

FOCUS ON THE FAMILYSM

HELP!

**MY CHILD
IS BEING
BULLIED**

**HELP!
MY CHILD IS BEING BULLIED**

dr. bill maier
general editor



Lyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Help! My Child Is Being Bullied

Copyright © 2006 by Focus on the Family

All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

A Focus on the Family book published by

Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The case examples presented in this book are fictional composites. Any resemblance between these fictional characters and actual persons is coincidental.

The use of material from various Web sites does not imply endorsement of those sites in their entirety.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior permission of Focus on the Family.

Editor: Brandy Bruce

Cover photograph copyright © by SW Productions/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Help! : my child is being bullied / Bill Maier, general editor.

p. cm. — (Help!)

“A Focus on the Family book.”

ISBN-13: 978-1-58997-176-9

ISBN-10: 1-58997-176-0

1. Bullying. 2. Child rearing. I. Maier, Bill. II. Series: Help! (Carol Stream, Ill.)

BF637.B85H45 2006

303.6'9—dc22

2006009215

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 11 10 09 08 07 06

Contents

Foreword by Dr. Bill Maier vii

Introduction 1

PART 1:

The Harm of Bullying 5

 Statistics on Bullying 10

 Why Do They Harass Others? 13

 Outlets for Bullying 16

PART 2:

Signs of Bullying 21

PART 3:

Dealing with Bullies 31

 School Bullies 35

 Bullying Outside of School and
 in the Home 39

 Cyber Bullies 42

 Intolerant or Racist Bullies 43

 How to Respond: Advice from
 Dr. James Dobson 45

PART 4:

Helping a Child Who's Hurting	49
Hope at Home	59
Communicating about Sensitive Subjects . . .	63
Monitoring Entertainment Outlets in Your Home	65

PART 5:

Help for Parents Whose Child Is a Bully	69
Dr. James Dobson's Personal Experience with Bullying	74
Notes	79
Resources	83

Foreword

Each day, thousands of children in the U.S. go to school in fear. They're afraid because they know that a bully waits for them—on the bus, around the corner, on the playground or in the locker room.

Bullying is a sad fact of life in our society. According to the American Psychological Association, almost every child will be bullied at some point during the school years.

No doubt you've picked up this book because your child is being bullied. You've seen the fear in your son's eyes or you've noticed a sudden change in his behavior. Perhaps you've watched as your daughter's level of confidence and self-esteem has plummeted.

This book will help you help your child. You'll learn how to identify the tell-tale signs that your son or daughter is being victimized. We'll tell you how to be an effective advocate for your child with the school system. And we'll teach you how you can help him or her overcome the emotional wounds inflicted by bullying and learn to stand strong in the face of intimidation.

I commend you for taking action to encourage and empower your child. May God bless your efforts!

Dr. Bill Maier

Vice President, Psychologist in Residence
Focus on the Family

Introduction

Kevin's Story

Kevin stood nervously at the bus stop, his eyes glued to his tennis shoes, afraid to look up. Just five more minutes, he silently told himself. The bus should be here in five more minutes. Then he heard Mark's voice behind him. Kevin's jaw tightened and his heart squeezed with fear. Not again. Mark's hurtful name-calling was one thing, and stealing Kevin's lunch money was another. But last week he'd knocked Kevin's bag into the street and shoved him to the ground.

"Fight back!" Kevin's father had said. "Don't let him do that to you. He's not that much bigger than you are."

Kevin felt desperate and alone. If telling Mom and Dad didn't help, what would?

Was he just destined to go hungry at lunch each day? To be pushed around by Mark every day at school?



While television and movies have often mined bullying experiences for both dramatic and comic effects, the topic is anything but funny. If your child is in a situation similar to Kevin's—being harassed by a bully—the situation can quickly become overwhelming, both for your child and for you.

For a parent whose child has been bullied at school, the agony of watching him or her withdraw further into despair can be heartbreaking. Knowing what to do may be extremely difficult, especially when the bullying escalates to the point where the child begs his or her parents

not to interfere out of fear it will grow worse.

So what can you do? Where should you begin? What defines a bully? Is bullying really a problem to be dealt with by adults, or is it just an unpleasant life experience that every child eventually encounters?

Bully (noun): an aggressive person who intimidates or mistreats weaker people.¹

Think for a moment about those key words: *aggressive*, *intimidate*, *weak*. How do these words help to define a bully? A *bully is a person who hurts others*.

Bullying is a sensitive issue. It can be just as sensitive for parents as it is for children. For moms and dads, considering this topic may bring back ugly memories of

being bullied as children themselves. The effects of bullying can leave deep spiritual and emotional scars. For this reason, bullying is a topic that must be dealt with promptly by both parents and educators.

In this short volume, we'll zero in on:

- the harm of bullying,
- just how big a problem it's becoming,
- how to recognize signs of your child being bullied or bullying by your child,
- and what to do if your child is being bullied.



Part
One

The Harm of Bullying

Why is bullying so harmful?

