



## Bullies

There was once a man who liked to go to the park and throw out breadcrumbs. The longer he went, and the more breadcrumbs he threw out, the more pigeons flocked around him. The man did not like this, he was very upset by the pigeons flying all around him. The man was afraid, angry, and felt very wronged by the pigeons behavior, fluttering all about him, making their sounds, why, he said, won't they just leave me alone? Don't they know I don't like them all around me like this? Because the man did not like these pigeons and felt they were wrong to fly and strut all around him, he began going to the park even more often and throwing out more breadcrumbs in his defiance and outrage. This of course encouraged the pigeons, and made more of them come to him more often.

What advice would you give the man who liked to go to the park and throw out breadcrumbs? What behaviors do you think are like breadcrumbs to bullies, encouraging them to come around more often and do what you do not like more? What could you do instead?

Consider treating the victims rather than the bullies. To me there is something very strange about punishing bullies, and we know from research that this does not work. Why would it? Isn't it modeling using your power against someone less powerful to make them behave the way you want? And so the bully, once punished, after doing his time in ISS or whatever, goes out and takes from others he doesn't approve of.

Early warning signs ie the precursors of bullying behavior:

- Irritability, impatience, moodiness from an early age.
- Tendency to perceive others as having hostile intent- such as seeing others as meanly making them lose with hostile intent rather than just trying to win as expected in the game.
- Quick retaliation for real or imagined threats.
- Trouble identifying feelings, acts out rather than communicating.
- Difficulty recognizing their pain and the pain of others.
- Abusive or neglectful home environment.

Developing class rules to deal with bullying:

1. Discuss what is bullying, get examples from the students.
2. Teach that if everyone sticks together, no one is left out and a bully can't isolate or pick on anyone.
3. Teach the difference between tattling and telling. Telling is when something could be dangerous and someone could get hurt. Otherwise, write it or draw it and put it in the tattlebox. Letting the teacher know that someone is being verbally or physically abusive is not tattling.
4. Present and discuss these rules about bullying:
  - We agree no student will be permitted to bully another student.



- We agree we will help any student being bullied by telling them to stop and/or getting help from an adult.
- We agree not to exclude any student from an activity in school or on the playground.

5. Post the rules in the classroom.

### How do you teach a target to deal with bullying?

-First of all, don't tell them they are the victim, use the word target. There is an important semantic difference here.

-Don't make yourself a big target- how does your posture show weakness and invite a bully? Practice proper posture, confidence in tone of voice, pitch voice lower, gait and style of walking. If it's a boy they shouldn't be prancing with their hands held higher than their waist. Chest out, shoulders back, chin high, gaze direct, not confrontational glaring, not fearful looking away. Observe the student and interview peers for any other behaviors they may be engaging in that may make them a big target for bullying. Point out that sometimes we fake it until we make it. Play poker with some loose change so they understand how to bluff.

-Don't show a big reaction- remember the pigeons and breadcrumbs story.

-Build self-esteem (for more information and techniques for self-esteem see my video and accompanying ebook).

-Remind them that nobody can make you feel anything without your permission and cooperation. Tell the student you want to play a game with them. Explain that you want them to imagine that you have put \$500 or even \$1,000 dollars on the corner of the table or desk. Say that they can win the money by not getting upset while you make fun of them and call them names. Ask them if they could win. If they don't smile right away, say, "Sure, you could, you'd sit there smiling thinking about all the money you are getting from this fool who is making it easy for you. See? As long as you decide that there is no way you are going to make you feel upset, I can't make you." I've done this scores of times and nearly all the kids get it, unless they are really concrete or entrenched and trained in victim mentality. "Refuse to give them the power to make you mad.

-Do not defend yourself from verbal taunts, accusations, name-calling. It takes two to create a conflict, if you defend yourself an enemy is automatically created.

-Hit them back? Well, that's a controversial answer, you'd better not say that if you work for the school, especially if you haven't consulted with the parents yet. Personally, I trained my kids to hit back if they are being hurt and can't get away. Punch them in the nose or kick them in the balls, if they have them. Telling is the teacher answer, but socially this can backfire through disrespect into more bullying, and many students have



reported to me that they told the teacher and it didn't help. At least if you fight back, even if you get beat up the bully and your peers will respect you after and the bullying may stop, so socially, and for the targets' own self-respect, trying to get at least one really good lick in on the bully may be the better answer if the target is getting physically hurt and abused. I do definitely think you should alert the parents to the problem, and inquire how they plan to advise their child.

