and can share that person's thoughts and feelings.



**Early childhood educators can teach young children to refrain from bullying by helping them learn and practice empathy in direct connection with bullying situations.**

They can help young children understand how children who are bullied might feel and how they themselves would feel if they were bullied. They can prepare children to become helpful bystanders by helping them recognize when a child who is bullied is feeling hurt and how they might help that child feel better.

The following activities can help children practice the empathy skills they will need in order to refrain from, stop, and prevent bullying.

### Activities for Teaching Empathy Skills

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ACTIVITY

# 1

#### **LABELING FEELINGS**

Ask children to describe and label how they might feel in these three different bullying situations:

- » If they saw someone being bullied
- » If they were being bullied themselves
- » If they bullied someone

Explain that bullying can lead to strong feelings, such as anger, frustration, and fear. While it's okay to *feel* these feelings, it's never okay to react by doing violent things, such as intentionally hurting someone. Say that if we all work together to prevent and stop bullying, no one in our group will ever need to experience these feelings as a result of bullying.

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ACTIVITY **2**

## DIFFERENT AND SIMILAR

Discuss the many ways that children are *different* from one another. Prompt them with examples, if needed:

- » **Some children are big, and others are small.**
- » **Some children run fast, and others run slowly.**
- » **Some children like to play with blocks, and others like to draw pictures.**

Ask, "What would our group be like if we were all the same?"

Elicit that while at first it might be fun, since we'd all agree on everything, eventually it would get boring, since we would never try anything new, every race would end in a tie, etc. Explain how the differences among us make our group stronger, more interesting, and better able to do different things. Discuss the fact that bullies may bully other children simply because they *are* different—they try to make differences seem like bad things or weaknesses, rather than the strengths they are.

Now discuss the many ways children are *similar* to one another. For example: All children eat, sleep, grow, and have feelings. And, most importantly, *all* children feel hurt when they are bullied.

Summarize by explaining that we should all agree to appreciate our differences, recognize that no one likes to be bullied, and never bully someone simply because he or she is different.

ACTIVITY **3** **HELPING OTHERS FEEL BETTER**

First, use these questions to discuss with the group what children can do to help others feel better:

**How can you know how someone else feels?**

**Possible answers:** Listen to what they say, ask them how they feel, look closely at their face and body, watch what they do

**How can we recognize when another child is feeling bad or left out?**

**Possible answers:** Making a sad face, not laughing when others laugh, crying, not looking at anyone, playing alone

**How can we cheer up children who feel bad and help them feel better?**

**Possible answers:** Pay attention to them, pat them on the back, ask them if they'd like to play with you

Next, use role-playing to help children practice recognizing a child who is feeling hurt and helping the child feel better. Have the group divide into pairs.

Ask one child in each pair to pretend that he or she has been bullied and feels bad, while the other child pretends to be a bystander who tries various ways to make the bullied child feel better.

Have the pairs of children switch roles and repeat the activity.

Discuss with the group how the bystanders could tell that the bullied child was feeling hurt and how the bystanders made the bullied child feel better.

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ACTIVITY **4** **ACTS OF KINDNESS**

Discuss how an act of kindness is the opposite of bullying because it helps another person feel *good* instead of *bad*—it *gives* a person a good feeling rather than *takes away* a good feeling. Ask children to describe one nice

thing they did for someone else, how it made the other person feel, and how it made them feel. Have each child plan one act of kindness that he or she will do that day for someone else in the group.

At the end of the day, have children report on their acts of kindness. Ask:

- » **How did this act of kindness make you feel?**
- » **How did the person receiving the kindness feel? (You could ask the giver for his or her perceptions, then have the recipient confirm whether those perceptions are accurate.)**
- » **How do you think you would feel if you had done an act of bullying, rather than an act of kindness?**

Conclude the activity by pointing out that doing an act of kindness is not only a great thing to do for someone else, it makes you feel good, too!

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ACTIVITY **5**

## **THE GOLDEN RULE**

Ask the children if they've heard of the *Golden Rule*: "Do to others as you would want them to do to you." Point out that this rule could also be phrased as "Don't do to others what you wouldn't want them to do to you." Ask them if children who bully are caring about other children's feelings and treating other children the way they themselves want to be treated. Discuss examples of bullying-related things they would not want other children to do to them and why they would not do those things to others. For example:

- » **I wouldn't want someone to say I'm stupid, so I won't say "You're stupid" to anyone else.**
- » **I wouldn't want someone to pull my hair, so I won't pull anyone else's hair.**
- » **I wouldn't want someone to say mean things about me, so I won't say mean things about anyone else.**

Then discuss things that they would *like* another child to do for them and that they might do for another child in return. For example:

- » I'd like someone to invite me to play, so I will invite someone to play.
- » I'd like someone to tell me that I drew a great picture, so I will tell someone that he or she drew a great picture.

