



A Quick Reference and Lesson Guide

Dealing with Bullying

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1 Scenarios and Assessment

Scenarios/Case Studies

A. Scenario #1

Susan, a seventh-grade girl who was a naturally gifted writer, completed an assignment for English. She wrote something so creative the teacher decided to read it aloud to her class. Afterwards, some of the other students were jealous because of the attention, and they started bullying her. The bullies used laughter and mockery as weapons to stifle her God-given talent.

B. Scenario #2

Bethany was diagnosed with brain cancer at three years of age. She went through radiation therapy, and was proclaimed a cancer survivor. However, she was left with a crooked smile and experienced years of bullying. It affected her self-esteem and her self-image. Unfortunately, neither school personnel nor her parents appeared to take her complaints about it seriously. Finally, as a sixth grader, she found the gun her parents had hidden at their home and brought an end to the bullying.

C. Scenario #3

Having an active military dad, Curtis moved frequently and had difficulty making friends in school and in the neighborhoods. Being the new kid, in addition to being small and skinny, and having big teeth and a high voice, he was an easy target. From third grade on, he was bullied for a variety of reasons. It got to the point where he was crying every day and wanting to end it all. He wanted so badly to fit in, but, no matter how hard he tried, the bullying continued.

Definitions and Key Thoughts

A. Facts and Statistics

1. In 2010, 38 percent of middle school students and 32 percent of high school students had been bullied in the previous twelve months, while 23 percent of middle school students and 28 percent of high school students had bullied and/or cyberbullied someone else in the past year.
2. About 85 percent of bullying takes place in front of bystanders, yet only 11 percent of observers intervene in any way on behalf of the target.
3. Youth who bully
 - a) are at greater risk of smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol,
 - b) perform poorly in school and have a poor perception of the school environment,
 - c) are more likely to become involved in criminal activity and to experience psychiatric disorders and emotional problems.

B. Common Myths About Bullying

1. Myth: Bullies seek power because they feel powerless.
Truth: Bullies use aggression in a calculated, dominating way to get what they want.
2. Myth: Bullying is a problem for schools to solve.
Truth: It's a societal problem. School is where it often happens, because that's where children gather.
3. Myth: The best way to manage a bully is to fight back.
Truth: Physical confrontation is the weaker position and encourages bullies to continue. Social assertiveness is better. Walking away is best of all.
4. Myth: Bullying is a bothersome but relatively harmless rite of passage into adulthood.
Truth: Kids who are bullied often begin to feel hopeless, one of the most dangerous states of mind for any person.

C. Symptoms of Bullying

1. Young people who have been victims will often show evidence of depression, social withdrawal, physical injury, addiction, self-harm, and even suicide.
2. Here are ten signs that can indicate a child or adolescent may be experiencing bullying:
 - a) Unexplained injuries
 - b) Changes in appetite
 - c) Frequent sick days
 - d) Missing personal items
 - e) Suffering grades
 - f) Tendency to self-harm
 - g) Isolation
 - h) Avoidance
 - i) Loss of sleep
 - j) Exclusion from social activities

D. Types of Bullying

1. Bullying is defined as mean, hurtful behavior that occurs repeatedly in a relationship with an imbalance of power or strength.
2. Bullying can be categorized into four basic types:
 - a) Verbal bullying
 - b) Physical bullying
 - c) Relational bullying
 - d) Cyberbullying

Assessment (Interview)**PLEASE NOTE:**

- The pastor should realize that there are a wide variety of situations that could present with regard to bullying. For instance, the person or people seeking your advice and direction may be
 - a child or adolescent in the church who has concerns that may be related to bullying,
 - an adult church member who is experiencing bullying,
 - a parent concerned about his or her child (or another child) being bullied,

- a Sunday school teacher with concerns about a young person that could be related to bullying,
- a church member who, as a bystander, has observed such behaviors,
- the person who is engaging in bullying behaviors themselves.
- Considering those varying scenarios, please select and adapt the most suitable approaches from the following assessment/interview suggestions.