-Get a big friend.

-Help the student to get a group to hang out with to reduce isolation and create more safety. Maybe introduce them to a group you think they could fit in with; ask the group to take the person in. Maybe it's a group of kids who are sometimes labeled as misfits, emo, nerds, jocks, hicks, rockers, whatever.

-Teach about victim mentality.

-Give up your idea of rights and fairness. Are there laws that make people treat each other well and make the world fair? Are their laws against teasing? Are there laws that say you have the right to a life of fairness? How about in nature- if you are a little fuzzy creature running around in the woods, do you have the right not to be eaten by a bigger fuzzy creature? No, it's just whatever happens happens. You have to make your own way, and if you expect life to be fair, you are setting yourself up for a lifetime of disappointment. Learn to say to yourself, "I wish life was fair all the time, and I'm glad that usually it is and most of the time I am treated nicely, I can handle a few problems now and then." Point out that to believe "I must be treated fairly and the way I want to be treated by everyone all the time or else I am going to have a huge meltdown" is ridiculous.

-Watch out for the "shoulds." This is a way to trick yourself into being upset about things that you can't change. You can control yourself and your reactions, not others. If someone always greets you by calling you a fool, and you think they should not do this, you will be upset. You may as well wake up tomorrow and yell "NOOOO! the sky is blue and I think it should be red!" It would be more accurate to say to yourself, or even the other person, "Oh, that's exactly what you should say to me, because that's usually what you say." However the world is, that's exactly the way it should be. Practice acceptance.

-Don't keep it a secret- get help, don't be embarrassed to confer with friends or an adult. This is why people live together in groups. We are here to help each other. Many times have I met with a family who tells me the bullying went on a long time before the kid spoke out about it, especially kids on the autism spectrum.

-Throw them off-balance by stepping towards them, making eye-contact, and saying something really nice to them, or just say "Thanks for the feedback," or "I'll think about that," "You would say that," "I welcome the opportunity to demonstrate I can control myself." Smile and keep walking.



-The student can also say, "Feel free to give me any criticism you want, because I've already decided nothing you can say can hurt or upset me." Remember, don't get upset, or don't show it. This makes you look like you are in control and makes the bully look more and more like a jerk if they continue.

-Ask the student to list, check, or circle the strategies they are most comfortable with trying. Explain that nothing works all the time, and if they try one strategy several times, it simply means it is time to try something else. This is how we solve problems, through effort, action, change, and experimentation.

-When I was an elementary school counselor, I had a simple strategy that worked. I told the complaining target that he was going to have to confront the offending party in person in my office with me present to keep them safe. I taught and had them practice the "When you \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_, and I want you to \_\_\_\_\_." Sometimes if they seemed nervous I had them write out the script for themselves. Typically they don't really want to do this. I explained that I would then tell the other student that if I heard about the problem again, we would be having this meeting again in my office. Since this generally feels weird and awkward for them, they stop. I also got the target to practice standing up for themselves, teaching them a valuable skill and empowering them to deal with problems themselves and feel strong enough to handle it.

See how many wonderful teaching opportunities the gift of unfairness and criticism by others offers?

-Check out [www.bullies2buddies.com](http://www.bullies2buddies.com) for more strategies.

School or class-wide techniques for bully prevention:

-Teach what conflict is. Conflict can simply be a disagreement and is a normal part of relationships. Demonstrate how a conflict can be resolved without fireworks, such as yelling or fighting. "Let's play Chutes and Ladders!" "No, I really want to play checkers." "Okay, let's play checkers, then if we have time, can we play my game?" "Sure." For more advanced students teach the difference between the conflict styles of aggressive, passive-aggressive, submissive (victim), and assertive.

-Train students in conflict resolution. For a simple list see the document "Solve Your Own Problem." Emphasize the importance of a cooperative nature in groups, finding solutions that provide mutual benefits and de-emphasizing the need to win or be right. Provide a step-by-step concrete process for solving a problem.

-Train peer mediators, there are many structured programs available out there for this. Have the student work in pairs and rotate the roles so they all get a chance to practice. Make this a first through twelfth grade procedure.