



HELPING OUR CHILDREN LIVE BULLY FREE

A **PARENT'S GUIDE** for children in **GRADES 3-6**

We all want our children to live in a safe, caring and non-violent world. Everyone – from parents, to schools, to the community at large – has a role to play in creating a positive place for our children to learn and grow.

Rio Rancho Public Schools supports safe and caring school environments.

Were you ever bullied as a child?

Then likely, you can still recall the pain it caused. As parents, we all want to protect our children and see them grow into healthy, well-adjusted adults. Bullying can undermine this, weakening self-esteem and school performance and scarring our children for years.

Protecting our children. How do you spot bullying?



When a child is continually put down, they are being bullied. That does not mean it is easy to spot. Some bullying leaves bruises we can see, while other types of bullying leaves emotional scars.

Essentially, bullying falls into three categories: **physical**, **emotional** and **social**.

As the name implies, **physical bullying** harms a victim's physical self or personal property. It may start with threats but, like all types of bullying, unless someone intervenes it can escalate into pushing, shoving, and fighting. Another form of physical bullying includes extortion, so if your child comes home hungry or missing personal possessions, there is a chance he or she is being bullied.

All bullying is painful. Some bullying is hard to detect because it does not leave physical bruises.

Forget the old idea that names will never hurt you. **Emotional bullying** can be devastating. Insulting remarks, name-calling and dirty looks may seem like child's play, but they're not. Emotional bullying is demeaning, upsetting and frightening.

Social bullying is the most difficult type of bullying to detect. After all, there are no scars, no destroyed or stolen property to help a parent discover that their child is being bullied. Social bullying may start with a dirty look. From there, ignoring, gossiping and spreading rumors usually follow. Then children may be shunned by their classmates and no longer be invited to birthday parties or to play at other children's homes.

There are three types of bullying:

Physical: where a person or his/her property is harmed

Emotional: where a person's feelings are hurt through insults and name-calling

Social: where a person is shunned and excluded from groups and events

Differences between girls and boys...

Studies show that both girls and boys bully. Boys generally tend to rely more on verbal and physical intimidation. Girls generally use tactics like teasing, gossiping, insulting, or

excluding their victims from social events. Bullying can be extremely painful and needs to be taken very seriously by both the parents and the school.

How much harm can it really cause?

The issue of bullying has to be taken seriously. Victims of bullying can develop severe depression. If it continues into their teen years, it can even lead to suicide. Studies reveal that bullies are four times more likely to become adult criminals.

Bullying is serious. Studies show that the majority of bullies end up in jail by their mid 20s. Victims can suffer from low self-esteem and depression throughout their adult lives.

Harassment and bullying grow. They may start as a mean look or insulting remark. Without intervention, bullying can grow into fighting, alienation, extortion, and weapon use.

Studies reveal that people who have witnessed bullying and didn't intervene felt more fearful and lived with a sense of shame. To say the least, bullying affects everyone. Silence only perpetuates the problem.

As a preschooler, Jackie would often exclude other children at her playgroup. Since no adults stepped in, her behavior continued. By the time Jackie reached Grade 2, social bullying had become a habit. She would whisper about other children and tell her friends who they could or could not play with. It gave Jackie a sense of power and control.

Why do some kids bully? Bullies are poor students...and other myths



A bully's power comes from many sources. It may be that the bully is physically stronger, has superior intelligence, especially in the form of "street smarts", or has power through group affiliation. At one time bullies were thought to have a low sense of self-esteem. Now studies show that bullying builds self-esteem.

Children who bully are not loners; most have a small, close group of friends who witness and support their behavior. Bullies need an audience.

Bullies are found in all economic, social and racial groups. Bullies are not poor students; most achieve average grades. Finally, "once a bully always a bully" is another myth. Bullying is learned behavior that can be unlearned.

So, where do kids learn to bully?

Bullies are often victims too. They may have learned their behavior by being bullied themselves by another child, sibling, or even a parent, teacher or coach.

Kids who bully are not living in a vacuum. They learned their behavior somewhere. Many bullies are victims themselves. For example, there may be a significant power imbalance where one parent or a sibling is consistently dominant over others. Some bullies lack empathy or compassion. They believe that their victims had it coming to them, and therefore, feel very little guilt for hurting others. Bullying can be a vicious cycle where victims often turn to bullying others out of frustration. The sooner we take bullying seriously, the sooner the cycle will be broken.

