

## **How to Help a Child who is Being Bullied\***

**Caution:** Before you intervene, **ALWAYS KNOW YOUR BULLY**. Evaluate the risk. Do not use blanket rules like, ignore, or stand up to him/her, or yell back, without first considering what the bully is capable of. Consider professional support if uncertain.

### **Assessment of Risk (Pepler and Craig):**

**Severity** of bullying or victimization – was serious physical or verbal aggression used, weapons?

**Frequency** – how often does it occur?

**Pervasiveness** – where does it occur and in how many different settings (school, home, community)?

**Chronicity** – how long has this been going on?

## **Some Areas of Interventions for the Bullied Child**

### **Support**

**(Message: I am not alone!)**

- Work on self-esteem - identify strengths
- Provide with opportunities to express emotions and receive emotional support for sadness, fear, anger, shame, anxiety)
- Role-play and strategize how to problem solve as a way of helping child feel more prepared
- Education and self-talk about motivation of bullying so as to reduce self-deprecation
- Practice relaxation techniques (i.e., deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation)

### **Presentation Style**

**(Message: Hey bully, go somewhere else for your entertainment!)**

- Develop confident presentation
- Anxiety management/ Relaxation training
- Reduce reactivity and increase tolerance and flexibility by exposing child to a steady diet of novel experiences
- Practice reactions to criticism and teasing
- Problem-solving skills to come up with solutions to reactivity
- Practice producing and reacting to non-verbal cues
- Assertiveness Skills development

### **Friendship Making Skills**

**(Message: There is strength in numbers!)**

- Principles of good friendships (honesty, sharing, perspective taking, taking turns)
- General social skills training
- Conflict resolution skills development
- Have child identify potential friends or alliances at school and ways to encourage these relationships
- Organize play dates after school
- Participate in extra-curricular activities

### Some Ideas for Parents

- Daily after-school processing of social conflicts, mishaps, and bullying episodes. Role-playing difficult episodes and helping child develop new approaches.
- Help your child learn about reputations and how his/her efforts to make changes will not likely result in the other children instantly responding differently. Helping your child understand that it is a process that takes time as you try to reshape his/her reputation at school.
- Distinguishing the social nuances of playful teasing from malicious teasing. Develop flow chart of rules. (i.e., Does this person continue to tease after you have said it hurts your feelings? If so then it is more malicious. Is this someone who has tended to be nice to you in the past?)
- Be a listening ear and help your child talk about his/her feelings related to the bullying. Shame, sadness, anger, anxiety, fear.
- Role-playing the various above mentioned skill areas
- Making teachers aware of how they can remove the imbalance of power and turn pseudo-conflicts into real ones that can be resolved
- Working with the teacher to strategically guide the adult response and role (i.e., making teachers aware of the players, as well as, where and how the bullying is occurring, so that the teachers can keep a closer eye on these children and catch them in the act). However, if your child is being seriously hurt or threatened, the teacher, principal, and police should be immediately involved.
- Getting a buddy. Your child's teacher or principal may be able to arrange for an older child or classmate to buddy up with your child during higher risk times (i.e., recess, lunch time, etc.). The socially isolating effects of bullying can place children at a greater risk for being picked on. This is reduced when the bully realizes he has an additional person to deal with when starting with your child.

### Social Bullying: Some Suggestions on How to Help

- As a parent, **gather information**. Let your child know that you are not going to just react and run to the school. Children are afraid of getting it worse if they are seen as a tattler or rat.
- **Identify the ring leaders and their supporters**.
- **Work with the school collaboratively** and recognize that teachers, principals, etc., are often kept out of the loop on these encounters by both the bullies who don't want to get in trouble, and the victim who doesn't want to appear to be a tattler. **Inform teachers** about when and by whom the bullying occurs so that they can catch it happening
- **Advocate to increase awareness within the classroom** and within the school (i.e., use material such as the DVD, class discussions, special books designed for the classroom)
- With child, **search out other children being ostracized** and band together for support
- Speak with school about **getting an older or popular buddy** that would be willing to include child in activities during unsupervised times
- **Developing friendships** is a strong buffering effect, in or outside of school
- See if school will have a **volunteer adult organize and supervise a fun activity during recess** so that your child can be social and safer
- Focus on **presentation style, reactivity, practice comebacks** in role plays, enlist older cousins or siblings to role play
- Behaviour to work on....trying too hard to fit in (signals desperation), dealing with anxiety, presentation style, getting involved in various activities (extracurricular)
- **Develop friendships outside of school** where people don't know your reputation and will therefore treat you fairly



- **Know when to stay and when to leave a group interaction.** When you are being insulted you may want to stay to prove it doesn't bother you. But it does, they know it, and they enjoy keeping you going. Work on how to exit a difficult interaction in a way that demonstrates extol **self-respect and assertiveness**, rather than leaving with a lame excuse or in tears.
- While it is important to stand up for yourself, you also want to be careful about getting into verbal matches with someone who might be more skilled. Bullies will try to control the conversation when efforts are made to resolve the situation, because they don't want to lose the power. **Identify for the bully your awareness** that he or she is being mean or unkind, regardless of all the attempts they will make to justify their behaviours. **Keep these conversations short if they are unproductive.**

#### Reputation:

- Means that you **can do all the right things and people will still expect the old you** and they will wait a while till they accept your new reputation
- Other bullies will learn about who the fun kids are to pick on. Therefore, it is not only about you giving off signals, **your reputation can sometimes be like an ad you put in the paper a month ago and you are still getting calls for it**
- **Reputation change requires patience**, keep doing the new things you have learned, it may take time for people to accept the new you

### Resources

#### For Teachers:

- ◆ Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual (Newman, Horne, Bartolomucci, 2000)
- ◆ The Bully Free Classroom (Beane, 1999)

#### For Children and Youth:

- ◆ Bullying: Deal with it before push comes to shove (Slavens, 2003)
- ◆ Bullies are a Pain in the Brain (Romain, 1997)
- ◆ Odd Girl Out (Simmons, 2002)
- ◆ Stop Picking on Me (Thomas, 2000)

#### For Parents:

- ◆ The Parent's Book About Bullying (Voors, 2000)
- ◆ Easing the Teasing (Freedman, 2002)

#### Educational DVD

- ◆ It's A Girl's World, National Film Board of Canada (1-800-267-7710)

#### Skills Building

- ◆ A Good Friend: How to make one, how to be one (Herron and Peter, 1998)
- ◆ How to start a conversation and make friends (Gabor, 1983)
- ◆ Teaching your child the language of Social Success (Duke, Nowicki, Jr., & Martin, 1996)

\*The suggestions provided in this handout are for parents, and are not intended to replace therapeutic interventions by trained professionals. Should your child be experiencing bullying difficulties, or be in need of specific skills development, it may be important to consider seeking professional help.