End the activity by reminding the group to treat other children the way they would want to be treated.

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ACTIVITY **6**

**MODELING HELPFULNESS**

Discuss the ways that bullying behavior leads both the child who bullies and the child who is bullied to disrespect each other and feel like enemies, rather than friends. Then use pictures, stories, puppets, or other concrete props to model examples of the many ways that children and adults can show that they care about other's feelings and can help each other. Discuss how caring behaviors make both the giver and the receiver feel happy and good.

# 9

ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING CHILDREN'S SKILLS

## Assertiveness Activities

Young children need to learn how to respond in bullying situations by standing up for themselves and others in non-aggressive and respectful ways. *Assertiveness* represents the desirable middle ground between the undesirable extremes of *aggression* (where the feelings and rights of others are violated) and *submission* (where one's own feelings and rights are violated).



**Learning assertiveness skills involves learning how to express one's own feelings and defend one's own rights in ways that also respect the feelings and rights of others.**

Assertiveness skills can help young children (a) achieve their goals without bullying, (b) avoid becoming a target of bullying, (c) respond effectively if they are bullied (without counter-attacking or submitting), and (d) support other children who are targets of bullying. Both boys and girls need to be taught assertiveness skills as an alternative to accepting aggressive behavior in boys and submissive behavior in girls.

Educators should explain to children that assertive behaviors can be appropriate and effective responses to others who are provoking them. However, children should consider safety first.



**If children don't feel safe, they should always seek help from an adult.**

Early childhood educators can use the following activities to help young children develop and practice the assertiveness skills they need to help prevent and stop bullying.

## Activities for Teaching Assertiveness Skills

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ACTIVITY

1

### KEEPING COOL

Teaching assertiveness begins with teaching simple relaxation and self-calming techniques to deal with strong negative feelings. First, discuss with the children how people may *feel* in a bullying situation, such as angry, fearful, sad, upset, embarrassed, or confused. Then ask the group what kinds of things people want to do when they feel this way, such as yell, throw something, hit something, hide, cry, or try to make someone else feel as bad as they feel. Ask if they think these are good or helpful things to do. Explain that at times everyone has strong negative feelings. These feelings are important because they often tell us that something is wrong or needs to be fixed. But strong feelings can also lead us to do the wrong thing, unless we learn how to calm ourselves, keep a cool head, and do the right thing to fix the situation. Ask children to describe and demonstrate the things they can do to keep calm and cool-headed if they feel angry, fearful, or upset in a bullying situation. For example:

- » **Close your eyes and take several slow deep breaths**
- » **Count to 10**
- » **Stand tall**
- » **Relax the muscles in your face and body**
- » **Talk silently to yourself and repeat a soothing phrase, such as “Keep calm” or “I control my feelings”**
- » **Get a drink of water**
- » **Go sit by a person you trust**

Have the group choose what they think are the best techniques and then practice using them together.

ACTIVITY **2** **IGNORING**

Children who attempt to bully other children are often seeking a reaction. If children learn how to actively ignore minor bullying-related behaviors, potential bullies may lose interest. Explain to the group that when another child is doing small things that annoy you but are not yet bullying behaviors that hurt you, you can often get the child to stop simply by keeping cool and actively ignoring him or her. Generate a list of ways to actively ignore a child who is attempting to provoke or annoy you. For example:

- » **Stop playing**
- » **Walk away**
- » **Turn your body away**
- » **Turn your eyes away**
- » **Don't answer a question**
- » **Keep talking to the other person you're with**

Role-play some of these situations, with the teacher playing the potential bully. Show them how the provoking child often loses interest after one or more attempts have been ignored.

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ACTIVITY **3** **"YES" OR "NO"**

Early childhood educators can teach children to respect their own right and the right of others to decline a bullying demand, as opposed to a polite request. In this activity, children practice deciding to politely say no or yes to a request or a demand, as well as to accept either a no or a yes from others.

Begin by asking the children what they would like to say to a child who is *demanding* a particular toy. If the children say they would like to say no, ask what they think they *should* say. Children may well think that they're supposed to say yes. Explain the difference between a bullying demand and a polite request by using a rude voice to say "Give me that!" and then a pleasant voice to say, "May I have that toy, please?"



