

Parent Toolbox

Dealing with Undesirable Social Interactions Between Children

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WHEN YOU WITNESS A CONFLICT...

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Parent Toolbox for Dealing with Undesirable Social Interactions Between Children

It's relatively easy to help your child out of a scrape with another kid when you are a witness to it. But what do you do about the many times your child's around others without your supervision? They go to playdates, babysitters, sports games, out into the neighborhood and off to school. When they come back with a scrape or a sad story, what should you do? What follows are some tried and true techniques for preventing and dealing with unhappy relations between children.

Teach Your Children to Recognize and Articulate Feelings

A lot of tussles between kids have to do with social immaturity rather than malice. For example, Chris wants to make friends with Bob, but can't seem to get his attention and feels too shy to join in Bob's games. This lonely feeling gathers in him until he feels ready to burst. He rushes over and smacks Bob. This sounds horrible, but it's normal to need to learn to speak before actions take over, and lack of impulse control is part of what makes a child immature. So work with your child on speaking feelings clearly before it's too late. Model statements like, "I'm starting to get mad!" or "When you _____ I feel _____ and I wish _____" or "Stop that, it makes me angry!" or "I really want _____". Have your child practice speaking their feelings with prompts like "You look like you're having strong feelings. What are they called?" Teach them, too, to recognize feelings in others. (This will help them avoid someone who's about to blow!) Ways to practice this skill come up when you're reading or watching movies together ("What's Dorothy feeling right now?"), or when you're about to blow yourself! There's a great book that helps young children learn to name feelings, it's called: "How Are You Peeling, by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers (and it's fun for adults too!)

About Hurting and Being Hurt and the Brain

Often when a child is hurt they move to "hurt back." While this is "normal" (we do it too) it is still not appropriate. When you experience or witness such an event, it's a great opportunity to teach appropriate behavior, and it's important to know that the brain loses its ability to reason when emotions are high. So in order to teach it is important that all parties calm down first.

It is often helpful to start by acknowledging their feelings. You can gently pull the child aside and say something like "*Ouch, that hurt. I'm wondering if you might be hurting too?*" This will help them to recognize the feeling and give them the opportunity to tell you about it. If they are too angry or hurt to solve the issue in that moment, encourage them to do something that will help them feel better. In addition to getting the brain back to a reasoning state, this teaches self-soothing skills. You can do this by saying

something like *“I see you are upset. See if you can find something to help you feel better; we’ll figure out how to fix this when you are feeling better.”*

It is not easy for anyone to apologize when they are hurt and/or angry. This includes children. Giving them time to calm down and re-gather themselves is helpful. When they are calm, we can ask them to come up with how to remedy the situation. They will gain skill, competence and confidence solving these problems.

Teach Your Children to Confirm their Impressions

This is useful for when the hurt they’ve suffered is the result of someone’s clumsiness. If they can say, “You stepped on my foot! Did you mean to?”, they can find out it was an accident before they lash back or get all hot under the collar. And on the other side, it’d be helpful if they know to say, “Oh, I didn’t mean to hurt you! Sorry!” right away.

A second use for this skill is asking about deliberate acts of aggression. In the example earlier of Chris and Bob, Bob could say after being smacked, “What’d you do that for?” Then there’s a chance Chris could explain that he really wants to play with Bob. They could end up being best friends.

By now you may be realizing that these are long-term goals. But the faster we start teaching our children to communicate about feelings, the sooner they’ll know how to keep themselves and others safe.

Teach Your Child How to Ask for Help

When the above doesn’t work, as when your child feels victimized by someone more powerful, or when talking to the other child doesn’t work, or when your child is just too plumb freaked out to remember how to talk, it’s time for your child to ask for help. There’s an attachment to this sheet that describes bullying so that you can recognize this relatively rare but pernicious form of unhappy social interaction, with which you should certainly help your child.