A. Following are some key questions to ask to determine if a form of bullying is present and what position this person(s) is in with regard to potential bullying:

1. Here are general questions to ask:
 - a) How can I be helpful to you today?
 - b) What are your goals for coming to talk to me today? What would you like to be different as a result of coming here to talk with me?
 - c) Please tell me a little more about what has been happening.
 - d) Do you believe that you are physically in danger in any way?
2. If you determine that the individual is the victim of bullying
 - a) and is underage (child or adolescent), ask:
 - (1) Are your parents aware of these situations?
 - (2) If yes: How did they respond when they found out about the situations?
 - (3) If no: Is there some reason you have not told them?
 - (4) What have your parents done to try to help you in those situations?
 - b) or is an adult, ask:
 - (1) How do you think all of this has affected you emotionally and in your relationships?
 - (2) What have you already done to try to resolve the situation with this person(s)?
3. If the person coming to see you is a parent or family member of a person who is being bullied or a family member of the one doing the bullying, ask:
 - a) Please tell me about your concerns and what you are aware of.
 - b) What are some incidences you have observed, and what things have been reported to you or you have heard about but not witnessed?
 - c) Have you discussed the situation or the responses of the victim/bully with him or her at all?
 - d) What have you tried to do to help them address the issue?
4. If the person coming to you is a “bystander” or witness to a bullying incident, ask:
 - a) Please tell me what happened, what you witnessed, and any action you might have taken at the time.
 - b) How have you responded emotionally or relationally to having observed this/these act(s)?
5. If the person is the one doing the bullying themselves, ask:
 - a) What is the reason you are coming to see me today?
 - b) Please tell me what has been happening and how long it has been going on.

- c) What do you see as the reasons these things have been happening?
- d) How do you see this has affected you personally and how has it affected you in your relationships with your friends and your family?
- e) How do you feel about having done those things?
- f) Have those kinds of things ever been done to you before? Have you been bullied?
- g) How do you feel about having those things done to you?
- 6. Red flags to be aware of during the interview:
 - a) Regardless of the status of the person coming to you
 - (1) *look for any indications of depression, social withdrawal, suicidal ideation or suicide attempts in themselves or (when appropriate) in the person with whom they are concerned,*
 - (2) *probe for any indications of possible violence when situations have potentially escalated to a dangerous point. Safety is a primary area of concern.*
 - b) Respond accordingly if you find any of those serious issues are involved.

2

Crítique and Counsel

Biblical Insight

- A. One manner of biblical expression of bullying has to do with brutish behaviors.
 - 1. Although we do not find the word “bullying” in the Bible, we do find the word “brutish,” a synonym of the brutal thuggery associated with thieves, assassins, and savage beasts (Psalm 49:10; Proverbs 12:1; Isaiah 19:11). The Hebrew and Greek words translated “brute” or “brutish” mean “stupid, foolish, and irrational, as cattle.”
 - 2. Bullying can also be found within the biblical theme of oppression (e.g., oppression of people or groups by other people or groups).
- B. Some examples of bullying or brutish behaviors in the Bible are
 - 1. The story of Jehu and Jezebel in II Kings 9. Jezebel was a manipulating and conniving bully who used her power to push people around.
 - 2. The story of David and Goliath in I Samuel 17. Goliath was a tormentor and a bully toward the whole army of Israel.
 - 3. The story of Joseph in Genesis 37. Joseph was bullied by his jealous older brothers and treated in a “brutish” way, selling him to slave traders.
 - 4. The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3. These three young Hebrew men were being bullied by King Nebuchadnezzar and ordered to bow down to the golden image he had created.

5. The story of the adulterous woman in John 8. The scribes and Pharisees were bullying the woman after she was caught in the very act of adultery.
6. Jesus himself, who experienced bullying behaviors on several occasions:
 - a) Crowds mocked and jeered at Him, saying He had a devil (John 7).
 - b) When He went to Jairus's home, the mourners laughed at and scorned him when he said the girl was "sleeping" (Mark 5; Luke 8).
 - c) The elders of the people, the chief priests, and the scribes and Pharisees bullied him during various portions of his Roman trial and crucifixion.

