

Love is louder
than bullying

a *Bully* discussion and action guide
for parents



Their stories are tragic. A new chapter starts *now*.

Bully is a movie that tells powerful stories about children and their families dealing with extreme pain and tragic consequences related to bullying. These are sad stories that remind us of the tremendous responsibility we have to stop hurtful behaviors, create supportive communities, and strengthen the emotional health of our children and teenagers.

“Love is Louder than bullying” means that the right types of caring, connection, support and action, can stop and overpower the negative influences and voices that make our children feel disconnected, different or hopeless. This guide turns awareness into action by providing talking points for a discussion with your child and ideas for things you can do as a parent.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you take action to stop bullying and work to build more supportive school and community environments:

Bullying means many things.

Bullying is most often defined as aggressive, and often repeated, behaviors intended to cause harm. They can be verbal, physical or emotional. Many of the examples given in the movie *Bully* are extreme cases in which students are being physically injured, publicly humiliated or seriously threatened. It's important to realize that there are also more subtle forms of mistreatment that can still cause serious damage. Students being talked about behind their backs, looked down upon, left out, or made to feel not good enough, smart enough or attractive enough, can all be just as painful as a shove or a sharp insult. ***So, when we talk about bullying, we must think about a range of hurtful behaviors, as well as the way that makes kids feel, and their ability to deal with those***

Bullying can impact or involve anyone.

Anytime we look at solving a social issue like bullying and mistreatment, it's important to identify groups who might be particularly at risk for distress. So any group of students that feels different or disconnected might be more likely to be mistreated, or feel alone and hopeless. This could include people from certain cultures or religions outside the local mainstream, young people who are LGBTQ or struggling with their sexuality, or students with learning disabilities or special needs. If your child fits into one of these categories, it's important to learn more about the challenges they face and look out for signs that they are having a hard time. But being mistreated or feeling hopeless can happen to any student. ***So just because your child doesn't fit into a certain "mold" doesn't mean they are immune. Likewise, any child is capable of using their actions or words in a way that hurts other. There is no single "type" of bully, and the bystanders who watch, laugh or spread gossip about what happened, are also contributing to the problem.***

It's about the behaviors...and the feelings.

Every individual has a different emotional make-up and a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. We all have different ways that we cope with bad things that happen to us. That's why some young people are able to weather traumatic events like bullying, and others may shut down or have thoughts of self-harm. ***So, while we focus on stopping the hurtful behaviors, we must also look for warning signs of other emotional problems like depression, lack of coping skills and self-image issues that may require attention in addition to the bullying.***

In having a dialogue with your child about *Bully*, it's important to focus on both the problem and the solution. In the film, parents and administrators are shown trying to help, but aren't always able to make things better. It can be frustrating for young people when they can't see hope or an opportunity to make change. As a parent, you can use the discussion started by the movie and news coverage about students being bullied, to empower your child and make decisions on actions you can take as individuals and a family to make things better. Here are some questions and talking points to guide your discussion:

How did the movie make you feel?

Depending on a child's personal experience with bullying and mistreatment, they may have different reactions to the movie. Start your discussion by simply asking how it made them feel. They may mention feeling sad, mad or frustrated, or a mix of those feelings. Acknowledge that these are valid feelings. Also let them know that we have choices when we feel mad or sad about something – we *can* choose to take those feelings and use them in a positive way to change things.

Bullying and mistreatment in their world?

Ask if the film made them think about things going on in their school or in their community. If they bring up certain situations involving them or another student, don't immediately threaten to call the school or a parent. You can set a tone that says it's OK to come to you if they are being mistreated or are worried about someone else, and that you will talk through solutions together.

Suicide shouldn't happen.

In the film there are two families who have children who died by suicide. We also hear these types of stories on the news frequently and they can make students feel hopeless, think that bullying kills people or is the natural response to – or outcome of – bullying, or feel like suicide is a way to stop the pain when nothing else works. It's a hard topic to talk about as a parent, but you should make sure suicide is not a taboo subject in case your child or someone they know ever has thoughts of harming themselves and needs to talk about it. You should make it clear that most people that face tough situations like bullying are able to find ways to change things or cope with it. You should also make it clear that there are other factors that contribute to someone committing self-harm, including depression and lack of family support and acceptance. Sometimes, people are hurting so much that they think there is no other way out. But there is always a way to get help and feel better. Make sure they understand that if they or someone they know is ever hurting so bad that they feel like they can't take it, they should let you know and you will talk through solutions together. [Click here to learn about the warning signs of self-harm.](#)

Diversity and differences.

The movie highlights people who are made to feel different because of race, sexuality or special needs. Have a conversation about any times that your child has felt different. Also ask them if there are people at their school who are made to feel different because of who they are or where they are from. If they identify specific people or groups, take some time to learn more about them and how you can make them feel more supported. [PFLAG](#) has some excellent resources for making communities more inclusive for LGBTQ students and [NCLD](#) offers insight and tools around students with learning disabilities or special needs.

Taking action.

