



A Kids Matter! Parent Message

Bullying: How to Prevent it, Intercept it, and Stop it.

Although **bullying does occur, it is not a rite of passage**. Our children are being influenced daily through reality TV, internet, video games, and movies with messages and images of inappropriate and unhealthy conflict resolution. As parents, we need to directly counteract these messages by teaching and role modeling empathy, respect, compromise and compassion.

A recent survey of Suburban Ramsey parents found that nearly half (47.8%) of parents said they would like to learn how to talk with their children about non-violent problem solving and half (50.8%) said they would like to learn how to talk with their child about bullying.

Preventing Bullying

Research says when parents talk openly about violence being unacceptable and learn alternatives to violence, children build an intolerance to violence, have better self control and develop more negative perceptions of engaging in, or witnessing violence¹. Here's how:

Lead by Example: Many times, our actions speak louder than our words. The best way to teach non-violent problem solving and conflict resolution skills is to role model self control and healthy stress management (e.g. being assertive (not aggressive), talking things through after you've calmed down and ultimately walking away from a fight).

Develop Clear and Consistent Rules: Teach your kids that being violent (physically, verbally and emotionally) is never ok. Rules such as *it's unacceptable to hit or lash out at others, no put downs, no excluding others on purpose, don't gossip or spread rumors (this includes texting, twitter, facebook and other media)* will provide needed guidance as your children develop values and behaviors. Curb sibling rivalry by saying, "Life is hard enough outside this home, so home must always be a safe, violence-free zone where it's always ok to let your guard down." Remember, bullying between siblings is still bullying.

Help your Child Learn how to be a Good Friend: Teach your child how to get along with other kids and how to disagree or solve problems non-violently. Kindness, empathy, fair play, and taking turns are all critical skills for good friendships. Share stories of how you appropriately stuck up for a friend or a friend stuck up for you when you were a child. Talk about the importance of making and having friends and what that's meant in your life.

The most courageous thing a parent can do is to admit when they and their child need help: If your child needs help managing their anger, get them help early. Kids who bully often have trouble making and keeping friends. This can have lifelong consequences. Remember, depression can oftentimes show up as frustration and anger. Talking with a counselor or your child's pediatrician can help you identify the emotional, social and behavioral needs of your child.

¹ (Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence, 2001) An intolerant attitude toward violence is one of the strongest protective factors against violence and delinquency.

Intervening Early

For some, bullying can have serious and/or long-term consequences.

Get in the habit of talking with and listening to your child every day:

Talk with your child about their experiences during the times and situations where bullying is most likely to occur—on the bus, at lunch, during recess and in the bathrooms. (*Ask questions such as, Who do you sit with at lunch? What happens on the bus ride? Who do you play with during recess? What games do you play? Do you feel safe using the bathroom at school?*) By checking in with them regularly, you'll be aware when there are changes in their attitudes and their relationships with peers.

Kids often don't tell anyone they are being bullied. Instead, they'll say "I don't want to go to school today". If you see changes in your child, consider the possibility that they are experiencing bullying.

What Kids Can Do to Stop Bullying

Teach your child not to be a bystander to bullying. If your child sees bullying, teach them to **Stop, Reach Out** and **Get Help**:

- 1) Stop the bullying** by saying "Leave him alone!", "It's not funny."
- 2) Reach out and befriend the person being targeted** and encourage others to do the same. Tell them how bad you feel about what happened and befriend them by including them in future activities.
- 3) Get help from a trusted adult.** Go with the child to report the bullying incident. Remember, telling is not tattling, it's reporting.

What Parents Can Do to Stop Bullying

If your child is being bullied at school it's critical that they know it's not their fault this is happening to them and they're not alone. **It is also important to involve your school as soon as possible. This is not something parents and children should take on alone; it must be a team effort.**

Give your child **Tools, Resource People** and a **Plan of Action** so they can move forward with less fear and anxiety.

- **Tools to Stop Bullying:** Teaching your child/youth to stay calm and assertive in these times is critical. Now is the time to practice the art of 'walking away' and not fighting back, which can potentially escalate a situation.
- **Resource People:** Talk with your child's teacher, school principal or social worker. Brainstorm ways your child can signal to them that they need help.
- **Create a Plan of Action:** Become a positive advocate for your child by learning the school's bullying policies and working with your child's teacher and the administration to help ensure your child's safety. Create a team approach where your child knows the plan of action you and the school are taking to address and stop the bullying.

If Your Child is Displaying Bullying Behavior or Bullying Others

Talk with your school social worker, pastor, counselor or a trusted friend to find help. Inquire about [resources in the schools and community](#) that would be effective in giving your son or daughter the tools they need to learn appropriate conflict resolution and anger management skills.

Additional Resources: Go to www.KidsMatterSRFC.org for live links to the resources below.

- All of the public schools in Suburban Ramsey County have anti-bullying initiatives and policies in place. **Second Step, Steps to Respect, Responsive Classroom and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** are some examples of the work being done in our school communities.
- [Kids Matter SRFC website](#)
- [A Guide for Parents: Bullying – What Parents Can Do About It](#)
- [Eyes on Bullying: A toolkit to prevent bullying in children's lives](#)
- [15+ Make Time to Listen...Take Time to Talk about bullying \(includes open ended conversation starters\)](#)
- [Online safety education for kids, parents and educators](#)