

Take A Stand:

Preventing Bullying,
Interpersonal Conflict and Violence

Teacher Guide

Developed and written by

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“What we do to children
they will do to society...”

Karl Menninger

We acknowledge the following groups for their invaluable assistance in creating this curriculum:

Tender Mercies Foundation, Inc., Syracuse, New York
Rabbi Levitt, the children and teachers of Denver Academy of Torah
The fifth grade at Denver Academy

A special thanks to Pat Segall for her invaluable input and editing.

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BULLYING

Bullying, intimidation and interpersonal conflict are encountered in one form or another by all of us. Children struggle with being called names, being picked upon, being excluded, not knowing how to make friends, or being the ones acting unkindly or aggressively toward others. All forms of bullying are abusive and all are opportunities to teach children how to get along, how to be considerate of people, how to be part of a community or group.

Bullying can take many forms: physical, emotional, verbal or a combination of these. It may involve one child bullying another, a group of children against a single child or groups against other groups (gangs). It is not unlike other forms of victimization and abuse in that it involves:

- An imbalance of power
- Differing emotional tones, the victim will be upset whereas the bully is cool and in control
- Blaming the victim for what has happened
- Lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings and concerns of the victim
- A lack of compassion
- A cycle that will continue – and may escalate – without intervention

WHO ARE THE BULLIES?

Bullies are very often children who have been bullied or abused themselves. Sometimes they are children experiencing life situations they can't cope with, that leave them feeling helpless and out of control. They may be children with poor social skills, who do not fit in, who can't meet the expectations of their family or school. They bully to feel competent, successful, to control someone else, to get some relief from their own feelings of powerlessness.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Not all children are equally likely to be victimized by bullying behavior. Those children who are more prone to be picked upon tend to have the following characteristics:

- Low self-esteem
- Insecure
- Lack of social skills
- Don't pick up on social cues
- Cry or become emotionally distraught easily
- Unable to defend or stand up for themselves
- Physical characteristics that may make them appear different – overweight, short, glasses, handicaps
- Small or non-existent support group

Some children actually seem to provoke their own victimization. These children will tease bullies; make themselves a target by egging the person on, not knowing when to stop and then not being able to effectively defend him or herself when the balance of power shifts to the bully. Many children who are bullied prefer this negative attention to no attention at all.

PREVENTING BULLYING

As soon as children begin to interact with others, we can begin to teach them not to be bullies and not to be bullied. We can give them words for their feelings, limit and change their behavior, and teach them better ways to express their feelings and wishes. **Children do not learn to solve these kinds of problems and get along by themselves. We need to teach them.**

When preschoolers begin to call people names or use unkind words, intervene immediately and consistently. In kindergarten, children learn the power of exclusion. We begin to hear things like, "She's not my friend and she can't come to my party." Respond with, "You don't have to be friends with her today, but it's not all right to make her feel bad by telling her she can't come to your party."

In the early elementary grades, cliques and little groups develop which can be quite exclusionary and cruel. Children need to hear clearly from us, "It's not all right to treat other people this way. How do you think she feels being told she can't play with you?" Kids don't have to play with everyone or even like everyone, but they can't be cruel about excluding others.

Boys who are physically small or weak are more prone to victimization. Making fun, picking on and other forms of bullying need to be identified in their earliest stages. The message needs to be crystal clear. "This is not okay. Think about how he must feel. How could you include him and let other kids know it's not all right to treat others this way?"

Children who are not bullies or victims have a powerful role to play in shaping the behavior of other children. **Teach children to speak up on behalf of children being bullied.** "Don't treat her that way, it's not nice." "Hitting is not a good way to solve problems, let's find a teacher and talk about what happened."

The Take A Stand Program methodically introduces concepts and skills that are age appropriate and can be used daily as children learn to address interpersonal conflict more effectively.

THE POWER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Children who are not bullied are the most powerful agents for change. They tend to have better social skills and conflict management skills. They are more willing to assert themselves about differences without being aggressive or confronting. They suggest compromises and alternate solutions. They tend to be more aware of people's feelings and are the children who can be most helpful in resolving disputes and assisting other children to get help.

The real power of the **Take A Stand** curriculum and the classroom activities lies in three principal areas.

First, the children who are bullies and those who are victims are the least able to extricate themselves from their situation. The real power lies with those children in the middle; those who are neither bullies nor victims. They have the best social skills, the highest self-esteem and are those most likely to be emulated. Teaching this group of children that bullying is unacceptable and giving them the skills to intervene immediately, effectively and consistently is where we create the possibility of reducing the levels of bullying in this culture.