Wise Counsel

- A. For those experiencing bullying behaviors, either as the victim or the bully themselves, basic goals of counseling include helping them realign themselves emotionally and spiritually by
 1. assuring them that Jesus knows how they feel. (See Hebrews 2:18; 4:15.)
 2. reminding them that He is always with them even if, in these times, they cannot necessarily feel His presence. (See Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 43:1-2.)
 3. helping them regain control of their thought life and "cast down" the imaginations connected with any depression or sense of hopelessness. (See Isaiah 26:3; Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 10:3-5; Philippians 4:8.)
 4. building up their confidence that the Lord already has made a way for them and is their healer. (See Exodus 15:26; II Corinthians 10:13; Luke 4:18.)
 5. praying with them to revive (or instill) the hope within them. (See Psalm 42:11; Colossians 1:27; 1 Peter 1:3.)
- B. Your line of questioning should yield information to help make an initial determination of what is happening. Based on statistics, we know someone who has experienced bullying behaviors may develop some degree of depression, even to the extent of being suicidal. Always be aware of this possibility during the initial assessment or in counseling with them. If you determine the person might be experiencing some form of depression, take action to determine whether or not any suicidal ideation or planning is present. Safety is the primary area of concern in these situations.
- C. Be aware of the tendency to label.
 1. When referring to a bullying situation, it is easy to call the people (young people or adults) who bully others "bullies" and those who are targeted "victims," but this can have unintended consequences and send the message that their behavior cannot be changed because that's "who they are."
 2. Instead of labeling the person involved, focus on the behavior.
 - a) Instead of calling a person a "bully," refer to them as "the person who bullied."
 - b) Instead of calling a person a "victim," refer to them as "the person who was bullied."
 - c) Instead of calling a person a "bully and victim," refer to them as "the person who was both bullied and bullied others."

3

Application and Prayer

Application

1. For those who seem to be experiencing bullying behaviors
 - a) help identify the context within which the bullying occurs and the specific behaviors that make up the bullying,
 - b) help identify the ways in which the person has responded to the bullying behaviors, both physically and emotionally.
2. Help them understand that they are not alone. Connect them with people within the church who can be supportive and provide extra attention and care. While bullying is painful, it is the social isolation that can be most damaging.
3. Because of the bullying, the person often has developed low self-esteem and does not view himself or herself as worthwhile or valuable.
 - a) Give them scriptures and corresponding statements that convey God's love for them and help reassure them of their worth. (See Psalm 139; Luke 12:6-7; Ephesians 1:4, 7, 11, 13; 2:4-5; Philippians 3:20; 4:7, 19.)
 - b) Help them understand that it is God's design and definition of who they are and their worth that is more important than the way anyone who has bullied them has defined them.
 - c) Assist them in developing strategies to help them deal with the bullying behavior.
 - (1) Those being bullied need to know that it is not their fault that the bullying is happening.
 - (2) Help them learn how to deal with their anxieties and fears of confrontation so they will no longer project the fear that seems to attract those who bully.
 - (3) Help them learn assertive relational skills and begin to deal with the bullying behaviors being directed toward them without returning aggression for aggression.

Prayer

"Lord, we know that You can touch the feelings of our infirmities and have compassion on _____ in this time of confusion and difficulty. You know exactly what _____ is feeling and experiencing right now and what (he/she) has been going through. We know that You have been walking alongside (him/her) and hurting with (him/her). We ask right now that you reach out with Your comfort and Your healing hand to touch (him/her) and give (him/her) direction in the path You would have (him/her) take as (he/she) works to deal with the situation. Help (him/her) know that (he/she) is not alone and that you have plans and a future for (him/her). Help _____ recognize and really know how much you value (him/her) and want the best for (him/her). Let your Spirit guide and direct us as we walk together through this time and bring _____ into Your perfect will for (his/her) life."