**Assure children that it is always okay to refuse a bullying request, but when a child is politely asking, they can choose whether to say yes or no.**

Have the children form pairs, and give a toy to one child in each pair. Have the child without the toy *demand* the toy. Have the other child keep cool and assertively say, “No, I’m playing with it now. You can have it when I’m done.” Next, ask the child without the toy to *politely* ask for the toy. The other child can choose to politely say either, “No, I’m playing with it now, but you can have it as soon as I’m done” or “Yes, you can play with it now.” Have the child without the toy respond by saying, “Okay, I’ll wait until you’re done” or “Okay, thanks for letting me play with it.”

Conduct the role-play again, with each child playing the opposite part.

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ACTIVITY

# 4

## STANDING UP TO BULLYING

It is important for children to learn an assertive style of responding to bullying situations. Knowing how to stand up for themselves and to speak up assertively on another’s behalf gives children a sense of control and an air of self-confidence that can deter others from bullying them. Early childhood educators can teach children who are being bullied and children who are bystanders to stop the bullying by responding assertively and/or by asking an adult for help.

Begin this activity by talking about the best way to respond to a bullying situation. Ask the children what they think will happen if they provoke the bullying child by retaliating, or if they reward the bullying child by submitting. Elicit that the bullying is likely to continue. Explain to the children that the best way to get the bullying behavior to stop is to respond assertively to bullying by standing up and speaking up, whether you are the one being bullied or whether you see it happening to someone else. Remind them that they can also ask for help from an adult.



**A note about tattling: Children may have been told not to be a tattle-tale or that it’s wrong to “tell on” somebody else. Remind children of the difference between bullying (involving a power imbalance) and conflict (involving disagreement among children of equal power). Explain that it is never wrong to ask for adult help in a situation that involves bullying.**

Make up some short bullying situations to role-play, or select a few from the **Bullying Actions and Victim Responses chart** (below). Have children generate and practice various ways for a victim or a bystander to stand up and speak up assertively, rather than to respond aggressively or submissively, to the bullying provocations of a child (role-played by the teacher). Be sure that some of the role-played responses include asking an adult for help.

Conclude the activity by reminding children how important it is to stop bullying by standing up, speaking up assertively, and/or asking an adult for help in bullying situations.

## Bullying Actions and Victim Responses

<b>Bullying (Provoking)</b>	<b>Giving In (Submissive)</b>	<b>Hurting Back (Aggressive)</b>	<b>Standing Up (Assertive)</b>
Bully roughly cuts in line in front of Victim.	Victim steps back, puts head down, and says nothing.	Victim shoves Bully out of line and says, "You jerk!"	Victim stands tall and says, "This is my place. No cutting allowed."
Bully grabs a candy bar that Victim is holding and demands, "Give me that!"	Victim lets Bully take the candy bar and timidly says, "O.K."	Victim screams and kicks Bully.	Victim firmly holds on to the candy bar and says, "This is mine."
Bully laughs and points at Victim and chants, "Loser, Loser, Loser!"	Victim looks upset and starts to cry.	Victim angrily replies, "Your mother is ugly."	Victim calmly looks at Bully and says, "You're just wasting your breath trying to make me mad."
Bully whispers to pals, "If you want to be my friend, you can't play with (name of Victim)."	Victim finds out, sits alone at a table and says, "I guess I have to eat by myself."	Victim finds out and tells a nasty rumor about Bully.	Victim talks privately with Bully and says, "I know you're talking about me behind my back, and I don't like it."
Bully tells Victim, "You stink on first base. I'm taking over. Out of my way, stupid."	Victim says, "Sorry I messed up," and hands his glove to the Bully.	Victim shouts, "Who are you calling stupid, you big bully!"	Victim stays on base and says, "I'm playing first base for the rest of the game."

Source: *Eyes on Bullying Toolkit*, p. 19

# 10

ACTIVITIES FOR BUILDING CHILDREN'S SKILLS

## Problem-Solving Activities

Bullying is different from other social problems children may face. For example, while conflict may be solved through negotiation and compromise, bullying cannot because it involves a power imbalance—the bully has more power than the victim. Solving a bullying problem requires analysis of the problem by the target and/or bystanders, and sometimes intervention by the teacher.



**Problem-solving skills can help children analyze and solve bullying problems.**

Early childhood educators can help young children understand the problem of bullying and how to apply problem-solving skills to situations involving bullying. These skills include:

- Defining the problem
- Thinking of solutions
- Anticipating the likely consequences
- Choosing the most effective responses

The following activities give young children an opportunity to develop and practice the problem-solving skills they need to help prevent and stop bullying.

