

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WHEN DEALING WITH BULLYING**

*By Brenda High, Director, Bully Police USA*

I know how parents feel when they realize their child has been bullied at school. In your mind, you want to immediately run down to your child's school, grab some Administrator or Teacher by the throat, and yell at him/her. However, stay calm and think about how your child is feeling. They probably did not want to come to you and tell you about the bullying because they believe that if you say or do something about it, the bullying might get worse. Sometimes they are right in their fears, but if your complaint process is handled right, more often than not, the bullying will stop.

### **Get the story of the bullying as correct as possible from your child**

Listen to your child with your heart and with your mind. Let your child know they have done the right thing by coming to talk to you and that you will find a way to help solve this problem. Get your child's ideas on what they think is the best action to take. Your child is feeling like they have lost control of their school life and that someone else, the bully, is controlling them. Let them know that you will be on their side, (their "lawyer") and will find a solution. Ask for their cooperation if there needs to be minor changes on their part, (i.e. a few changes in behavior, dress, or social skills).

### **Think about how you will approach the school**

If the school has no knowledge that your child being bullied, then it is fair to give the school a reasonable amount of time to work out minor problems to your child's and your satisfaction as a parent.

Request a daily update from your school, and from the teacher, if the bullying happened in his/her classroom. A "fair" amount of time is about one school week. Remind your school that every day your child is being bullied is like an eternity to him/her and your child wants the bullying to stop.

### **Document everything!**

Pretend you are a lawyer and put EVERYTHING in writing. Tape record statements, type them up and have witnesses sign the statements. Take pictures of injuries, places (buildings), people, etc. Enough cannot be said about documentation. Getting the dates, times, locations, and names, not only of the bullying incidents, but also those you talked to at the school. Write down any information that you feel important for reference later, especially any comments made by the principal, superintendent, teachers, etc.

After communicating with an administrator, write a recap of what was said. Fax a copy to the administrator and ask them to correct or change anything that is incorrect or any misunderstandings. Let the administrator know that you will be doing this so that he/she is clear about your desire to solve the bullying. This will assure all parties involved that solutions to the bullying of your child are what you want for an outcome.

Try hard to control the anger you may be having over the bullying. The "poison pen" document full of anger will not accomplish anything and administrator and teachers may have the natural reaction to become angry back. We are all human, well most of us are all human ☺. Administrators will be more willing to help if you act and write statements about your child's bullying situation in a mature and diplomatic way. Keeping and sharing detailed documents will

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help the school admit that they have a problem with bullying and that they must take responsibility.

### **Online Bullying or Cyberbullying**

If your child is being bullied online, copy EVERYTHING. Save all emails or instant-message conversations.

You may feel that you cannot do anything about online bullying because you cannot find the cyberbully. This may not always be true. Computer specialists can track down internet provider addresses of offending websites, and there are computer whizzes that are making a living off fines collected from email spammers. Some police departments have hired these specialists to work in their criminal investigation departments and a good computer and internet investigator is in high demand. If your son or daughter is getting threatening email, your local police department may be able to help or lead you to a private investigator with computer skills. If the emails are terrorist type threats, report this immediately to the police, who will then report it to the F.B.I.

### **Parents sign a service agreement when they sign up for internet services**

Here are some examples of service agreements with internet providers and/or hosts to websites, (i.e. AOL, MSN, XO, Earthlink, etc.)

**WebPages** - By applying to register a domain name, or by asking us to maintain or renew a domain name registration, you hereby represent and warrant to us that (a) the statements that you made in connection with such application for registration, maintenance, or renewal are complete and accurate; (b) to your knowledge, the registration of the domain name will not infringe upon or otherwise violate the rights of any third party; (c) you are not registering the domain name for an unlawful purpose; and (d) you will not knowingly use the domain name **in violation of any applicable laws or regulations**. You agree and acknowledge that it is your responsibility to determine whether your domain name registration infringes or violates someone else's rights...

YOU REPRESENT THAT, TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF, NEITHER THE REGISTRATION OF THE DOMAIN NAME YOU HAVE APPLIED FOR NOR THE MANNER IN WHICH IT IS INTENDED TO BE OR IS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY USED INFRINGES THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF A THIRD PARTY.

