

## **The ABCs of Bullying Prevention**

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### **Bullying Myths**

You might hear people make false or misleading claims about bullying. Those erroneous beliefs serve to downplay the seriousness of bullying, and can keep school staff and parents from taking the necessary action to respond to the problem. Changing false beliefs about bullying can help change the response to the problem. Let's take a look at some of those myths.

#### **"Bullying builds character."**

Rather than building character, bullying can cause children to become anxious, fearful and unhappy. It also can lower their self-esteem. Bullied students might come to believe something is wrong with them and even that they deserve such treatment. Some adults might contend that bullying can be a learning experience, but for most victims, the lesson of bullying is that the world is unsafe and people cannot be trusted.

#### **"Bullying is a harmless rite of passage that is a natural part of growing up."**

Bullying might be a fact of life for many children, but that doesn't mean it needs to be accepted as a normal or inevitable part of childhood. Certainly, it is not harmless. Many bullying victims are left with lasting psychological scars.

#### **"Bullying is no more than kids being kids."**

Bullying is far different from child's play. When children fool around, they choose to do so. Victims of bullying, however, do not choose to be tormented. Furthermore, bullies and victims are not on equal footing. The bully is typically stronger and more physically imposing than the victim.

#### **"Kids bounce back quickly after being bullied."**

Although some children weather bullying more easily than others, many suffer long-term effects from the experience. Those who insist that they survived the ordeal without harm might have forgotten the genuine hurt they felt at the time.

#### **"Victims of bullying usually bring it on themselves."**

According to that theory, the victim's behavior provokes the bully into reacting and thus the victim is blameworthy. The reality is that bullies often choose their victims because they appear weak, isolated, or vulnerable, or because they seem different in some way. We need to convey the message to victims that they did nothing wrong; it is the bullies who are wrong.

#### **"Bullying will disappear if you ignore it."**

In fact, the opposite is the case. Closing your eyes to the problem is giving bullies a license to continue inflicting pain on other children, while telling their victims they must handle the problem on their own. One student, when asked why he was bullying another student, gave the simple answer "because I can." He was bullying because he

thought he could get away with it. The reality is that bullying must be confronted vigorously, and bullies must be held accountable for their behavior.

**"Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can never hurt you."**

Telling that to a bully is usually of little comfort to a child who is being constantly teased or called names. The pain caused by verbal blows often can last longer than that caused by physical blows, especially if the bullying is frequent and ongoing. That fact is captured in the following poem by an unknown author.

Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
But words can also hurt me.  
Sticks and stones break only skin,  
While words are ghosts that haunt me.

Slant and curved the word-swords fall  
To pierce and stick inside me.  
Bats and bricks may ache through bones,  
But words can mortify me.

Pain from words has left its scar  
On mind and heart that's tender.  
Cuts and bruises now have healed;  
It's words that I remember.

**"Victims of bullying must learn to stand up for themselves."**

Although we want children to learn to resolve conflicts with their peers on their own, that doesn't mean they should be left to fend for themselves in the face of typically bigger, stronger children. Some students simply are unequipped to deal with the intimidation; retaliation could result in their getting hurt. In those cases, they need the help of an adult. Victims of bullying need to be told that seeking help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of good sense.

**"Hit the bully back and he'll leave you alone."**

Not only is that untrue in most cases, it is likely to make the problem worse. Bullies are unlikely to back down if their victims fight back. Rather, they are likely to strike back if challenged, placing the victim in harm's way. You also do not want to give the message that violence is acceptable.

**"No students are bullied in this school."**

Some principals would like you to think that bullying does not take place in their schools; the reality is, virtually every school has bullies.