Bullying is a growing problem in schools today, and any child can be at risk. According to the American Psychological Association, 90 percent of fourth through eighth graders report being victims of some form of bullying.² While it's true that any child can be at risk, children who are bullied often have certain qualities in common. Shy, sensitive children are easy targets for bullies. Many times boys who are bullied are smaller and weaker than other boys in their age group. Children who already suffer from abuse at home or elsewhere may feel insecure and wounded. This sense of vulnerability makes them easy prey for bullies.

While the term *bullying* may bring to mind children being physically overpowered, mental bullying can be just as emotionally draining. A child may be

intimidated or threatened verbally by a bully. This intimidation may be very subtle, going unnoticed by parents, teachers, or even other students.

The emotional scars that result from bullying can last a lifetime. Children who have been bullied may sink into patterns of antisocial behavior such as vandalism or even look to drugs and alcohol as sources of relief. Constant bullying in school can interfere with a child's education and mental and physical health. Because of the aggressive nature of bullying—stronger children dominating weaker children—the problem requires the intervention of parents, educators, and authority figures on behalf of the child being bullied.

Frank Peretti, best-selling novelist, speaks of being bullied as a child because of his small stature—a result of birth defects and illness—and his gentle nature.

He uses the phrase *wounded spirit* when talking about children who have experienced bullying or abuse of any kind. This phrase captures the pain felt by those who have been ostracized, persecuted, ignored, made fun of, or abused. According to Peretti, “A bruise or a cut is visible, but a wounded spirit can remain buried deep inside a person unless you provide the environment that will bring it out and heal it.”³

Frank Peretti’s personal story of being bullied as a child was shared on a Focus on the Family broadcast in October 1999. After the broadcast, Focus received more than 3,000 telephone calls, surprising Peretti and Focus staff members. The topic of bullying was obviously a subject that resonated with many people.⁴

Bullying is an issue that requires urgent attention among parents and educators. Simply dismissing the problem with clichés

such as, “Kids will be kids” or “It’s just a part of growing up” has proved to be a harmful approach. Long-term psychological effects of bullying, including humiliation, loneliness, low self-esteem, and even thoughts of suicide, are not to be taken lightly.

Statistics on Bullying

Dr. James Dobson, licensed psychologist and founder of Focus on the Family, addresses the topic of bullying in his book *Bringing Up Boys*:

A study by psychologist Dorothy Espelage revealed that 80 percent of students take part in bullying, and 15 percent of seventh and eighth graders say they bully someone regularly. In an older study, boys were found to be four times as likely as girls to be responsible

for physical attacks and far more likely to be victims of attacks. In a study sponsored by the Kaiser Foundation, 74 percent of eight- to eleven-year-olds, and 86 percent of teens, report being teased or bullied by their peers. One child in five is frightened in the classroom.

It is a major problem for boys on campuses today. It also plays a significant role in the bloody violence that continues to distress the nation. In the past four decades, there has been a 500 percent increase in the rates of homicide and suicide.⁵

While bullying used to be considered primarily a “boy” problem, today the issue of bullying reaches both boys and girls in all age groups. While boys can be more physical about bullying, girls are more relational. Bullying among boys might

manifest itself as taking things from a victim, hitting or kicking a victim, or making threats in order to frighten a victim.

Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, says, “There is a hidden culture of girls’ aggression in which bullying is epidemic, distinctive, and destructive.”⁶ Bullying among girls is becoming an increasingly popular topic in books, magazines, news specials, and even movies.

Michelle Williams, member of the Grammy-winning singing group Destiny’s Child, empathizes with those who have trouble “fitting in” during the school years. She has been quoted as saying, “Growing up, I experienced a lot of hurts . . . I was ridiculed and bullied for being a good student and person. Kids were really cruel. I was skinny and underdeveloped. Everybody else was getting chosen and getting

boyfriends, but now, I'm thankful that God saw something and He chose me.”⁷

Female bullying often involves verbal and emotional harassment rather than physical bullying. Girls might isolate other girls deemed “uncool,” purposefully leave them out of activities, or spread hurtful rumors about them. Both styles of bullying have the same result: intense emotional, and possibly physical, harm to the victim.

Why Do They Harass Others?

At times bullying simply occurs for no reason other than a child wants to make others feel threatened or insecure. But sometimes there are specific reasons for bullying related to race, social status, disabilities, or even physical size. Sometimes bullying can be a result of problems at home; maybe the child has seen Dad bully Mom, or maybe Mom and Dad are

NOTES

1. Encarta World English Dictionary Online, *Bully*, <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/dictionary/dictionaryhome.aspx>.
2. *Bullying*, APA online (2005), <http://www.apa.org/ppo/issues/bullying.html>.
3. Frank Peretti, *No More Bullies: For Those Who Wound or Are Wounded* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2000), 172.
4. *Ibid*, 80.
5. James C. Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2001), 44, used by permission.
6. Rachel Simmons, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (New York: Harcourt, 2002), 3.
7. "Michelle Williams Bio," http://www.sphinxmg.com/artist/gospel/michelle_williams.asp.
8. Dobson, 43.
9. "Ready, Set, Game: Learn How to Keep Video Gaming Safe and Fun," (November 4, 2004), <http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/children/griefers.msp>.