

Protect Your Child *from* **Bullying**

**Expert Advice to Help You
Recognize, Prevent, and Stop
Bullying Before Your Child
Gets Hurt**

Allan L. Beane

 **JOSSEY-BASS**
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This book is dedicated to our son, Curtis Allan Beane, who was bullied in seventh grade and high school. It is also dedicated to our daughter, Christy Turner; our son-in-law, Mike Turner; and our grandchildren, Emily Grace Turner, Sarah Gail Turner, and Jacob Allan Turner.

They have been the light in the darkness caused by Curtis's death. I hope this book and those who use it will bring light into the darkness of children who are mistreated.

PREFACE

Several years ago, the pain of being mistreated visited our home. When our son, Curtis, was in seventh grade, he was bullied and eventually isolated by several students. My wife and I decided to transfer him to another school system. He found acceptance and a sense of belonging at the new middle school. However, at age fifteen Curtis was in a car accident that changed his life.

My wife and I had to give the surgeons permission to remove two fingers and one-third of his right hand. He had two other fingers repaired and one rebuilt. When he went back to school, many of his classmates encouraged and supported him. Unfortunately, many were cruel to him. Once again, I asked myself, "How can kids be so cruel?" There was a cry from within me for answers. I wanted to know if I could stop cruelty from developing, and I wanted to stop it after it had already developed.

There was also a cry from within my son, but it was deeper and more intense than mine. The bullying had a tremendous impact on his self-esteem, confidence, and emotional health even into the adult years. At the age of twenty-three, he suffered from depression and anxiety. He developed posttraumatic stress from the car wreck and from the persistent peer mistreatment. He also sought the company of the wrong people. He got desperate to escape his pain by taking an illegal drug. He had a heart problem that no one knew about, and the drug killed him.

Now you understand why I am passionate about preventing and stopping bullying and why I am writing this book for you,

the parents. I understand the pain expressed by children who are mistreated and the heartache experienced by their parents. I want to stop the pain.

Please join me in bringing light into the darkness of kids who are mistreated every day. I hope that you and your family are blessed with health, peace, and happiness and that you will act as instruments in promoting acceptance and a sense of belonging in others. Any child I can help through the actions of you and your family will bring honor and purpose to my son's life.

Bullying can be found in every neighborhood, school system, and school. To prevent and reduce bullying, a systematic effort must be made in each school. There must be a systemwide commitment to prevent and stop bullying. There must also be adult involvement, including parents and others in the community. This kind of commitment doesn't always exist. It is difficult to believe, but I have actually had school superintendents tell me that bullying didn't exist in their school system. Adults denying that bullying exists or ignoring bullying is the worst thing that can happen to children, a school, and a community. When adults get involved and harness the energy of school personnel, parents, community representatives, and children, bullying can be prevented and stopped, or at least significantly reduced. I often wonder if we can ever eliminate it—considering the nature of human beings. However, I am extremely hopeful.

I hope you find this book informative and helpful. It should help prevent your children from becoming victims of mistreatment and, if they are being mistreated, give them and you hope that the bullying will stop and that they will go on to lead happy, fulfilling lives.

Allan L. Beane

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allan L. Beane, PhD, is an internationally recognized expert, speaker, and author on bullying, as well as a nationally renowned consultant and educator. He is the president of Bully Free Systems, LLC, in Murray, Kentucky. He has over thirty years' experience in education that includes teaching special education, teaching regular education, serving as vice president of a university, and serving as director of a school safety center. He has served as a consultant in criminal cases and lawsuits involving bullying and has been an expert guest on several television shows. He and material from his anti-bullying program have been featured in such national publications as *USA Today*, *USA Weekend*, *Time for Kids*, and *Newsweek for Teens*, and in many other national magazines and journals.

Dr. Beane's son was bullied in seventh grade and high school. His son's life inspired him to develop the Bully Free Program, which has been adopted around the United States. His first book, *The Bully Free Classroom* (Free Spirit, 1999) is also available in several languages. For more information, visit his website at www.bullyfree.com.

INTRODUCTION

You know firsthand that parenting isn't an easy job. It seems that the job is more complicated today and that parents need more guidance than ever before. It is sadly ironic that we train people in how to fulfill the requirements of almost every job *except* the most important job in the world, parenting. The violence we see in our communities and schools reflects our neglect of providing any guidance for parents. Parents are in grave need of knowledge and skills when it comes to keeping their children safe in neighborhoods and schools.

This book is designed to teach you some of those skills. It is written just for you, the parent, and will help you prevent your child from becoming a victim of bullying. If your child is already being bullied, it will help you stop the mistreatment and help you give your child hope. It is designed to be an informative, practical, and useful tool. The book comprises important information about bullying as well as effective, practical tips and suggestions for you to help your children.

Throughout this book, I repeat certain themes. This is intentional, for I hope that you and your family never forget these themes.