Is my child a bully?

Signs your child is bullying others:

- ***Comes home with “gifts” from other children***
- ***Insensitive to the feelings of others***
- ***Gets into frequent fights***

In reality, bullies are hard to spot, because they have learned to bully when adults are not watching. However, there are some signs to watch for. Children who have trouble concentrating in class, get into frequent fights, don't listen to adults and are insensitive to the feeling of others, may have a tendency to bully. Even more disturbing is when a child reacts to disappointments and criticism with extreme anger, blame or revenge, and is cruel or violent towards pets. This may signify a need for professional help.

Bullying isn't always obvious. Sometimes children who consciously ignore or whisper about another child are bullying. A more obvious sign could be when a child shows up at home with “gifts” from another kid.

What can a parent do?

If your child is accused of bullying:

- ***Stay calm***
- ***Do not deny it***
- ***Listen to both sides***
- ***Try to be helpful***
- ***Explain that bullying is unacceptable***

If you suspect that your child is bullying others, discuss your concerns with your child. You may discover the reason for the bullying is that he or she is being victimized by someone else.

If your child is accused of bullying, don't threaten punishment; this just keeps the cycle going. Instead, talk about how his or her words or actions can hurt others. Then decide on a logical consequence—for example, apologizing to the child who's been hurt.

When Michael's parents received a call from the school telling them their child had been bullying others, they were tempted to deny it. Instead, they remained calm and listened to both sides of the story. By doing so, they discovered that Michael was having trouble making friends and was bullying out of frustration. Michael received help in learning to socialize better. In the end, Michael made friends and the bullying stopped.

As a parent, you have the right to be informed of your child's behavior and to have access to your child's student records. You also have the right to appeal any decision made by the school that adversely affects the education, health or safety of your child.

Every bully needs a victim ...



The fact is bullies have no power without their victims. Research reveals that there are two types of victims, **passive** and **provocative**.

Passive victims are the most common. Often smaller in stature than their bullies, they tend to be shy and have fewer friends. They spend their energy trying to avoid bullies.

Provocative victims are more rare and often thought to be bullies themselves. They regularly pester others, are quick tempered, have problems socially interacting and are willing to fight back.

All victims who are bullied may live in fear and silence and need our help to deal with the trauma.

There are two types of victims:

- ***Those who are shy and small in stature***
- ***Those who provoke others and have trouble socializing***

Both types need our help.

Is your child a victim?

Signs your child is being bullied:

- ***Invitations to events and parties drop off***
- ***Upset stomach***
- ***Sleeplessness***
- ***Sulkiness***
- ***Avoiding school***
- ***Coming home disheveled***
- ***Missing personal possessions***

As children get older, they become more reluctant to tell you that they are being bullied. There is a strong code of silence around bullying, even among children in the elementary grades.

If your child is avoiding school, complaining of headaches or stomachaches, has changed the route to school for no apparent reason, returns home from school disheveled or extremely hungry, or is missing personal possessions, he or she may be a victim of bullying. Other signs include crying, sleeplessness or sleeping much more than normal.

Trust your instincts. If your "parent radar" is telling you something is wrong, you are probably right.

In Grade 4, Maria suddenly found herself at the brunt of racial slurs and mean comments by children she once considered her friends. Eventually the bullying escalated. Maria's lunches were stolen and her schoolbooks were defaced. Normally a happy child, Maria became quiet and sullen. When her parents expressed concern, Maria covered up the bullying with lies. She was afraid that if she told the truth, the bullies would retaliate.

How can a parent help?

It's tempting to tell your child to stand up to a bully. The fact is that such action usually creates a far more dangerous situation. Bullying is real and must be treated seriously, right from the start. Never blame your child for the bullying, and do not tell your child to deal with it on his or her own. Listen closely to your child without interrupting. While it's great to help your child problem-solve, chances are he or she has tried everything.