## Activities for Teaching Problem-Solving Skills

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ACTIVITY

1

### WHAT IF?

In this activity, children are presented with scenarios describing various bullying problems (physical, verbal, and relational); their task is to discuss and practice the best response to each situation. Young children are more likely to think of and use their problem-solving skills in bullying situations if they have an opportunity to practice them, with adult guidance.

Read the following scenarios:

- » **Physical bullying:** Whenever Javier sits on his favorite bench on the playground, David tells his friends, "Watch this." David walks over to the bench and sits right next to Javier. Then he uses his body to push Javier off the end of the bench and onto the ground. David and his friends laugh at Javier, and Javier starts to cry.
- » **Verbal bullying:** Grace visited the zoo last weekend and afterward she started calling the children in her playgroup by animal names. Grace called Erin "Hippo." Erin's face got red, and she left the playgroup to play by herself. Now, whenever Erin tries to rejoin the playgroup, Grace and some of the other kids call out, "Erin is a hippo," which makes Erin very unhappy.
- » **Relational bullying:** Shaquilla told her friends to stay away from Penny because "Penny isn't cool." Now, whenever Penny tries to play with Shaquilla or one of her friends, they say, "No, we're too busy." Penny feels left out and doesn't know why they won't play with her.

After reading each scenario, ask the children to think of several responses that victims and bystanders could give and the likely consequences of each response. Have children choose the best responses. Conduct role-plays in which the teacher plays the role of a child who bullies, and children practice using the responses they've identified as effective. Make sure that children have a chance to play both victims and bystanders and that the responses include asking an adult for help.

## ACTIVITY **2** PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM

In this activity, children use the insight and skills they gained in the *What If?* activity to address a variety of pre-bullying problems.

Before the activity, create “Solution Cards,” choosing from the solutions on the next page. Write each solution on a large index card, leaving space for the children to illustrate it.

Tell children that they will work together as a problem-solving team to solve a pre-bullying problem—a hurtful behavior (verbal, physical, or relational) that, if not stopped, may turn into bullying. Give children an example of what a pre-bullying behavior might look like:

- » **If two children want to play with the same toy, this turns into pre-bullying when one child demands the toy or takes it by force and the other child gives in.**

Explain that when you're faced with a problem, there are things you should tell yourself and there are things you should tell others. Here are some statements that everyone involved in a bullying situation can say to themselves or say to others. Read the Solution Cards aloud, and have the children illustrate each card.

Present the children with a pre-bullying problem that might occur in their classroom (without using real names). Talk about how your problem-solving team might solve this problem, and have the children select the Solution Cards that would work best to solve that problem. Remind them that different problems require different solutions.

Repeat the activity with different pre-bullying problems, and have children think of the best solutions for each role in the problem: kids who bully, kids who are targets, and kids who are bystanders.

Conclude the activity by displaying all the Solution Cards. Explain that these cards can help everyone remember the variety of solutions for solving pre-bullying problems.

## SOLUTION CARDS

### For kids who bully

#### TELL YOURSELF:

- » "When I'm feeling mad, take 3 deep breaths."
- » "Treat my friends the way I want to be treated."

#### TELL OTHERS:

- » "Sorry, I didn't know I hurt you."
- » "No hurtful name calling."

### For kids who are targets

#### TELL YOURSELF:

- » "Stand up for myself."
- » "Don't fight back."
- » "Walk away."
- » "Ask for help."

#### TELL OTHERS:

- » "Sorry, no, I'm playing with this now."
- » "You can't say I can't play."
- » "Wait, it's my turn now."

### For kids who are bystanders

#### TELL YOURSELF:

- » "I will stand up for my friends."
- » "I have the power to help."

#### TELL OTHERS:

- » "I'll sit with you at snack time."
- » "I'll play with you at recess."
- » "I'll be your friend."
- » "Let's get help together."



# Intervention ACTION PLAN

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# 11

## INTERVENTION ACTION PLAN

# Shared Vision



**Creating a bullying-free environment in early childhood settings requires everyone—adults and children—to understand that bullying is unacceptable, hurtful, and preventable and to take responsibility for stopping it.**

It's important to involve everyone in creating an environment that discourages bullying behaviors and encourages positive, supportive actions.

A shared vision of bullying prevention involves three key components:

- **A commitment to a bullying-free environment:** Clearly state the program's bullying prevention philosophy, goals, and policies, and engage the children in committing to a bullying-free environment.
- **Rules:** Develop expectations and procedures about bullying, including consequences, and involve the children in contributing to these rules.
- **Common beliefs:** Strive to understand and shape the children's beliefs about bullying.

