

Bullying: What Teachers Can Do About It

Bullying is not just physical aggression by one student against another. Bullying can take on a lot of different forms, such as:

- Teasing and name calling
- Sexual harassment
- Intimidation, threats
- Verbal cruelty
- Rumours or gossip
- Exclusion
- Pushing, shoving or tripping
- Slander
- Religious, racial or gender slurs
- Assault
- Embarrassment or humiliation
- Cyberbullying

As a teacher, you need to be aware of all of these, and be prepared to do something about it if you discover it happening in your classroom or school. And make no mistake, you *will* encounter it; kids can be unintentionally cruel.

What can you as a teacher do about bullying? Here are some suggestions.

- Model the behaviour you expect from your students. If you show respect for others, both in and out of the classroom, your students will model it too, to try to please you. This is especially true for younger students. Never ever talk down to students, or be sarcastic; they will think that this is OK, and will do it themselves.

- When you know who the potential bullies are, try to change their behaviour by being more attentive to them. Find out their likes and their values. Talk to them often about these things; make them feel like someone cares about them.

Encourage your bullied students to do the same ... friendships can result. My best friend in high school was a bully in elementary ... he picked on me a lot ... until we discovered that we both liked and were good at soccer.

- Bullies like attention. Give them lots of it, in the form of positive reinforcement. Recognize them for positive behaviours, and make sure they know exactly what it was they did that pleased you.

- Talk to your class about bullying. Let them know what to look for ... they may not always recognize it. Talking about it raises their awareness of the problem. Make sure they know that it's all right to talk to an adult whenever they see it happening.

- Make it clear that bullying, in any of its forms, will not be tolerated, and that reports of bullying will always be taken seriously.

- Role-play the various forms of bullying with your students. Let them act out different situations. Let them talk about how it makes them feel. Have another teacher join in, and bully *you* in a way that a kid might bully another. They won't forget the message.

- Show your students how to react to a bully. Role-play that too.

- Make sure you know the policies that are in place in your school to deal with bullying.

- If you suspect that one of your students is being bullied, deal with it right away. Their thoughts will be on what's been happening, not on your lessons, so the sooner you deal with it, the better.

- Make sure other staff and parents know about potential bullying problems.

- Remember that, as a teacher in a school, it is your responsibility to look after the well-being of *all* students in the school, not just the ones in your classroom.