Important Themes

- Everyone must understand the nature and seriousness of bullying.
- Because school violence is a problem of the heart, hearts must be changed.

- We all must value and live the Golden Rule: treat others the way you want to be treated.
- We all need to strive to be peacemakers.
- No one deserves to be mistreated, and we must not tolerate mistreatment.
- To prevent and stop bullying, school personnel, students, parents, and others in the community must work together. Parents and their children play a key role in this effort.

Overview of the Contents

Your first task as a parent is to learn as much as you can about the nature of bullying. If you don't understand the problem, it is more difficult to help your child. Chapter One, "The Nature of Bullying," provides you with such information—defining bullying and describing the types of bullying behaviors that often make up a bullying situation. You will also learn how boys and girls differ in their bullying behavior. Because most bullying occurs in secret, adults often underestimate the problem. Therefore, this chapter also discusses research findings regarding the frequency of bullying and where it is most likely to occur. The last portion of this chapter then presents the rationale for preventing and stopping bullying in all environments.

Chapter Two, "Warning Signs," discusses why children often do not report bullying to their parents or other adults. Because your child may not tell you, it is important for you to know the warning signs that your child is being mistreated or is himself bullying others.

We know that children can be cruel, but we don't often discuss why. Chapter Three, "Possible Causes of Bullying," presents a comprehensive examination of possible causes of bullying. When I developed my anti-bullying program, I spent most of my initial research time identifying these possible causes because I believe it's a key step to finding solutions.

Parenting has its blessings and struggles. The responsibilities are awesome and sometimes overwhelming. All good parents want their children to be able to deal with the challenges associated with new relationships, and their goal is for their children to be caring, sensitive, and resilient. Chapter Four, “Giving Your Child a Good Start,” will provide you with some excellent practical and effective strategies for helping children develop into young people and adults who have self-control, healthy self-esteem, and empathy.

No child deserves to be mistreated and rejected. However, sometimes children do need to make some changes in order to increase the likelihood that they will be accepted. Chapter Five, “Promoting Your Child’s Acceptance,” provides you with an array of strategies to help your child be accepted and have a sense of belonging, while still remaining true to himself and to your values.

When a child is bullied, she sometimes feels helpless and hopeless, and if parents find out their child is being bullied, they sometimes feel helpless as well. What should you do if you find out your child is being bullied? Chapter Six, “Helping Your Bullied Child,” answers that question.

Cyberbullying is a growing problem. Children are using computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices and means to mistreat others. Chapter Seven, “Preventing Cyberbullying,” describes some important steps to take to prevent your child from being cyberbullied.

Bullies are everywhere. Sometimes children are bullied not only at school but also in their neighborhoods. I have met parents who have considered moving because they could not find an answer to this problem. Chapter Eight, “Neighborhood Bullying,” is an exploration of preventive measures you can take if your child is experiencing bullying in your neighborhood.

Older or stronger or even just more popular siblings have an important role to play in helping their brother or sister who is being bullied. Whether at school or in the neighborhood and

community, siblings can take steps to stop the bullying. Chapter Nine, “Supportive Tips for Siblings,” provides you with tips to share with your child’s siblings.

Just as it breaks a parent’s heart to see her child being mistreated, so it breaks the heart of good parents who cannot seem to find effective ways stop their children from mistreating others. We should not assume that all parents of children who mistreat others are bad parents who are themselves abusive. Parents of mistreated children need to understand that their children may become bullies, and to take steps to keep that from happening. Chapter Ten, “When Your Child Bullies Others,” is a chapter that should not be skipped by parents of mistreated children and is a must-read for parents of children who bully others.

Children can be either victims, bullies, followers, or bystanders. Followers and bystanders have a more important role than you may think in the act of bullying. Followers are those who join in on the bullying or laugh or encourage the bullying in other ways. Followers are not necessarily friends of the bullies. They may be following the bully to avoid becoming targets themselves. Bystanders are children who ignore the mistreatment or who may stand at a distance and laugh. In our anti-bullying program (the Bully Free Program), we seek to empower bystanders. These are usually children who have good hearts and must learn to take a stand against bullying. Chapter Eleven, “When Your Child Is a Bystander,” tells you how to empower your child who is a bystander.

Parents need to understand the thoughts and feelings of victims that sometimes drive them to make tragic choices. Chapter Twelve, “Why Some Victims Retaliate, Self-Harm, and/or Commit Suicide,” is designed to help you understand the path that some victims take from hurt, to fear, to overwhelming anxiety, to anger, to hate, to rage, and then to retaliation, self-mutilation, and/or suicide.

Unfortunately, not all schools have anti-bullying programs. Some use some anti-bullying materials and resources; others have not yet initiated an effective effort to prevent and stop the problem. Some states have passed laws requiring schools to have at least policies and procedures for dealing with bullying. You can play an important role in encouraging anti-bullying efforts. Chapter Thirteen, “Working with Your Child’s School,” tells you what to do to encourage your child’s school to develop a schoolwide program and how you can support such a program.