Here are some ways that early childhood educators can involve children in developing a shared vision for their early childhood setting.

### **ESTABLISH A BULLYING-FREE ENVIRONMENT**

- Discuss your center's philosophy and goals for a bullying-free environment with the children.
- Ask children to envision what a bullying-free environment would look like in their early childhood program. Encourage them to illustrate their vision by making posters, drawing pictures, and writing stories.
- Work with your children to set goals that everyone can agree to.
- As a group, check in regularly to determine if the group is meeting the goals that help make the classroom bullying-free. Determine what's working, what's not working, and what can be done to improve.

## SET RULES AND FOLLOW THROUGH



**Young children need to know that their early childhood setting has rules and expectations about bullying that help all children feel safe, included, and supported.**

Involving children in contributing to the rules, and understanding the consequences of not following the rules, helps ensure their commitment to a bullying-free environment.

- During group meetings, make sure that all children know and understand the rules, and what happens when children don't follow the rules.
- Involve children in talking about the rules and contributing their own ideas.
- Ask them to give examples of how a particular rule might help make their classroom a better place.
- During group meetings, reinforce the rules for acceptable behavior, encourage empathy with peers, and involve all children in taking responsibility to make sure their classroom is a safe, welcoming, and inclusive place for everyone.

Here are some examples of rules about bullying that are appropriate for early childhood settings:

- Bullying is not allowed.
- Stand up for yourself and your friends.
- Don't fight back.
- If someone bullies you or your friends, it's okay to walk away or ask for help.
- Include everyone in your play and activities: "You can't say you can't play."
- Report bullying—telling is not tattling.
- Be a good friend.



## DEVELOP COMMON BELIEFS ABOUT BULLYING

A shared vision of beliefs about bullying is an important component of a bullying-free environment. Beliefs about bullying lead to choices about how one behaves.



**Children need help developing the beliefs that can prepare them to prevent rather than promote bullying.**

In a group discussion, encourage children to talk about their beliefs (what they think and feel) about bullying. Discuss how their beliefs may influence the choices they make to ignore, stop, or join in a bullying situation. Ask children how *what they believe* might affect *how they behave* and the choices they make.

**Use the following questions to help children talk about their beliefs and how these beliefs may affect their actions related to bullying:**

1. Do you think that kids and adults can help make bullying stop?
2. Do you think it's none of your business when other kids get bullied?
3. Is it okay to bully if you're having a bad day or if you're mad at your friend?
4. Do some kids deserve to be called hurtful names?
5. Does anyone deserve to be bullied?
6. If a bully tries to make you do something, can you say no or do something else?
7. Should you stand up to someone who bullies you?
8. Is it okay to fight back if someone bullies you?
9. Is it okay to ask for help if you get bullied or see someone getting bullied?

Work with children to establish a shared set of beliefs that will guide how they treat their classmates and how they prevent and respond to bullying. Discuss how these beliefs, along with the classroom rules, help everyone feel safe, included, and supported in their early childhood program.

# 12

## INTERVENTION ACTION PLAN

# Teachable Moments

Every day, children's interactions present many opportunities for teachers to intervene "in the moment" in ways that support helpful behaviors, stop hurtful behaviors, and guide children to act in alternative ways.



**Teachers can take advantage of teachable moments to help children learn how to prevent and stop bullying.**

### **CATCH THEM DOING GOOD**

Increasing cooperative behaviors is one of the best strategies for preventing bullying. Teachers can intervene when they see or hear children acting in cooperative ways, such as helping a classmate, sharing a toy, and inviting someone to join their play group. When teachers pay attention to and encourage these desirable behaviors, children will increase their cooperative behaviors and reduce their bullying behaviors.

### **DISTINGUISH BETWEEN CONFLICT AND BULLYING**

Conflict and bullying require different intervention strategies. Conflict involves disagreements between children with nearly equal power but different self-interests (e.g., disagreements over possession of a toy or who was first in line). Teachers can mediate mutually acceptable resolutions or coach the children to use their own negotiation skills to resolve conflicts in a mutually agreeable way.

However, conflict can turn into pre-bullying or bullying behavior when one child involved in conflict uses greater power to intentionally and repeatedly hurt another child.



