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# Break the Bully Cycle

Intervention Techniques & Activities  
to Create a Respectful School Community

**SiriNam S. Khalsa, NBCT**



Good Year Books  
Culver City, California

## **Dedication**

This book is sincerely dedicated to my wife, Kirn Kaur, for her perseverance through life's adversities and dedication to being a caring mother and loving wife, and to my children, Ananda, Dharam Bir, and Karta, who freely share their insights and school experiences.

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# Introduction

One of the major problems facing children and teenagers today in our schools is bullying. Most students have to deal with a bullying problem at some point in their lives. Consider these statistics:

- ◇ Schools across the United States harbor approximately 5 million bullies and 5.5 million of their victims (D. Owens, National School Safety Center). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), one in seven school children is a bully or a victim.
- ◇ Sixty-five percent of students in schools have reported being bullied. Twelve percent were bullied on a regular basis and 13 percent bullied other students once or more a week (Center for Youth Development).
- ◇ Recent studies by CBS News show that an alarming number of teenagers, usually boys but sometimes girls, are driven to suicide by schoolyard bullying. Suicides may be the exception to everyday life in most schools, where bullying is less dramatic but still common.

We know that bullying begins in preschool and seems to reach its peak during the middle school years. Bullying behavior in elementary school can easily turn into violence by middle school and high school. Jack, who is a bully at age eight, is *three times more likely* to be convicted of a crime by age thirty and less likely to find a meaningful profession. Cindy, who is a thirteen-year-old bully, is more likely to raise children who become bullies. We hear and read about abusive spouses and workplace bullying because studies show that childhood bullying grows into workplace bullying and that children who are victims of bullies often become victims as adults. This underscores the fact that bullying is a learned behavior, and a bully will not change by simply growing up. To avoid becoming adult bullies and victims, young bullies must be taught better ways of relating to others and young victims must be given the skills to be more assertive in their interpersonal relationships.

Teachers, parents, students, and others are creating a growing number of anti-bullying programs. However, despite the serious social problem we have in our schools with bullies and victims, the issue has been largely overlooked. Children can be naturally self-centered and may make hurtful remarks during a conflict, but a quarrel or one-time fight is

## Key Concept

*Experience tells us that the abundance of a problem does not bring about change until direct intervention and direct action takes place.*



not bullying. *Bullying occurs when a child is the target of repeated negative actions by someone else, usually a peer.* Not unlike sexual harassment, bullying is so widespread and so common that the integration of so-called “normal growing-up behavior” has blinded us to its extensive harm.

We do know that teachers and parents can have a profound effect on a child’s behavior and the school climate. To begin the process of change, it’s equally important to know what you *don’t know* about bullies and victims.

### ***Bully Facts:***

- Bullying is a learned behavior.
- Boys and girls both bully, but their tactics are usually different.
- Bullies tend to be average students academically.
- Bullies come in all sizes. Sometimes they may intimidate victims who are larger than they are if there is an imbalance of power due to age or peer support.
- Bullies have an inflated self-concept but usually have low self-esteem or feel inferior to others, which reflects a strong need to dominate with threats.
- Bullies lack empathy for their victims and feel justified in their actions.
- Reciprocal aggression doesn’t usually stop the victim from being bullied. In fact it may incite the bully to future attacks. Assertive versus aggressive behavior is most effective.
- When dealing with a bullying incident, it is usually more effective to meet with parents apart from meeting with bullies and victims. Parents are emotionally involved, so a meeting will be beneficial.

### ***What Can Be Done?***

*Break the Bully Cycle* provides teachers, parents, and all school personnel with insight into this problem and specific interventions that address the needs of the school and community. This book is not a program. Rather, it’s specific information to educate the user, along with a collection of interventions, strategies, and activities designed to address the multifaceted problem of bullying in today’s schools. If your school presently has an anti-bullying program in place, you might find this book a useful supplement to the existing program. If it doesn’t have a defined anti-bullying program, then use this book to help start one. The goal is to take purposeful action to meet the unique needs of your classroom and school.

