

STEP IN SPEAK UP

10 actions you can take to help
ELIMINATE BULLYING.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The latest research is startling: More than half of all children have been involved in bullying as a perpetrator, target or both. Those who aren't directly involved often witness others being bullied. Bullying affects kids of every race, gender identity, grade and socioeconomic sector. But it doesn't have to be this way. Here are 10 actions you as a parent or Scouter can take to help address bullying.

1 Talk — and listen. Adults are often the last to know when young people are bullying others or being bullied. Talk to your kids about their social lives. Ask open-ended questions about their school friends, what they do between classes, their lunchmates, and what happens on the way to and from school. If children feel comfortable talking to you *before* they're involved in a bullying event, they'll be much more likely to get you involved *after*.

2 Be present. Research shows 67 percent of bullying happens when adults aren't around. Volunteering at school or a Scouting event once a week or once a month can make a real difference. Your presence will encourage kids to play well with others. Ask your child's teacher, principal or Scout leader how you can best serve.

3 Lead by example. Kids learn a lot about power relationships by watching you. When you get angry at a waiter, driver or fellow Scout leader, you have a great opportunity to model effective communication techniques. Don't blow it by blowing your top. Any time you speak to another person in a mean or abusive way, you're teaching your child that bullying is OK.

4 Learn the signs. Most children won't tell anyone, especially adults, that they've been bullied. That makes it vital for parents to learn to recognize possible signs of their being targeted, such as frequent loss of personal belongings, complaints of headaches or stomachaches, looking upset after reading a social media post on their phone or computer, avoiding recess or school activities, or getting to school very late or very early.

5 Create healthy habits. Help develop anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits as early as preschool and kindergarten. Coach your children on what not to do, including hitting, pushing or teasing. Help your child to focus on how such actions might feel to the child on the receiving end by asking, "How do you think you would feel if that happened to you?"

6 Learn the policies. Know how your child's school and Scout unit address bullying. Research shows "zero-tolerance" policies aren't effective. It's better to use ongoing educational programs that help create a healthy social climate in the school. This means teaching kids of all ages how to be inclusive leaders and how to be empathic toward others.

7 Establish household rules. Your children and Scouts need to hear explicitly from you that bullying is not OK. They shouldn't tolerate being bullied, either. It's important to define bullying, because many children don't know when they're bullying others. Help young people find other ways to exert their personal power, status and leadership at school, and implement a kindness plan at school and in the Scout unit.

8 Encourage upstanders. Research shows that kids who witness bullying feel powerless and seldom intervene. Children shouldn't put themselves in danger, but they can often effectively diffuse a bullying situation by stating firmly, "Stop! You're bullying!" People who stand up to bullying are called "upstanders." Teach all kids (and adults) to be upstanders.

9 Talk about cyberbullying. Children often don't realize what cyberbullying is. It includes sending rude, vulgar or threatening messages or images; posting private information about another person; pretending to be someone else to make that person look bad; or intentionally excluding someone from an online group. These acts are as harmful as physical violence and must not be tolerated.

10 Spread the word. Bullying should not be a normal part of childhood. Some adults think of bullying as a typical phase of childhood that must be endured or that can help children "toughen up." That's wrong. All forms of bullying are harmful to the perpetrator, the target and even witnesses. The effects last well into adulthood. By sharing this information with other adults you know, we can work together to end bullying. ✦

ANTI-BULLYING RESOURCES

- ▶ **BSA Youth Protection:** scouting.org/training/youth-protection
- ▶ **Bullying Research Network:** cehs.unl.edu/brnet
- ▶ **Netsmartz:** netsmartz.org/cyberbullying
- ▶ **Federal anti-bullying site:** stopbullying.gov
- ▶ **Selected books about bullying:** cehs.unl.edu/empowerment/books