**Observing children's actions, words, body language, and facial expressions will help determine if bullying is occurring.**

## IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION: STOP, COACH, ENGAGE

Bullying requires immediate intervention to stop the bullying. With effective guidance and intervention, teachers can use these teachable moments to shape and change children's actions and responses during bullying, using the strategy **stop, coach, and engage**:

- Teachers need to immediately **stop** the bullying by saying "Stop" and paying minimal attention to the child who is bullying. Surprisingly, giving attention in the moment, even if intended to stop or deter a negative behavior, can actually increase the negative behavior. Even attention such as scolding, lecturing, or giving extensive explanations about why bullying is not permitted can be rewarding for a child who is bullying. For this reason, teachers should talk to the bullying child separately at a later time.
- Teachers need to **coach** the child who is being victimized by standing behind him or her and helping the child respond assertively (e.g., by standing tall and speaking up).
- Teachers need to **engage** the children who are bystanders to support the child who is being bullied (e.g., by making her or him feel better and including the child in activities).



**In one teachable moment, this intervention strategy can stop the child who is bullying, coach the child who is being bullied, and engage bystanders to help the situation.**

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION

On a daily basis, it is important to attend carefully and respond consistently to children's interactions.



**Teachers should be especially alert to pre-bullying behaviors that, if not stopped, may turn into bullying.**

Following are some tips for turning bullying situations into teachable moments.

**During intervention:**

- Stop the bullying by saying “Stop.”
- Separate the victim and bully if necessary.
- Respond firmly and calmly.
- Firmly state the “No bullying” rule.
- Briefly describe the behavior you observed and why it is not allowed.
- Stand behind the victim and coach the victim to stand up and speak up.
- Praise helpful bystanders and encourage other kids to help.

**There are also things that are important *not* to do:**

- Don’t respond aggressively.
- Don’t reward or give extensive attention to the child who is bullying.
- Don’t lecture, scold, or attempt to reason with the child who is bullying.
- Don’t impose immediate consequences.
- Don’t ask children to “work things out” for themselves.
- Don’t label individual children as a “bully” or “victim.”

After the incident, teachers should follow up with each of the children separately. Rely on your relationships and connections with the children to talk openly and productively about the bullying incident and its effects and consequences:

- Children who **bully** must understand that bullying is not acceptable and will not be allowed. Help them understand your group’s expectations and rules about bullying, realize that bullying hurts, and practice positive social behaviors.
- Children who are **victims** must know that adults care and support them, that they do not deserve to be bullied, and that they can ask adults and peers to help them. They need help and practice responding assertively to bullying.

- Children who are **bystanders** must understand that they have the power to cool down the situation by asking the bully to stop, helping the victim walk away, getting support from other bystanders, asking an adult for help, and/or reporting the bullying incident. Talk with them about what they did or did not do to help.

After the incident, inform all staff who work with the children, and the children's parents, as warranted. Keep a detailed record of the incident, including who was involved, what type of bullying was involved, where the incident occurred, whether it has happened before, and strategies used to address the problem. This record will reveal any patterns and help teachers see which interventions are most successful.

# 13

## INTERVENTION ACTION PLAN

# Involving Parents

Involving parents and seeking their cooperation and support for bullying prevention initiatives in their children's early childhood setting will help widen the reach of these initiatives and reinforce what their children are learning in the classroom. Parents can adapt and apply the bullying prevention lessons to their daily routines at home.

### TALKING ABOUT BULLYING



**Parents can build on the ways that children are learning to understand, talk about, and respond to bullying in their early childhood setting.**

For example, parents can talk to their children about what bullying is, share personal stories about bullying, help children distinguish teasing from taunting and mistakes from things done “on purpose,” encourage their children to include rather than exclude playmates, and read books about bullying with their children. (For more suggestions, see [6. Talk About Bullying](#) and [14. Adult Resources and Children's Books](#).)



**Parents may need help from educators to understand what bullying behaviors look like in early childhood, and why it's important to intervene.**

Many parents will be upset to be told that their young child is exhibiting bullying behaviors. Others may resist intervention for their child based on the belief that bullying is a normal part of growing up. When talking with parents, it is important for educators to show understanding of and support for parents' feelings and to avoid making parents feel defensive. Educators can also reassure parents that bullying behavior can be stopped more easily in the early years than later on.

Educators can explain that until recently, the nature and consequences of bullying were not fully understood, and the belief that bullying is just a normal part of child development was widely held in our culture. Parents can benefit from hearing educators explain that bullying behavior is learned from other children, and has a variety of harmful consequences for the victimized child, the child with bullying behavior, and bystander children who observe it.