But often they’ll need help with more innocent forms of inter-child violence. How to ask? For the youngest child, it could be as simple as yelling at the top of one’s lungs, “I need help!” A more subtle approach is to find a reliable friend or grownup nearby. And reporting violence to a grown-up or parent after the fact can help your child sort through the feelings and prevent re-occurrences.

In some households two tools are very helpful in teaching this. 1) “Stop” means “Stop” and 2) “Is everyone still having fun?” The first is built on the teaching that stop really means stop, it is a bottom line safety rule. No matter who it is when they say stop, the activity stops – whether it be roughhousing, tickling or nagging. It is the bottom line – “I’m telling you now I don’t like it – and I mean it” message and applies equally to children and adults. The second teaches awareness. Kids (especially siblings) love to explore the edges of limits – it’s one way that they learn. When observing children pushing those limits, one can ask “Is everyone still having fun?” and allow the children to make self-assessments – if one or more answers “no!” the adult can then ask “what

can you do to change that?" (Often the answer is "say Stop!") These questions teach skills and develop each child's own capacity and confidence for taking care of themselves.

How to Speed up Your Child's Absorption of These Ideas

It can help to role-play with your child. Trade roles, aggressor and victim, and see what approaches and words work best to promote peace. It can help to talk about scenes read in a book or seen on the playground, television or at a movie. Discuss what felt good and not so good; what they would have liked to have happened and how they are feeling witnessing what they did see.

Also please see the attached list of children's books and parent books about how to deal with inter-child conflict. Ask each day if there's anything that happened while you were away that your child wants to share with you. Try to listen without judgment and offer advice gently so that your child continues to confide in you.

What to Do Until your Child Masters Social Interactions and/or Grows Up

Check up on your child's life with the adults they've been around. Ask after playdates, time with the sitter, coaches or day camp counselor to see if all was peaceful. Occasionally confirm with your child's teacher or principal that they are progressing socially and are able to defend themselves appropriately. Ask for advice from the adult in charge of the spot where your child needs help getting along.

If your child's consistently having a problem with a certain child, it can help to arrange a playdate with that child at a neutral spot (like a playground, or a pool on a rainy day). Supervise them closely and try to help them learn to get along. With close supervision challenges that arise can be used to help teach social skills and appropriate behavior. A bonus to this technique is that as you arrange the playdate you can let the other parent in on the fact that there's been a problem. Trust me: they want to know!

Most of all, take it upon yourself to investigate your children's social life until you're sure that they can handle their inevitable rough spots on their own.

Bully Books for Elementary-Age Youth

Bateman, Teresa, "The Bully Blockers Club"

Clements, Andrew, "Jake Drake: Bully Buster"

Cosby, Bill, "The Meanest Thing to Say" Cartwheel Books, 1997

Cox, Judy & Cynthia Fisher, "Mean, Mean Maureen Green" Holiday House, 2000

DePaola, Tomie, "Trouble in the Barkers' Class"

Everitt, Betsy, "Mean Soup" Harcourt Brace, 1992

Henkes, Kevin, "Chrysanthemum"

Howe, James, "Pinky and Rex and the Bully" (Young Readers Level 3)

Krensky, Stephen, & Susanna Natti, "Louise Takes Charge" 1998

Lovell, Patty, "Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon" Putman, 2001

Ludwig, Trudy, "My Secret Bully" Riverwood Press, 2003

Mayer, Gina & Mercer Mayer, "Just a Bully" Golden Books Publishing Co, 1999

McCain, Becky. "Nobody Knew What to Do" 2001

McNamara, Margaret, "The Playground Problem"

Moss, Peggy, "Say Something"

Munson, Derek, "Enemy Pie" Chronicle Books, 2000

O'Neill, Alexis, "The Recess Queen" Scholastic Books, 2002 (grades Pre-2)

Payne, Lauren, M.S.W, "A Child's Book of Choices" Free Spirit, 1997

Patneaude, David, "Colder Than Ice"

Reynolds-Naylor, Phyllis, "King of the Playground"

Simon, Francesca & Caroline Church, "Hugo and the Bully Frogs"