## ***The Wimpy Caterpillar***

One of my colleagues, Ms. Cook, recently shared a conversation with me that she had had with one of her students. This student had recently graduated from college and was looking for work. Her student, George, was a bully in middle school and almost got expelled for hurting another student. George reminded Ms. Cook of a conversation they had had one day after school that seemed to be a turning point in his aggression toward others. Ms. Cook explained to George that he reminded her of one of those fuzzy caterpillars that have long extended tentacles and look pretty scary, but when you touch them they roll into a small, tight ball. George remembered Ms. Cook asking him why he thought the caterpillar looked so scary. He responded, “To keep his enemies away.” She then asked him what he thought the caterpillar was really feeling, especially after being touched by someone else. George wasn’t sure so Ms. Cook said, “The caterpillar is actually scared of other creatures and is feeling kind of wimpy inside.” Then she told him that she thought that was how George felt when he teased and picked on other kids. In order to feel powerful and big, he needed to harass someone else. George remembered Ms. Cook then asking him if he wanted to keep this conversation between themselves or discuss it with other kids in his class. He opted to keep it between themselves. George and Ms. Cook had several subsequent conversations as he gradually related to her as his mentor teacher. Fortunately, George began rethinking how he related to others, and in high school he took out his aggression playing football and being part of the wrestling team.

We should never underestimate our ability to make a difference in a child’s life. Ms. Cook happened to tell the right story at the right time in this student’s life. Unfortunately, few bullies change so quickly or have the insight that George possessed but as teachers and parents, we are shaping young lives. When children are in elementary and middle school, their minds are like Jello. We need to put a lot of good thoughts into their minds before they set. By reaching out to your students, and treating them with respect and dignity, you’re giving them what all students need: positive role modeling and caring from a healthy adult. In general that is what this book is teaching: how to effectively interact with all students by showing them by example what behaviors you expect from them and then providing opportunities for them to change their bullying and victim habits. By doing this, we are empowering children to prevent and solve their problems.

This book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of bullying. Chapter 2 addresses the foundation of change, which is creating a

cooperative classroom environment. It also includes techniques and activities designed to heighten awareness of the bully and victim problem as well as to change everyone's attitudes and behaviors for the better. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss victims and bullies, respectively, and how you can help both. Chapter 5 provides information and interventions on how to keep a safe and secure school community. One of the most effective deterrents to bullying and aggression in school is adult intervention with student support. This chapter provides strategies for working with potentially violent students and offers activities that can help create safer schools *and* school buses. The final chapter addresses the rising problem of cyberbullying.

The dual purpose of this book, intervention and prevention, alerts adults and children to the difference between “normal teasing” and bullying situations. Once you understand these dynamics, this book will help you act effectively when children are bullying or being bullied. Stopping a bullying situation is not enough unless we can also cultivate a school climate that prevents the attitudes and behaviors that may have caused the problem to arise. Aggressive behavior is an innate human response more prevalent with young minds and underdeveloped egos. We cannot expect to eliminate all aggressive acts in today's schools, but we can put limits on it where children's interactions and well-being are concerned. This book is written to educate, empower and encourage children and adults, students and teachers, to work in partnership to prevent bullying in our schools across the country. If you do have a bullying problem, regardless of how large or small, you'll be taking concrete steps to improve the lives of your students. If you do not take steps to address the problem, cruelty will continue to grow and be overlooked and, therefore, be condoned, and children will suffer.

I hope this book can help you, your classroom, and your school community become a place where all students are free to work and learn without the fear of being harassed. You as the teacher, counselor, or administrator also have the right to teach without the ongoing concern about bullies and victims, and parents have the right to feel their children are being looked after. Let us know at Good Year Books how these interventions are working. I welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions.

—SiriNam S. Khalsa

# Bullying: An Overview

.....  
*“Out of sight, out of mind.”*



## What Is Bullying?

Bullying takes place when one or more individuals use threats of bodily harm, assault, or battery to cause physical, verbal, or emotional harm to another individual. Simply stated, bullying is any behavior that is hurtful to someone else's physical, emotional, or mental self, regardless if the person intended it to be hurtful or not. It is not something to be minimized. Bullies attempt to control their peers by using verbal or physical threats that can turn into assaults. They choose their victims carefully, finding those who are unpopular and vulnerable to aggressive acts.

People are not born bullies. They often become bullies after being bullied when they were young. It is a learned behavior that has taken on a persona that enables a child to feel psychologically big and powerful. Research points out that by age thirty, approximately 25 percent of adults who were bullies as children have a criminal record. This demonstrates the urgency of early intervention.