Secondly, by teaching children that all forms of bullying are unacceptable, we lay the foundation for prevention of physical, emotional and verbal abuse by adults. Children who are emotionally and physically abused by adults are most likely to continue that pattern when they themselves become adults. Without suggesting that parents might abuse children or indicating that those who do are bad people, we can give children a way to recognize victimization at the hands of adults. We can also provide skills in two specific areas:

1. Getting help when they need it
2. Not internalizing verbal and emotional abuse

Finally, as teachers and parents learning that social interaction is as important a skill as reading and writing, we can begin to change the patterns of unkind and inappropriate social interactions from the earliest age. We can stop saying things like “you guys work it out” to children who have no skills to work it out. We can become advocates for all children and families in our every day interactions as well as through this specific curriculum.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Parents who are informed about the content and approach of The Take A Stand Program will be more supportive and parental support is a key element in making a difference in the lives of children. The techniques taught in the program will be much more powerful if parents understand and support their use at home and in the community.

A Parent Seminar is one powerful way to make parents aware of the Program. However, most schools will have a maximum attendance of 25% of parents at any parent meeting. Other ways to let parents know about the Program and how they can support it include the Family Handbook and take-home activities. The Family Handbook is provided in two forms. It should be duplicated and sent home with all children prior to beginning the Program. Take home activities are as much for the parents as for the children and should not be skipped.

Parents who have questions should be invited to come and see a session of the Program, or to review the teacher materials. They can also be referred to the Coalition for Children website to learn more about the Program. www.safechild.org

THE CLASSROOM PROGRAM

To make the process of teaching the **Take A Stand** Program as easy as possible, the manual walks teachers through what to say, what responses to expect, what role-plays to use and how to follow up. It covers all the common - and some not so common - concerns children express, with the accompanying explanations.

This guide, however, is only a tool. Teachers should feel free to use the curriculum guide in a way that is consistent with their own style and comfort level and the needs of the children in their group. Teachers should feel free to break the presentation down into smaller parts, adapt the role-plays to the community or change some of the language to make it more appropriate to the developmental level of the group.

Because every group is different, you may cover more or less of the materials on any given day. Feel free to move more quickly or slowly depending on the group you are working with.

The Program is most effective when the five sessions are presented about once a week. This allows time for the children to utilize the skills and begin to see changes. Change over time is the goal, and the Program should be conducted on an annual basis. This allows the children to learn new skills as they mature and keeps the concepts fresh for all age levels every year.

ROLE-PLAY

Children learn by doing. Role-play is what makes prevention of bullying and interpersonal conflict real for children. There is a fundamental difference between a “concept” and a “skill.” This is important for parents and schools to understand because stories, videotapes, coloring books, etc. only teach concepts. Concepts don’t change the nature of interpersonal conflict.

Role-playing takes concepts and turns them into skills. Actually walking through situations and having the children practice different responses is what takes the information from the level of a concept – or an idea – to a skill that is learned in the “muscles” and will never be forgotten.

It is like the difference between understanding how to ride a bicycle and actually being able to ride a bicycle. Classroom role-play, merged with discussion and activities, enables the children to learn the skills in their muscles. This is what allows them to actually intervene on behalf of themselves or others in real life situations.

The process of teaching role-playing is one of discussion first and then actually walking through a scenario, applying the concepts to real situations and learning how to implement the concepts with skill. This is usually a process of successive approximations based on your coaching.

Most children begin a role-play not being able to implement the very thing they were just talking about. As you act out a situation, you want to coach the participants to communicate effectively, utilizing eye contact, clear and straightforward language and consistent body language. Each time they role-play, the children will improve and feel more comfortable taking action. This comfort level – advance preparation for life – is what will enable them to use the skills in their peer group and community.

Most people are uneasy about role-play in the beginning. But it is really what we do every day. We walk through how to handle a business meeting or a conflict with a family member. We think through how to handle getting the baby and the dog and the groceries into the house. The difference in the classroom is that we act out solutions rather than just thinking about them.

The role-play suggestions in this Program are just that. You should feel free to modify scenarios or create new ones that work for your group of kids. The point is only to create opportunities to practice for life in such a way that kids are really prepared to be effective advocates for themselves and others.

INTERVENTION WITH BULLIES

Children who are bullies need to be dealt with consistently and effectively. Bullying should not be overlooked or excused. We know bullying behavior only escalates as children get older and the ramifications for bullies and the group as a whole are significant.

