

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### 1) WHAT IS BULLYING BEHAVIOR?

Bullying behavior involves repeated and intentional harassment and attacks on others. Bullying can be perpetrated by individuals or groups and can take on many forms such as verbal, physical, social, sexual, racial, and perhaps the most prevalent of all, cyberbullying. Bullying is about an imbalance of power and results in a pattern of negative behavior. Bullying should not be confused with normal peer conflict whereby both parties have equal power and the conflict is relatively short lived. Conflict is normal; **bullying is not!**

### 2) IS A BULLY BORN THIS WAY? IS IT INNATE?

Bullies are not born that way, rather their personality is developed through the environment in which they are raised. Bullying is a learned behavior that is modeled and reinforced early in childhood. The characteristics of intolerance, judgment, and a sense of entitlement are generally modeled and reinforced at home by the parent or caregiver. The sense of entitlement and lack of remorse becomes more deep-rooted the longer an individual gets away with the mean-spirited behavior. It is not surprising that little bullies grow up to be big bullies if we do not intervene and set consistent guidelines and consequences regarding unacceptable behaviors.

### 3) HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE A PERSON WHO BULLIES OTHERS?

Bullies want to be in charge and assert their power. They value the rewards that their behavior gets them and they have learned that they can get what they want, when they want, and that most likely, no-one is going to stop them.. Bullies learn to justify their behavior and without consequences they will develop a lack of empathy and difficulty feeling compassion towards their targets.

### 4) HOW DO BULLIES ACHIEVE SO MUCH POWER?

Bullies generally need to create a group of followers that condone their behavior and support it through silence or apparent acceptance. A bully relies on this group to help them feel powerful and maintain status.

There is another very large group in schools, sports, and the workplace who are known as bystanders or the silent majority. They do not condone the bully's behavior but they do not speak up, confront or report the bully. By remaining silent they are part of the problem as their lack of action further increases the status and power of the bully.

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### 5) HOW HAS BULLYING BEHAVIOR CHANGED SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF 'SCHOOL-YARD BULLYING'?

The difference between the bullying that occurs in schools today and the bullying that occurred in schools in the 20th century is widely due to the prevalent use of technology. While verbal, social, physical, and racial/cultural forms of bullying have always been part of human interaction in our schools, sports, and workplaces, the advent of social media and mobile technology has resulted in crippling and sometimes deadly cyberbully outcomes. Prior to mobile technology, a person could leave the school or the workplace and go home to a safe, bully free environment. Today, unfortunately, the bullying is coming into our living rooms and bedrooms via social media, texts, e-mails, etc. There is simply no escape from the devastating and hurtful comments of others.

### 6) IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHILDHOOD BULLYING AND ADULT BULLYING?

There is really no significant difference between children who bully and adults who bully. It is still about a power imbalance between the bully and their target. As we say in the world of bully prevention, if a child is not held accountable for their repetitive mean-spirited behavior, it is very likely the child will grow up to be a bigger version of a bully in the workplace, in the community, and in our homes.

### 7) WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE TARGETED?

*There are three groups who are more likely to become the targets of bullying.*

#### A. Passive Individuals

Passive children and adults tend to be quiet and shy in temperament. They often do not retaliate or make any assertive responses to the bullying. Instead, passive individuals react in non-verbal ways such as crying or showing frustration and/or fear. The bully sees this as a weakness and gets great pleasure out of this reaction. Passive individuals tend to have a lack of social support at school, on a sport team, or in the workplace and they are often not confident in their ability to stop the bully.

#### B. Provocative Individuals

While most targets of bullying try to avoid provoking the perpetrator, there is a subgroup of individuals who tend to show irritating and inappropriate social behavior without knowing that this is what they are doing. These individuals tend to be impulsive and have poor social skills. Due to their inability to 'read the room' or pick up on social cues, they are a favorite target for a bully. This inability to utilize proper social skills results in little support from their peers and makes them a frequent recipient of torment.

#### C. People with Differences

Individuals who bully others also often target those who seem "different". Children with disabilities or chronic diseases are sometimes more likely to be bullied than children without disabilities. As well, individuals are more often bullied for reasons relating to sexual or gender identity/orientation, cultural or faith background, race, and socioeconomic status.

### 8) DO BULLIES HAVE LOW SELF-ESTEEM?

Having low self-esteem is the most common misconception regarding individuals who bully others. It is widely believed that bullies mistreat others in order to feel better about themselves and their situation. This is a myth! Studies show that most individuals who bully actually have a very inflated sense of self.

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### 9) ARE TARGETS OF BULLYING LIKELY TO CONTINUE BEING TARGETED THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFETIME?