Educators can be proactive and host parent workshops on child development and social emotional skill development. Information about the early childhood program's stance on bullying can be shared at workshops, as well as embedded in the materials distributed to parents when they enroll their child. Educators and parents can create a school culture that values kindness, inclusion, and positive discipline approaches that support all children in their development. Parents should not hear the word bullying only when it pertains to their child.

### TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS



**Parents can help their children develop the important social skills needed to prevent bullying:**

- They can help their children develop **empathy** by labeling feelings, modeling helping behaviors and kindness, and encouraging their children to help others and show kindness. They can help their children understand and appreciate differences among their friends and family members. (See [8. Empathy Activities](#) for more suggestions.)
- They can help their children develop **assertiveness** by encouraging them to ignore minor provocations, to keep cool during confrontations, and to say no to playmates' demands. They can encourage their children to respond to bullying by standing up, speaking up, or getting help. (See [9. Assertiveness Activities](#) for other possibilities.)
- Parents can help their children **solve problems** by encouraging them to think ahead about alternative responses to bullying and to anticipate the consequences. They can prepare their children to be helpful bystanders by encouraging them to stand up and speak up when they see or hear about bullying. (See [10. Problem-Solving Activities](#) for more ideas.)

## PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES



**Educators can support parents of children with social-emotional challenges to obtain appropriate services.**

In some cases, early childhood educators may find that a child’s behavioral problems go beyond bullying—representing instead a broader pattern of aggressive, antisocial, or oppositional behaviors, combined with other signs of emotional or underlying developmental issues. In such cases, educators can work with parents to have the child observed by a consultant. In some situations, young children will act out to get what they want because they lack the language skills to converse effectively or resolve conflicts. The consultant can conduct a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) which looks at the classroom environment, and what triggers an aggressive behavior. With parent consent, the consultant can also work directly with the child and suggest strategies that may help the child succeed. Depending on the results of the FBA, the early childhood educator can refer a child to be evaluated by the school district’s special education department to determine the child’s needs and potential eligibility for services such as speech/language services or emotional supports.

Based on the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (known as IDEA), early intervention services are available for children under age 3, and special education services are available for children and youth with a disability between the ages of 3 and 22. If eligible, a team, including the parents, would determine the special education services that could provide greater structure, assessment, social skills training, counseling, therapies, and family involvement to address the child’s individual needs within the educational setting. Alternatively, if the educators feel the child does not have a disability or developmental delay and is not eligible for special education, they could recommend that the family seek evaluations or services through their health care providers or community mental health clinics.

## COMMUNICATING



**Parents need to know that the early childhood staff take bullying and its prevention seriously and that parent cooperation and support are welcome.**

Regular and open communication with parents can help staff resolve bullying problems that emerge. If warranted, parents should be informed when a bullying incident occurs, if and how their child was involved, and how the incident was resolved. It is also important to let parents know when their child has stepped forward as a helpful bystander, intervening to prevent a bullying incident or asking an adult for help.

A good way to involve all parents is to share the *Eyes on Bullying Toolkit* and invite parents to participate in bullying prevention workshops. Parents also need to be informed about the guidelines, practices, and policies of their children's early childhood setting.

Parents should be encouraged to contact program staff if they think a child is being bullied or is doing the bullying. If a child is involved in ongoing bullying or victimization, early childhood staff and parents need to work together to create an individualized program and/or seek special counseling.

Parents can find additional help in the brochure *Bullying Prevention: When Your Child Is the Victim, the Bully, or the Bystander* available at [www.massmed.org/violence](http://www.massmed.org/violence).



# RESOURCES

**14** [Adult Resources and Children's Books](#)

14

# Adult Resources and Children's Books

## SELECTED RESOURCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Cote, S., Vaillancourt, T., LeBlanc, J. C., Nagin, D. S., & Tremblay, R. E. (2006). [The development of physical aggression from toddlerhood to pre-adolescence: A nation wide longitudinal study of Canadian children.](#) *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *34*(1), 71–85.

This study identifies the factors that lead to aggression in toddlers and explores the connection between physical aggression in toddlers and aggressive behaviors later in life.

Dolby, R. (2010). [Everyday learning about bullying.](#) *Early Childhood Australia: Everyday Learning Series*, *8*(3), 1–9.

This publication describes research on early childhood development and aggression, and suggests strategies for dealing with childhood aggression and bullying.

Evans, B. (2012). [Bullying: Can it begin in preschool?](#) *HighScope Extensions*, *25*(3), 1–8.

The author addresses bullying in the preschool setting and how adults can effectively intervene.