Stolz, Mary, "The Bully of Barkham Street" Grades 3-7

Thomas, Pat, "Stop Picking On Me" Barron's 2000

Winthrop, Elizabeth, "Luke's Bully" ages 7-10

Zolotow, Charlotte, "The Quarreling Book" HarperCollins, 1991

Bullying: Educators and Adults

A Tribe Apart, Patricia Hersch

All Grown Up and No Place to Go, David Elkind

And Words Can Hurt Forever, James Garbarino, Ellen deLara

Best Friend, Worst Enemy, Michael Thompson

Breaking the Culture of Bullying and Disrespect Grades K-6` Best Practices and Successful Strategies, Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin & Maureen Taylor

Bullies and Victim, Helping Your Child Survive the Schoolyard Battlefield, Suellen Fried & Paula Fried

Bullies, Targets, and Witnesses: Helping Children Break the Pain Chain, Suellen Fried

Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do, Dan Olweus

Bullying in Secondary Schools: What it Looks Like and How to Manage It, Keith Sullivan

Bullying Prevention Handbook a Guide for Principals, Teachers, and Counselors, John H. Hoover

Cat's Eye, Margaret Atwood (Fiction)

Easing the Teasing: Helping Your Child Deal with Name-Calling Ridicule and Verbal Bullying, Judy S. Freedman

Girl in the Mirror, Nancy L. Snyderman

Girl Wars, Cheryl Dellasega & Charisse Nixon

Helping the Child Who Doesn't Fit In, Stephen Nowicki & Marshall R. Duke

Shelter of Each Other, Mary Pipher

Long Walk to School: A Story about Bullying Cindy Leaney & Peter Wilks

Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls, Rachel Simmons

Odd Girl Speak Out : Girls Write about Bullies Cliques Popularity and Jealousy, Rachel Simmons

Once Were Warriors, Alan Duff

Perfect Targets: Asperger Syndrome and Bullying, Rebekah Heinrichs

Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence, Rosalind Wiseman

Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys, Dan Kindlon PhD and Michael Thompson, PhD

Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood, William Pollack

Reviving Ophelia, Mary Pipher

Schools Where Everyone Belongs: Practical Strategies for Reducing Bullying, Stan Davis

Take the Bully by the Horns, Sam Horn

The Bone People, Keri Hulme

The Bullied, the Bully, and the By-stander: from Preschool to High School, How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence, Barbara Coloroso

The Bully Free Classroom, Allan L. Beane

Weakfish: Bullying Through the Eye, & of a Child, Michael Dorn

What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future, Peter L. Benson

Words Will Never Hurt Me: Helping Kids Handle Teasing, Bullying, and Put-Downs, Sally Northway Ogden

You Can't Say You Can't Play, Vivian Gussin Paley

Websites

Anti-bullying Network, www.antibullying.net

Awesome Library, www.awesomelibrary.org/Office/Counselor/Conflict

[Prevention and Mediation/ Bullying.html](http://www.awesomelibrary.org/Office/Counselor/Conflict/Prevention%20and%20Mediation/Bullying.html)

Bully B'ware, www.bullybeware.com

Bullying.org, www.bullying.org

National PTA, www.pta.org

Safe Child, www.safechild.org/bullies.htm

Stop Bullying Now,
www.stopbullyingnow.com

Success Unlimited,
www.successunlimited.co.uk

Washington State PTA,
www.wastatepta.org

<http://www.livewiremedia.com/preview.html> **Groak videos**

For Students

Bullies are a Pain in the Brain, Trevor Romain and Elizabeth Verdick
Chrysanthemum, Kevin Henkes
Enemy Pie, Derek Munson

How to Lose A ll Your Friends, Nancy L. Carlson
Inventing Elliott, Graham Gardner
My Secret Bully, Trudy Ludwig