**How law enforcement can get your information** - ...may disclose personal information about Visitors or Members, or information regarding your use of the Services or Web sites accessible through our Services, for any reason if, in our sole discretion, we believe that it is reasonable to do so, including: **to satisfy laws, such as the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, regulations, or governmental or legal requests for such information; to disclose information that is necessary to identify, contact, or bring legal action against someone who may be violating our Acceptable Use Policy or other user policies;** to operate the Services properly; or to protect our Members.

The parents of students who are doing the bullying may be liable for the emotional damages caused by their child to another child. If the cyberbullies' parents know what is going on (or had received a letter of complaint), they have "knowledge and notice" of harmful activity. The parents are paying for the telephone bill and internet charges into their home – they are legally responsible for the acts of their children while on the computer and in their care. Parents can be sued for damages.

Inform your school administrators about the cyberbullying your child is experiencing. If cyberbullying happens on school time or with school computers, schools come under the

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“knowledge and notice” rule. If, while a child is being cyberbullied, he/she is threatened to be “beat up” or assaulted while they are in school, the schools must take responsibility for activities that follow a child from their home to their school.

### **Written Notes – Phone bullies**

If your child is being bullied through written notes, phone, or in person, document EVERYTHING. Save all written notes, even if they are not technically bullying. Do NOT throw them away as they can be used to identify a bullying pattern or possibly identify handwriting.

If your child is being bullied in phone conversations, try to get the verbal bullying on your answering machine or on tape. Make it a habit not to answer the telephone right away. Wait for the answering machine to pick up a message. If it is for someone else, the family member can just pick up the phone. Get caller ID and take a picture of the number that the call is coming from. This will document the phone number, date the call came in, and time of day. Taping someone’s conversation without his or her consent cannot be used in court but using a recorded message left on a message machine CAN be used in court. Have your child record in a notebook everything the bully said. Written notes can also be used in court.

You can also call the telephone company and get their advice on handling threatening phone calls. If the phone company feels you have basis (and your written record will help), they can trace and record threatening calls for you.

### **Some bullying must require immediate and swift action**

It is not the job of school administrators or teachers to act as police officers when a serious bullying incident occurs. In cases of a major harassment situation such as a physical or sexual assault, call the police immediately. Age is not an issue, as 6-year-olds have been known to bring guns to school and/or violently bully. (A 6-year-old boy shot and killed a classmate a few years ago in Florida.)

Serious offenses must be handled by the police and entered on the abuser or perpetrator's police record or Juvenile Record. School Administrators can take some actions against bullies and perpetrator(s) but they are not police officers and they open themselves up to lawsuits when they fail to report this type of violent bullying.

There are assault and battery laws that pertain to juvenile offenders. Do not wait. Tell the police right away and have a report written up.

With the proof you have collected, especially when there has been physical violence, obtain a restraining order.

### **It’s time to spill the beans**

There are countless stories of life-threatening injuries bullied children and teens have suffered without the parent or school even knowing about the bullying. A child may feel that if a parent intervenes the bullying will get worse. They think they can be quiet and endure bullying/abuse for the short run thinking things will change, but doing nothing ensures that nothing will change.

There is a feeling of empowerment, and healing, that comes to people who tell their stories. The same is true for bullied kids. Encourage your child to write their stories and begin to talk about what they are going through. They can tell a parent, counselor, teacher, administrator, a lawmaker, and the news media or even write a book. Help your son or daughter make decisions that will be proactive and work towards a positive solution to their bullying problem.

### **What to do when the administrators or teachers will not help**

Once in awhile, sadly, administrators and/or teachers will not stop the bullying. They may give many excuses but the number one excuse is that they lack time and resources to deal with just one child, that they have too many students to worry about one child being bullying. "Let them figure it out by themselves," "It's part of growing up," or "Boys will be boys" is still the attitude of many uneducated school personnel.

Now the parent has to go on a "mission" to save their child. Here are some things a parent can do to bring awareness to the school.