Protect Your Child
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1

The Nature of Bullying

Dear Dr. Beane:

I was at the parent presentation you gave several weeks ago for our school system. I was inspired by your knowledge and passion for preventing and stopping bullying. Your son's story broke my heart. I am so afraid for my son. Your son's story sounded a lot like my son's. I have talked several times with his teachers and principal. They don't seem to understand the hurt caused by my son's mistreatment. I wish they were at the parent presentation. When I explain what is happening to my son, they seem to minimize it as normal conflict and say that all children have to learn to deal with conflict. How can I change their thinking? How can I help them see that my son is being destroyed by bullying?

It is important for you to know the difference between bullying and normal conflict. Some types of conflict are a normal part of life. Not all conflict is meant to be hurtful, and coping with such situations can help prepare your child for life in a positive way. Therefore, do not intervene too quickly when you observe conflict between your child and others. However, if you have verified that true bullying is occurring, you should intervene and teach your child skills to stop the bullying. Behavior has exceeded the bounds of normal conflict when

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- It is meant to hurt and harm your child.
- It seems intense and has been occurring over a significant period of time.
- The person hurting your child seeks to have power and control over your child.
- No apologies are forthcoming.
- The behavior has a negative impact on your child.

What Is Bullying?

Understanding bullying is an important step in helping your child. When we don't fully understand a problem, we deal only with the symptoms of the problem and not the root causes. After reading this book, you may be more knowledgeable about bullying than the teachers at your child's school. You may be able to provide leadership or at least encouragement to anti-bullying efforts in your child's school. The next few pages are designed to equip you with facts about bullying.

The term *bullying* describes a wide range of behaviors that can have an impact on a person's property, body, feelings, relationships, reputation, and social status. Bullying is a form of overt and aggressive behavior that is intentional, hurtful, and persistent (repeated). Bullied children are teased, harassed, socially rejected, threatened, belittled, and assaulted or attacked (verbally, physically, psychologically) by one or more individuals. There are unequal levels of affect (that is, the victim is upset and distressed while the bully is calm) and often an imbalance of strength (power and dominance).¹ This imbalance of power can be physical or psychological, or your child may simply be outnumbered.

There are times when bullying can be considered violent. All bullying is serious, but when it is intense and lasts for a significant period, it is very serious—it is violent. In fact, bullying is

the most common form of school violence. It is violence because it is so destructive to the well-being of children and can lead children to harm themselves and to harm others.

Some of the key words in our definition of bullying are *intentional*, *hurtful*, *persistent*, and *imbalance of strength*. Thus behavior such as teasing that is not intended to hurt and is not persistent is not considered bullying. However, even playful teasing can easily escalate into a bullying situation. Those who have power over the child may repeatedly use the teasing comments to hurt her.

What Does Bullying Look Like?

Bullying behaviors come in a variety of forms: physical, verbal, and social and relational. When it comes to cruelty, children can be incredibly creative. In fact, it would be very difficult to list every possible behavior that makes up a bullying situation. But let's take a look at some of them.

Physical Bullying

Bullying behaviors that are more physical in nature include the following:

- Hitting, slapping, elbowing, and shouldering (slamming)
- Pushing, shoving, and tripping
- Kicking
- Taking or stealing, damaging, or defacing belongings
- Restraining
- Pinching
- Flushing someone's head in the toilet
- Cramming someone into his locker

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- Attacking with spit wads, food, and so on
- Threats and body language that are intimidating

It is important not to minimize any of these behaviors. They all can be hurtful, even things that may seem like “horseplay.” One nine-year-old boy said, “When they push you in front of your friends and you fall down, it is very embarrassing and humiliating.” Restraining someone against her will can also be very hurtful because it is often accompanied by some other inappropriate behavior. For example, one sixteen-year-old girl was held down on the floor by a group of girls who then marked all over her face with a permanent marker. You can imagine how hurt she was emotionally.

Pinching and many other forms of physical bullying are beneath the radar screen of teachers. One teacher told me about an eight-year-old girl who reported at the end of the year that the boy sitting behind her had pinched her back all year long. She had bruises all over her back. The teacher did not know this was happening because the little girl was afraid to tell her.

When I speak to a group of students, it is not unusual for a significant number of students to raise their hands when I ask, “How many of you have had your heads flushed in the toilet?” This is called “swirling.” In one school, where the principal told the newspaper that there was no bullying in his school, about one-fourth of the students said they had had their heads flushed. Being crammed into one’s locker almost every day is also not uncommon. I have met several students who no longer use their lockers because they know they will be mistreated there. They carry all their books in a backpack.

Verbal Bullying

Verbal bullying can sometimes be more hurtful than physical bullying. Unfortunately, some children learn very quickly that “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can hurt me