Nobody Knew What to Do, Becky Ray McCain, Todd Leonardo
Odd Velvet, Mary E. Whitcomb
Please Stop Laughing at Me, Jodee Blanco
5hredderman: Secret Identity, Wendelin Van Draanen
Star Girl, Jerry Spinnelli
Stick Up for Yourself, 6ershen Kaufman
The Bully Buster Book, John William Yee
The Chocolate Wars, Robert Cormier

The King of the Playground, Phyllis
 Reynolds Naylor The Recess Queen,
 Alexis O'Neill
The Two Bullies, Ko Morimoto

What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future, Peter L.
 Benson

RESOURCES for PARENTS, STUDENTS and TEACHERS CONCERNED ABOUT BULLYING

Concerned Children's Advertisers, an excellent site for victims, bullies and parents, has interesting information for parents, coaches, caregivers and children on bullying; tips and coping skills. As well, the current CCA commercial regarding bullying, called Walk Away, can be viewed from this site. www.cca-kids.ca

Yello Dyno, a leader in Child Abuse Prevention Education, offers musically-based child abuse prevention and anti-bullying programs. The award winning Yello Dyno is a personal safety education system which empowers kids and young people with the tools they need to meet today's personal safety challenges. www.yellodyno.com

KidzSafe Foundation specialises in Youth Violence Prevention. It is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to providing parents and children with the essential tools to protect them from child abuse, abduction and other forms of victimization, including bullying. The KidzSafe team brings musically-based personal safety education to children through presentations, as well as delivering workshops to adult groups on the prevention of sexual abuse, abduction of children, and the prevention of bullying in schools and in the community. www.kidzsafe.org

Kids 4 Kids www.kids4kids1.com suggests coping skills for dealing with bullies. This organization also runs programs.

The Toronto Police website includes a "fact sheet" on Bullying information with an anonymous reporting telephone number. The website link is: www.torontopolice.on.ca/publications/justthefacts/bully.htm

Canadian Safe School Network's website www.cssn.org offers tips on bullying and videos and CD's that educators can order. Staying Safe: Practical Tips for Personal and Home Safety:

Bullying: Nova Scotia Department of Justice: www.gov.ns.ca/just/tips8.pdf

Bullying and Victimization: The Problems and Solutions for School-aged Children is the title of the National Crime Prevention Council website. The site examines characteristics of bullies and victims and discusses the roles of students, teachers, parents and schools. This site also has numerous links to other sites re bullying.

www.prevention.gc.ca/en/libra

Positive Steps Against Bullying: A Teacher's Guide. This is a joint project of the Canadian Safety Council and the National Film Board of Canada (supported by the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention and the Government of Canada), endorsed by Kids Help Phone and by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This Guide includes a broad outline for four lessons focussing on bullying and also includes information on how to access other bullying resources, both print and videos. The Guide can be downloaded off the National Crime Prevention Council's www.nfb.ca/nomorebullies/teachersguide.

London Family Court Clinic website: This site provides information for parents and teachers about bullying with detailed suggestions for action. www.lfcc.on.ca/bully.htm

Making A Difference in Bullying; Understanding and Strategies for Practitioners by Peeler, Debra J and Craig, Wendy;; LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution, 2000. This excellent resource document outlines a systemic approach to bullying strategies and includes a "whole school policy outline" which thoroughly reviews principles and strategies for students who bully, for the students who are victims, and for students who are silent observers. It can be downloaded from the Lamarsh Centre website. www.yorku.ca/lamarsh/reports.htm

Voices for Children is a not-for-profit leadership organization which promotes healthy lives for children and their families. Their website contains a multi-page fact sheet with bullying information. www.voicesforchildren.ca/factsheet15.htm

Cultivating Peace in the 21' Century is a teaching resource to support education in the broader sense of global issues, pence and security, human rights, cultural diversity and active citizenship. These resources will engage children and youth in the search for a culture of peace in their homes, their schools, their neighbourhoods and their global community. These programs encourage youth to respect diversity, think globally, value human rights, recognize injustice and respond to conflict with methods other than violence. The organization's website is www.cultivatingpeace.ca