4 Recommended Resources

- Anderson, N. T. (2001). *Who I am in Christ: A devotional*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers.
- Colorosa, B. (2009). *The bully, the bullied, and the not-so-innocent bystander: From preschool to high school and beyond – Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Creating More Deeply Caring Communities*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Cooley, J. (2014). *Heroes of the bible devotional: 90 devotions to help you become a hero of God!* Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Criswell, P. K. (2016). *Stand up for yourself & your friends: Dealing with bullies & bossiness and finding a better way*. China: American Girl Publishing, Inc.
- Drew, N. (2010). *No kidding about bullying: 125 ready-to-use activities to help kids manage anger, resolve conflicts, build empathy, and get along (Bully free classroom)*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing Inc.
- Gerth, H. (2009). *Rain on me: Devotions of hope and encouragement for difficult times*. Savage, MN: Summerside Press.
- Gerth, H. (2014). *You're going to be okay: Encouraging truth your heart needs to hear, especially on the hard days*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell.
- Goldman, C. (2012). *Bullied: What every parent, teacher, and kid needs to know about ending the cycle of fear*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Ivester, M. (2011). *lol...OMG!: What every student needs to know about online reputation management, digital citizenship and cyberbullying*. Reno, NV: Serra Knight Publishing.
- Lohmann, R. & Taylor, J. V. (2013). *The bullying workbook for teens: Activities to help you deal with social aggression and cyberbullying*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
- Lucado, M. (2012). *Grace for the moment: 365 devotions for kids*. Nashville, TN: Tommy Nelson Publishers.

- Magnusson, A. & Marathas, G. (2015). *What YOU can do about bullying by Max and Zoey*. Charlestown, MA: Olivander Press.
- Thomas, J. (2011). *Parent's guide to preventing and responding to bullying*. United States of America: School Bullying Council.
- Voors, W. (2000). *The parent's book about bullying: Changing the course of your child's life*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.

A listing of books for children of all ages can be found at <https://www.weareteachers.com/14-must-read-anti-bullying-books-for-kids>.



"Do Unto Others"
By Sylvia Clemons

Focus: *Discuss the biblical expressions of bullying behaviors and attitudes, along with God's plan for victory. Look at ways we deal with situations related to bullying.*

Lesson Text:

Luke 6:27-31 (KJV)

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Focus Verse:

Luke 6:31 (KJV)

"And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Biblical Expressions of Bullying Experiences

Joseph's brothers bullied him when their jealousy prompted them to sell him to Midianite merchantmen, and Joseph was later bullied "day by day" by Potiphar's wife. The Israelites were bullied during four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. Moses was bullied by Pharaoh and his soldiers as he was attempting to lead his people out of slavery. Goliath bullied the whole army of Israel, making fun of the Israelites when no one would accept his challenge to fight him alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were young Hebrew men bullied by King Nebuchadnezzar when he ordered everyone in his kingdom to bow down to an idol and they refused to do so. The

*Use of this material does not qualify the user as a "mental health professional" and should be communicated as such. It is important to refer individuals for professional help if the need arises beyond the scope of this quick-reference guide.

Pharisees bullied the woman caught in the act of adultery and they were close to stoning her to death. Jesus himself was bullied and ridiculed on various occasions. When He came to Jairus's house, the people laughed when He said the young girl was not dead but sleeping. He was mocked and ridiculed at different times during his trial and crucifixion.

Life in a Fallen World

Behaviors categorized as bullying and the attitudes that go along with them are not a new part of the fallen human experience. We will never be able to completely stop it, but we can learn to recognize and manage the problem more effectively by applying God's truth. Bullying is not just about children. Adults are bullied too. Whether it is mild, moderate or severe, bullying hurts and creates painful memories. As believers, we are called to deal with the injustice of bullying rather than allowing, ignoring, denying, or giving excuses for bad behavior. Though some of the forms of bullying today, such as cyberbullying, did not previously exist, God's Word still speaks directly to every situation and every kind of brutish, oppressive behavior. There is a biblical response to bullying that is spiritual, practical, and applicable for any age.

Responding to Bullying

As Christians/the Church:

Many people believe bullying is a relatively harmless rite of passage into adulthood. They often say those experiences do not kill us but make us stronger. Kids, statistics, and the Bible tell us otherwise. Bullying can cause emotional, physical, and academic problems for children who are bullied and/or witness bullying. If you talk to kids who are bullied, you will find out they do not feel stronger. Instead, they often feel hopeless...one of the most dangerous states of mind for anyone. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12).

Those targeted for bullying, especially at a young age, hope to be rescued. And for far too many, rescue never comes. Their longing—their tree of life—must be provided by adults and peers who possess courage and are willing to use strength justly on their behalf. Some Christians tell their children they are being bullied because of their faith. Yet, in reality, few kids are bullied due to their faith or because they are overweight or wear glasses, which are other popular myths. The main reason anyone is bullied is because they are non-assertive and do not know how to stand up for themselves.