- Write a letter to the Principal of the school. Write a letter to the Principal after each incident of harassment. (Keep a copy in your file)
- Write letters to School Board Members. Write letters to Board members separately and after each incident of harassment. (Keep a copy in your file)
- Write a letter to the Superintendent. Write a letter to the Superintendent after each incident of harassment. (Keep a copy in your file)
- Go to School Board meeting and speak out. It is not just your child that you are thinking about, but also all the other children who are harassed and have parents who will not, or do not know how, to speak for them.
- Write multiple letters to your State Representatives (The State Senate and House Education Committee). Tell them what is happening in your school and how your Administrators are handling your child's case.
- Write a letter to each member of the Education Committee separately and after each incident of harassment. (See the BullyPolice.org website to see if your laws, policies or codes are listed)
- Write a letter to the Editor of your local newspaper. Do not embarrass your child with details, but write instead about your schools lack of response for harassed students in general.
- Consider going to the television stations. Bullying can be very dangerous and taxpayers have a RIGHT to know what is going on in their local schools. Voters also have a right to know what their candidates for the school board believe and if they will support and vote for good common sense anti bullying policies.

There is strength in numbers. Try to find out the names of other families within your child's school who are experiencing similar bullying and harassment issues. As a group, you can have even a stronger voice for change and action.

### **Bullying is an adult problem**

Do not let anyone, (Administrators, teachers, etc), try to put the blame of bullying on your child, a victim of the bully. The blame is always on the bully and the reason for the bullying is that adults allow it to happen. Bullies bully because they can, and because they can get away with it. Adults let bullies get away with bullying and when adults choose to do something to stop the bullying, it will stop.

Tell administrators that you will discuss your child's problems when they have resolved the bullying.

### **When to call an attorney**

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If you have not been satisfied with the response you have received from School Administrators within a reasonable period, then hire an Attorney. If this is a case of a major harassment situation, such as a physical or sexual assault, call an Attorney within 24 hours. DO NOT let your school become your attorney! They have already proven that they do not have your child's best interest in mind or they would have solved the bullying problem. They are not the parents of your child and they do not love your child as you do. Armed with your documented evidence, and your repeated requests for help, you will find that the schools will take responsibility for their actions, or they will pay for their incompetence in court.

### **Going to the top for help**

Check out [www.bullypolice.org](http://www.bullypolice.org) to see if your state has an anti bullying law. If your state needs improvement or has no law, contact your local State Representative or State Senator and get something started. Ask them to support State laws that will protect children from bullies, students who are whistle blowers, give counselors to victims, and make stronger laws to force bullies to take responsibility for their actions. If your State has a law, than insist that your school districts obey the law.

Be sure and read up on how to get a good anti bullying law at the [www.bullypolice.org](http://www.bullypolice.org) website. Do your homework. Obtain copies of your State law and your school district policies regarding bullying, harassment, and your child's right to a safe learning environment. If your school does not have a policy, insist that they get one and volunteer to get on the committee to write it.

Its time that every school in America has a clear direction, by common sense laws, to stop the hurt and pain that goes on every day in a place where our children should feel safe and secure. .

It only takes one voice to make a difference.

### **In the aftermath – how to help your child heal**

Keep listening and communicating with your child. Ask them questions about how they are doing in school, like, "Did you play with anyone on the playground today?" or "Did you sit with anyone at lunch today". You are checking to see if your child is spending any time with friends. A lonely child is at great risk for depression. Continue to ask your child about the bullying and whether the situation has improved.

Consider getting your child in to see a Counselor or Therapist. Check with the school district to see if they have any qualified counselors, who have dealt with bullying and the conditions it may cause, like depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorders. Follow up frequently with the school

See who else in your area has children going through bullying or have children who have dealt with bullying. A positive and proactive approach would be to work with your school district to get a quality anti bullying program into your local schools. This can also be a "healing" activity, to take away the anger that victims of bullying harbor inside. Get creative - Bullying decreases when students, parents and child activists show their numbers, demanding positive changes inside their schools.

Find a healing extracurricular activity. There are Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, self-defense classes, volunteer organizations in the community, church activities, or community events. Do something as a family or perhaps develop a hobby.

### **Stay united as a family**

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Remember that you are not alone. There are a good number of us out there experiencing the same thing. Have a game plan in mind including removing your child from the school, home schooling, requesting that the school provide a tutor, etc. These are often hard decisions to make, but they may be the only options available as you work at resolving the problem.

"Be strong. Turn your anger and disgust into something positive. You owe it to yourself and your child's academic success and happiness." Ken Kuczynski, President Power of One Foundation, Inc. <http://www.powerofonefoundation.org/>