- ***Take bullying seriously***
- ***Listen to your child***
- ***Help your child problem-solve***
- ***Do not blame your child for the bullying***
- ***Do not expect your child to deal with it on his/her own***

Encourage your children to tell you about any bullying they may be aware of. If you are aware of an incident yourself, talk to the school. You can even do this anonymously. At home, talk about bullying with your children. Ask them how they would deal with bullying if it happened to them, or to others. Discussions like these can be the first step in changing things for the better. It is important that we break the code of silence about bullying and harassment.

Encourage your child to have friends over after school or on the weekend. Just one friend can go a long way in keeping self-esteem intact. Get your child involved with something he or she is good at and enjoys such as art classes, music lessons, sports, or groups such as the Girl and Boy Scouts. It will help build their self-confidence.

Should a parent intervene?



Intervention is vital. But how you intervene is just as important. Generally, it is not recommended that you contact the parent of a bully. Instead, talk with your child about reporting the bullying to the school. The older your child is the more resistance you will get, so remind him or her that there is a difference between “reporting” and “tattling” or “ratting”. Reporting is done to keep someone safe. Tattling is done to get someone in trouble.

When you talk to the school, ask about the school's plan to address bullying that includes the confidentiality of your child's identity in making a report. If you are getting little response following the report, call your local school district office and ask to speak to someone responsible for this area. If the bullying continues, document the incident(s). This helps to identify a pattern and provide some objectivity. Keep in mind that kids often bully others in response to their own victimization. By addressing the situation, both the victim and the bully can get the help they need.

Here is how to intervene:

- ***First, get your child's OK to report.***
- ***Explain that reporting is done to keep people safe.***
- ***Ensure the school protects your child's identity before discussing the problem.***
- ***Document the incidents.***
- ***Call your school district office for more help.***

An ounce of prevention...

Help prevent bullying by:

- *Modeling anger management*
- *Accepting differences in others*
- *Monitoring television use*
- *Knowing your children's friends and whereabouts*
- *Having limits but providing choices*



Day to day there is a lot we can do to help prevent bullying. First, talk to your child about what it means to be a friend. Discuss and model non-violent ways to cope with anger. Teach acceptance and the value of differences. Avoid stereotyping others through jokes and comments. Get to know your child's friends. Invite them into your home. When your child is away, know where and with whom. Discuss what he or she sees in the media, and monitor the use of television, violent games and toys. Talk to your child about how words and actions can hurt others. Teach empathy by discussing "what if" scenarios where your child imagines how it feels to be in a victim's shoes. Set age-appropriate limits, but also allow children to make some choices within those limits. For example, while the rule is that your child must clean his or her room, when to do this task could be his or her choice within reason. Finally, avoid using physical punishment; instead, consider means such as withdrawal of privileges.

It is up to everyone. Get involved with your child's school.

Bullying usually occurs when children are on their own. A parent's presence at special events such as school concerts and field trips or during recess and lunch hours can be helpful. Many schools have implemented anti-bullying strategies. All Rio Rancho teachers have access to anti-violence training programs and information through the district's Safe and Drug Free Schools program.

Parent Resources

ON-LINE INFORMATION ON BULLYING

<http://www.bullying.org>

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/>

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp>

<http://www.cfchildren.org/bully.html>

National PTA Resources to Stop Bullying <http://www.pta.org/bullying>

RRPS Website: Internet Safety Information

COMMUNITY LISTING

RRPS Student Services Department (505) 896-0667 Ext. 129

On-Line Resources <http://www.sandovalhealth.org/scchp/agencySearch/index.php>

Domestic Violence State Hot Line (800) 773-3645

Haven House Domestic Violence PO Box 15611, Rio Rancho, NM 87174 (505) 896-4869

La Buena Vida, Inc. Counseling 872 Camino del Pueblo, Bernalillo, NM 87004 (505) 867-2383

Presbyterian Medical Services (Rio Rancho Family Health) Rio Rancho (505) 896-0928

Youth Development, Inc. 1710 Centro Familiar SW, Albuquerque, NM 87105 (505) 831-6038



For more information, or if you need to contact someone, please contact the Counselor at your child's school first. You can also contact the Executive Director of Student Services, Tonna Burgos at 896-0667.

Created by: Rio Rancho Public Schools' Safe and Drug Free Schools: Middle School Coordinator Program

Special Thanks to: British Columbia Ministry of Education Live Violence Free Campaign Copyright © 2001, Province of British Columbia