DO NOT BLAME. Do not get into a discussion about the "whys" of what happened. Your discussion with a bullying child should focus on several key points:

- Bullying is not acceptable in our school, family or in society.
- If you are feeling frustrated or angry or aggressive, here are some things you can do. Then provide concrete examples based on the current situation.
- Role-play or act out the new behaviors so your teaching is experiential. Remember that role-play is the key to changing behavior!
- Ask, how can I help you with this? Who could you go to in school if you see yourself getting into this type of situation again?
- Specify concretely the consequences if the aggression or bullying continue.
- Your objective is to stop the behavior, understand the child's feelings, then teach and reward more appropriate behavior.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE – closer to home

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that attacks a child's sense of self-worth and emotional development. Emotional abuse includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands, constant belittling, criticizing, insulting, rejecting and teasing. Emotional abuse also includes failure to provide the psychological and emotional nurturance a child needs to develop fully. Among other things, this can include withholding love and emotional support. The Take A Stand Program discusses the ways people sometimes treat children that make them feel bad about themselves. If something like this happens over a period of time, and the child is beginning to believe he or she is bad, that's too much and the child is encouraged to talk to someone about what is happening.

PHYSICAL ABUSE – closer to home

Non-accidental physical injury inflicted by someone responsible for a child is considered abuse if the individual creates, or allows to be created, situations whereby the child is likely to be at risk. This may include beatings, bums, biting, strangulation, scalding or other treatment resulting in bruises, welts, broken bones, scars or serious internal injury.

The Take A Stand Program says to children, "If someone hits you so hard, or punishes you in a way that leaves bruises or marks that are there the next day, that is too much and you should tell someone."

THE COALITION FOR CHILDREN

The Coalition for Children is a private, not-for-profit organization, founded in 1983, which is committed to creating and providing positive and effective programming for children and families. The Coalition is not a group; rather it acts as a catalyst, bringing together individuals and organizations for specific projects and community action. The specific focus of the Coalition for Children for the last 18 years has been the prevention of child abuse and interpersonal violence. Projects include: development and evaluation of new programs, consulting, training, research, and community-wide efforts such as The Safe Child Project. For more information, please contact Sherryll Kraizer, Ph.D., and Coalition for Children, P. O. Box 6304, Denver, Colorado 80206, (303) 320-6321.

Dr. Sherryll Kraizer, Executive Director of the Coalition for Children, has a Bachelors degree in Special Education, a Masters degree in Psychology and is a Ph.D. in Education with a specialization in youth at risk. She is the author of The Safe Child Book, the Safe Child Program, the REACH, CHALLENGE and RECOVERY Programs. She is internationally recognized for her prevention programs and research in program effectiveness. She lives in Denver with her husband Al and their son Charlie.

For more information on The Safe Child Program, REACH, CHALLENGE, or RECOVERY Programs, please contact The Coalition for Children, P.O. Box 6304, Denver, Colorado 80206 or visit the website: www.safechild.org.

Additional curricula by Sherryll Kraizer, PhD.

The SAFE CHILD Program

The Safe Child Program is a comprehensive curriculum which teaches prevention of sexual, emotional and physical abuse by people known to the child; prevention of abuse and abduction by strangers; and safety in self-care. Presented in a preschool through third grade series, it teaches a broad base of life skills. In nearly a decade of evaluation, the Safe child Program has clearly demonstrated that it reduces children's risk of abuse and enhances their personal safety and competence.

REACH

For elementary school age children, 1992.

A prevention program for high-risk children ages five through twelve. This 10 to 20 week group program is designed to provide life skills training which enables: increased self-esteem, management of emotions, effective communication, independent thinking, appropriate assertive behavior, problem-solving, assessment and decision making, identification and pursuit of goals, taking responsibility for choices, prevention of child abuse and development of personal resources. Training available.

CHALLENGE

For adolescents and young adults, 1992

A prevention program for high-risk youth ages 13 to young adulthood. This 10-20 week group program is designed to provide life skills training in the same areas as REACH, modified for an older age group. Training available.

RECOVERY

A therapeutic prevention program, 1992

A 10-week group program for previously abused youth designed to prevent more abuse and to rebuild self-esteem and life skills. Training available.

DATING VIOLENCE

Intervention and Prevention, 1991

Group and student leader's curricula to educate, intervene and prevent interpersonal violence in dating relationships among young people.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A Basic Manual for Intervention and Prevention, 1991

A curriculum guide for leading public seminars and professional training in the area of education, intervention and prevention of domestic and interpersonal violence.