At the end of this guide there are ideas of things students can do to prevent bullying, support themselves and help others. You can also check out action opportunities provided at www.thebullyproject.com. Talk through these ideas together and encourage your child to come up with their own. Make a list of all the things that they can do to make things better.

Actions for Parents

Here are some tips and ideas for things parents can do to prevent bullying, create more inclusive communities and support students who may be struggling emotionally:

Lead by Demonstrating Empathy and Kindness

Let's face it, kids and teens aren't the only ones who start rumors, speak in anger, call people names or get aggressive. If we are challenging our young people to think twice about the impact of their words and actions, then we all have to do the same. Be conscious of how you treat people or talk about others.

Set Boundaries

Treating others with respect shouldn't be an option...it should be the rule. Make it clear that physical, verbal or emotional bullying won't be tolerated. Also make it clear that standing by and watching or laughing at someone being mistreated or bullied is a form of participation.

Trust Your Instincts

You know your child. If you notice injuries, emotional cues or changes in behavior that worry you, have a conversation about your concerns. Don't feel you have to wait until you have solid proof. It's important NOT to make the conversation an accusation such as, "I think you're being bullied and you're not telling me." Start the conversation with what you've observed, not what you think might be happening. "I've noticed you seem a little down lately and I just wanted to check in and see if everything is alright at school." If your child starts to open up, don't immediately push for details and get angry about the situation. Instead, listen and ask questions so they feel comfortable, safe and supported. Be careful not to inadvertently reprimand or punish them for not having told you sooner about the bullying – you want them to feel good about opening up to you.

Be Direct and Consistent When Addressing Problems

Behavioral and emotional issues like bullying and discrimination are often hard for schools to handle. So if you are reaching out to a school administrator or authority figure to report these behaviors, make sure to focus on specific events and incidents. This allows you to request and follow-up on specific actions to help deal with and remedy those situations. PFLAG National provides helpful tools for creating safe school environments through their [Cultivating Respect](#) program. Learn more at www.pflag.org/safeschools.

Know the Warning Signs of Emotional Health Issues and Self-Harm

While bullying can cause tremendous pain for any child, those who are already struggling emotionally or dealing with conditions like depression are more likely to become distressed or suicidal when faced with traumatic events. You can find common warning signs of emotional health issues and self-harm here: <http://www.loveislouder.com/warningsigns>. If you are concerned about your child or someone else in your life, encourage them to talk to you or a counselor about how they are feeling. You can find information and resources at www.loveislouder.com/resources or www.thebullyproject.com.

Ideas for Students

We need students to help us better understand what is going on in their worlds, let us know how they are coping with hurtful behaviors or painful emotions, and look out for warning signs of problems in their peers. They need to feel empowered to make change and comfortable talking to adults about their thoughts or concerns. Here are some ideas to discuss with your child.

1. Speak Up

Sometimes it's hard to speak up and tell somebody that we are being bullied or mistreated, or that we feel different or alone. We feel like we need to be perfect or we don't want to seem whiny or be a burden to other people. Or it may feel embarrassing to tell parents, teachers or friends what others are saying about us or doing to us. Here's the truth — we all have a hard time sometimes and there is nothing wrong with speaking up and saying that you or someone you know are feeling sad, alone or mistreated.

2. Think Twice About Our Words and Actions

In the movie *Bully*, we see examples of really mean or violent behaviors. Being violent or cruel can cause really serious pain and damage. But there are also lots of other ways that we make people feel bad or different: comments or insults said behind someone's back, rumors that are started to embarrass someone, ignoring people or making them feel like they don't fit in, and standing by and watching or laughing when someone else is being bullied. The things we choose to do and say are really powerful. So we can take action daily by making sure we are using our words and actions to help others and not harm them. Instead of making a joke at someone's expense, think of something kind to say. Instead of tweeting or posting an insult, use that as a chance to make someone feel good. We have to think twice before we do or say something that could hurt someone — and then choose to use those words and actions in a good way instead.

3. Focus on the Positive

A few people being mean to us or not accepting us can make it feel like no one cares. It's easy to focus only on the negative and to start believing what's being said by all the voices that are bringing us down. Even when it feels like no one gets us or likes us, it's important that we support and love ourselves. Try and take a moment each day to focus on the positive instead of the negative. Instead of replaying that insult someone threw at you over and over in your head, make a list of things that make you feel good, or things or people you appreciate. And, if you are having a hard time changing the sad or bad feelings, or if you are thinking about hurting yourself — speak up and let someone know. Talking to someone about how you feel really is the first step to feeling better.

4. Look Out for Friends and Classmates

Sometimes we have so many things going on in our own heads and so many things we feel worried or insecure about, that we don't notice when other people are having a really hard time. If you see someone who is being bullied or mistreated, it's important not to ignore it. You never know what is going on in someone's life. They may already be feeling depressed or dealing with tough stuff at home, and that insult or shove might be the thing that makes them feel hopeless. If you notice someone in your school or community seems really down, angry, anxious or hopeless, reach out to them and offer support...or reach out to a parent or teacher and let them know you are worried.

For more ways that students can get involved, visit www.thebullyproject.com or www.loveislouder.com.