Kaiser, B., & Rasminsky, J. S. (2012). *Challenging behavior in young children: understanding, preventing, and responding effectively* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

This book provides new research-based strategies to help early childhood educators understand, prevent, and respond effectively to challenging behaviors, including bullying.

Perren, S., & Alsaker, F. D. (2006). [Social behavior and peer relationships of victims, bully-victims, and bullies in kindergarten.](#) *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *47*(1), 45–57.

This article examines the social dynamics of children and adults in the kindergarten setting, and identifies patterns connected with bullying behaviors.

Russell, A., Hart, C. H., Robinson, C., & Olsen, S. (2003). [Children's sociable and aggressive behaviour with peers: A comparison of the U.S. and Australia, and contributions of temperament and parenting styles](#). *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 27(1), 74–86.

This article discusses the effects of parenting, child development by gender, and a child's country of origin on children's aggressive and social behaviors.

Slaby, R. G., Roedell, W. C., Arezzo, D., & Hendrix, K. (1995). *Early violence prevention: Tools for teachers of young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

This book presents effective intervention strategies to help educators prevent and respond to young children's aggressive and violent behaviors in the classroom.

[StopBullying.gov](#). (n.d.).

This website, developed and supported by the Federal Partners for Bullying Prevention, provides a variety of resources—videos, policies, laws, blogs, Twitter chats, recent reports, news releases, and more—for parents, educators, communities, and youth.

Storey, K., Slaby, R. G., Adler, M., Minotti, J., & Katz, R. (2008, 2013). [Eyes on Bullying Toolkit](#). Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

An engaging and clearly written toolkit with strategies for dealing with bullying, ideas for talking about bullying with children, and activities to help children learn and practice bullying prevention skills.

Tepetas, G. S., Akgun, E., & Altun, S. A. (2010). [Identifying preschool teachers' opinion about peer bullying](#). *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 1675–1679.

In this study, researchers identify preschool teachers' perceptions of bullying and the strategies they use to deal with bullying in their classrooms.

Vlachou, M., Andreou, E., Botsoglou, K., & Didaskalou, E. (2011). [Bully/victim problems among preschool children: A review of current research evidence](#). *Educational Psychology Review*, 23(3), 329.

This report examines aggressive behavior and bullying in preschool classrooms and recommends classroom interventions.

Zimmerman, F. J., Glew, G. M., Christakis D. A., & Katon, W. (2005). [Early cognitive stimulation, emotional support, and television watching as predictors of subsequent bullying among grade-school children](#). *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 159(4), 384–388.

This article discusses the environmental predictors for bullying in adolescence, including cognitive stimulation, emotional support, and television viewing.

### **SELECTED CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

Criswell, P. K. (2009). *Stand up for yourself & your friends*. Middleton, WI: American Girl Publishing.

This book teaches girls positive strategies for responding to bossiness and bullying.

Ludwig, T. (2011). *Better than you*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Children learn why they and their peers like to brag, and the impact it can have on making friends.

Ludwig, T. (2010). *Confessions of a former bully*. New York, NY: Dragonfly Books.

Katie learns the repercussions of bullying first-hand and decides to write a tell-all story about what she learned and how to be a better friend.

Ludwig, T. (2008). *Trouble talk*. New York, NY: Random House Children's Books.

Trouble Talk describes the problems with secrets and rumors and how they affect the friendship between two girls.

Ludwig, T. (2006). *Just kidding*. New York, NY: Random House Children's Books.

This book addresses emotional bullying in a group of boys and how to know when teasing has gone too far.

Ludwig, T. (2006). *Sorry!* New York, NY: Random House Children's Books.

This book focuses on sincere versus insincere apologies and how two friends find the path to forgiveness.

Ludwig, T. (2005). *My secret bully*. New York, NY: Random House Children's Books.

In this book, Monica experiences what it feels like to be bullied by a friend, and how an adult, in this case her mother, can teach her the skills and strategies to face her bully.

McCain, B. R., & Leonardo, T. (2001). *Nobody knew what to do: A story about bullying*. Chicago, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.

This book describes how bystanders—those who witness bullying—can help a child being bullied.

Moss, P., & Lyon, L. (2004). *Say something*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House.

This book teaches children to avoid being a “silent bystander” of bullying and shows them ways to make a difference in their school community.

O'Neill, A., & Huliska-Beith, L. (2002). *The recess queen*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

This book illustrates how children can sometimes solve problems by themselves.



eyes on bullying

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[eyesonbullying@edc.org](mailto:eyesonbullying@edc.org)

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