Still more Christian parents tell their children to "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39) when they are bullied. But when Jesus was slapped on the face by the guard, He did not turn His face so the guard could slap him again. Instead He responded, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:19-23). Jesus not only defended himself with words; He confronted the bully and demanded an answer for His unjust treatment. Since Jesus does not contradict himself, we have a valuable lesson in what He really meant. He does not want His followers to return an insult for an insult or to seek revenge. Moreover, He is not speaking of ignoring justice or letting a bully have his way. Christians are not denied the option of self-defense, and they can and should stand up to bullying. Self-defense is not the same as revenge. Someone can defend himself or herself without abusing or demeaning another person.

Jesus never directly said, “here is the solution to bullying.” But it can be inferred in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). It begins by acknowledging the suffering of the downtrodden and encouraging them to follow His instructions so they will “inherit the earth.” In other words, it is the way for the powerless to become the powerful. His instructions are completely different from the strategies of our modern culture. Jesus does not teach us that if we are victims, other people need to change. He puts responsibility entirely on us, both in how we treat others and in how we respond to others’ actions. He understood that human authorities cannot solve our social problems for us, and that if our remedy to feeling downtrodden is for other people to change, we have no workable solution.

The Bible tells us to treat others fairly and with respect. Matthew 22:39 says to love others as yourself. And Romans 12:18 advises, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” When faced with bullying, we are not to seek revenge but respond in love. Matthew 5:44 says to “love your enemies,” and Matthew 5:9 says peacemakers will be blessed. Luke 6:28 even says, “Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.” That does not mean that we ignore the bullying or allow it to go on without confrontation. We are to openly identify the behaviors and confront them in appropriate ways and teach our children to do the same.

As children grow in faith, they should develop an understanding of how best to relate to others. From Scripture and those around them, they should learn acceptance, tolerance, mutual respect, and love. Children’s participation in church should have a profound influence on how they react when confronted with bullying and other forms of aggression or violence. The church can help foster these positive ways of relating:

1. Messages from the pulpit and within Sunday School curriculum can help reinforce the kind of attitudes and behaviors that emulate what Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.
2. Churches should provide a safe haven and comforting atmosphere for all attendees by training church staff, volunteers, and Sunday School teachers on how to recognize and deal appropriately with bullying behavior.
3. Churches should provide youth programs and knowledgeable workers who can recognize children or young people experiencing bullying. Leaders of youth programs can create caring environments where children feel safe and know bullying is not allowed.

As Individuals:

Everyone has a responsibility to learn and to model how to handle relationships God’s way, such as in the Golden Rule. How we treat others reflects our relationship with God since He created and values everyone. Here are seven tips to help anyone struggling with bullying:

1. Learn the art of communicating assertively. Rather than retaliate when someone bullies you, be like Christ and show compassion while remaining strong.
2. Choose confidence. Stand up for yourself, but do not hurt anyone else in the process. People who bully respect strength and prey on people they perceive as weak.

3. Be forgiving. This does not mean forgetting the offense or thinking that what happened is all right. But if people who have been bullied can forgive, they will be able to move forward rather than allow the experience to debilitate them.
4. Be sure to set and give consequences to bullies. Do not equalize the bully and the bullied victim, as if the victim did something to deserve the bullying behavior. Bullying is not acceptable under any circumstance.
5. Put into practice the values of love, respect, and dignity, toward others as well as yourself.
6. Pray! Access the power of God through prayer and bring Him the circumstances surrounding bullying incidents. Ask for wisdom to care for the bully and the bullied.
7. Get connected. Find a youth group, support group and friends who share the same values about how to manage/stop bullying. Rally around people who are lonely or isolated, and be a friend to bullies and bullied victims. Love heals wounds.
8. Manage bullying. Become educated about what bullying is and is not. Parents, teachers, pastors and friends need to step in and report all inappropriate behaviors to proper authority figures.

Unfortunately, we will never fully stop bullying. But we can minister to one hurting person at a time by introducing him or her to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.