The most common misconception regarding the targets of bullying is “once a victim, always a victim”. If we can give children the support and life skills they need to maneuver through this challenging world, they will become resilient and resourceful. Another misconception is that targets of bullying are primarily picked on because of physical appearances such as size or shape of body. While physical appearance can play a role, it is the individual's reaction to bullying that is often the primary reason they are targeted in the first place. Bullies often seek out those that are easy to tear, quick to show frustration, or easily angered.

### 10) DO PARENTS WHO BULLY HAVE CHILDREN THAT BULLY?

Children pick up on all of the nuances in their homes, community and on television/social media. If they are surrounded with messages of intolerance and disrespect, it will most certainly have an impact on their character and personality development.

By age 3-5, children become aware of individual differences but they do so with great curiosity and zero judgment. Parents/caregivers must understand that their own beliefs and actions are likely forming their child's view of the world and how they react to it. Parents/caregivers need to be positive role models for their children. They must recognize that every time they interact with their children, or their children see them interacting with others, parents are teaching them something. As a result if a child is raised in a household where power is used to intimidate, it is possible the child will grow up to use the same tactics. Often the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

### 11) WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED?

The sooner parents/caregivers understand and acknowledge that bullying is a serious problem and not just something to be brushed off, the more chance we have to change the inappropriate and unacceptable behavior. Bullying is not a ‘right of passage’ that all kids must go through. While peer conflict is a very normal part of growing up, bullying is not. If a child reports that they are being bullied, we as adults must take it seriously. Listen to your child and take notes. If it is determined that the negative behavior is occurring repeatedly, then the parent/caregiver must work with the school to ensure their child is safe. Parents must be their child's advocate but they must also know the difference between what is typical peer conflict and when it has escalated into bullying.

### 12) HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS BULLYING OTHERS?

*It is time to intervene when your child is consistently showing the following traits:*

- No remorse
- Quick to blame others
- Power oriented
- Little or no emotion towards the child they are targeting
- Ego-centric

While all children show signs of the above, if you have a child who is consistently lacking remorse or empathy and if you know there is a strong adult influence in the child's life that demonstrates the same traits, then it is better to err on the side of caution and get the child some help. We are not doing anyone any favors by ignoring this behavior in young children and hoping that it is just due to a lack of maturity or lack of social skills.

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### 13) HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD IS A TARGET OF BULLYING?

If children would just tell us what is going on in their lives, we could intervene much more effectively and efficiently. Unfortunately, children who are bullied often put on a “mask of happiness” as if everything is fine in their world. They may give us subtle cues but as busy adults we often miss out on these cries for help. In order to know if your child is being bullied, you must open up the lines of communication. As with some other topics that we may not look forward to discussing with our children, such as alcohol, drugs or sex, we must add bullying and healthy friendships to this list and make it a ‘non-stigma’ topic to talk about. Share your own stories of being bullied or having witnessed bullying. Children, like adults, feel ashamed that they are being targeted. By sharing our own stories, we take away that shame and allow children to be more honest and open with us.

### 14) HOW DO WE SHIFT A CULTURE OF BULLYING TO A CULTURE OF CARING?

Bullying ends when every stakeholder is involved in the effort of bully prevention. In a school setting, this means that the staff, students, and parents must all work together to create a common language around bullying. Students need to learn non-reactive strategies, staff need to learn no-nonsense approaches to bullying, administrators need to create and implement a clear and concise code of conduct, and parents must continue to work with the school to enforce a bully-free environment. Bullies only make up 2% of the population. We need to shift the power imbalance into the caring majority's hands.

### 15) IS A BULLY A NARCISSIST?

If a child is exhibiting bullying behaviors and there are no consequences or attempts to change the behavior, there is a chance that some personality traits will be formed that are similar to a narcissist. In fact, 20% of children who bully, without consequence, will go on to have a mental health issue in adulthood related to a personality disorder (in some cases that disorder is narcissism).

### 16) HOW LONG SHOULD A PARENT WAIT BEFORE REPORTING BULLYING TO THE SCHOOL?

*This really depends on two things:*

1. The impact it is having on your child
2. The severity of the bullying

If your child is suffering emotionally and/or their safety is in danger then you need to immediately work with the school to alleviate the problem (this is true whether it is bullying or even just a one-time incident).

### 17) HOW DO I PROTECT MY CHILD IN THIS DIGITAL AGE?

When it comes to your child's online activities, knowledge is truly power. Set rules and expectations with your child, such as when and where they can access their devices and daily usage. Set the guidelines for age-appropriate apps like social media, gaming, etc. Be proactive in educating your children on how they can contribute to their safety by being aware of issues in the digital world.

It's hard to know what children are exposed to daily, and challenging to keep up with the constant shift in technology and social platforms. Familiarize yourself with the basic principles and terminology of online security. Some great Parental Control Tools can help you navigate the growing digital world and provide a safer cyber experience for your child.

Here are just a few tools for you to explore: **Circle, Norton Family, Qustodio, Bark, Net Nanny, Google Family Link.**