

Bullying in the Classroom: The Ultimate Guide to Stopping it.

by Michael Linsin

Chances are one of your students is being bullied. And if you're like most teachers, you're either unaware of it or you don't know how to stop it.

This is why bullying has become epidemic.

The teacher is the only one in position to put a stop to it, and he or she is ill-equipped to do so.

This isn't another article about teaching manners or preaching respect. It's not about group counseling or community circles.

This is about putting an end to bullying. It's about protecting your students and their right to learn and enjoy school without being threatened, terrorized, or picked on.

It's about stepping in and saying, "I'm your teacher, and you will not be bullied. Not on my watch."

If you want to be that kind of teacher, if you want to end bullying in your classroom forever, if you want to take a stand for those who can't always stand for themselves, then keep reading.

How to Stop Bullying

Put the strategies and guidelines below into practice and you will put an end to bullying.

However, it does take a certain amount of work. You will have to follow through. You will have to be vigilant. You will have to be bold. But the rewards for you and your students can be life changing.

Let's get started.

Take a stand, make a commitment.

Decide right now that you will do whatever it takes to legally, safely, and ethically prevent bullying in your classroom. You must commit yourself to protecting each student's right to learn and enjoy school, above all.

Know what bullying is.

Bullying is the strong preying upon the weak. It can be a physical advantage or a social advantage. It can be one student or many. It often takes the form of threats, intimidation, repeated cruelty, and/or forcing someone against his or her will to do what the bully wants.

You take care of it.

Don't wait for someone else to step in. Don't assume that because you referred the bullying behavior to the principal or a counselor that it's going to be taken care of. You take on the responsibility and see it through to the end.

Know your school's bullying policy.

It's important that you're familiar with your school's bullying policy—if there is one. When should a student be referred? What circumstances constitute suspension? What about expulsion? You need to be clear on these matters so you can accurately communicate the policy to your students and their parents.

Work within the school policy.

At most schools a student who physically bullies another student is suspended—as they should be. Also, cyber-bullying can have certain legal complications that can only be handled by an administrator. Make sure you understand what your responsibilities, your school's policy, and be sure to follow them.

Have your own bullying policy.

In addition to your school's bullying policy, you must have your own policy—or steps you take when bullying occurs. You are in a better, more influential position to stop bullying than any principal or administrator. To effectively stop bullying, students who bully must answer to you and his or her classmates.

Send a copy of your policy home the first week of school.

Your bullying policy should be part of the classroom management package you send home to parents during the first week of school. It's a smart way to protect yourself from complaints, and it gives parents a chance to discuss bullying with their child.

Make a promise.

At the start of every school year—and repeated regularly throughout the year—make a promise to your students that if they are the victim of bullying, you will take care of it. It's your job to take care of it. And you will protect them and make it go away.

Promise your students that if ever they're bullied, they can talk to you privately and you will never reveal you've spoken. They can slide you a note or ask if they can speak to you at recess about an academic issue. But you will protect their privacy and never let on you learned about their being bullied from them.

Communicate your policy.

Teach your bullying policy to your students during the first week of school. Define bullying for them, model what it looks like, role-play common scenarios, and make clear what happens if they bully a fellow student.

Supervise.

Watch your class like a hawk. Always. Notice body language. Keep an eye on students who are socially awkward, smaller in stature, or less confident. Be aware of those students who have fewer friends, who are alone frequently, or who play by themselves at recess. They are often, though not always, most likely to be bullied.

Keep your ear to the ground.

Victims of bullying are often fearful or embarrassed to come forward. Be proactive. Identify your leaders early in the school year (a key strategy). Check in with them often. Build a trusting relationship with these few key influencers. It's critical that you're able to count on them to be your eyes and ears on the playground or whenever you're away from your class.

Talk to your students.

When you're working with individual students, ask them, "How are things going? Anyone bothering you? Do you know of any student picking on others?" It takes only a few seconds and if you have good rapport, they'll give it to you straight.

Don't discourage tattling.

You can't protect your students from bullying if you discourage them from telling you about it. The truth is, frequent tattling is a message that the teacher is not protecting the rights of students to learn and enjoy school without interference.

Get the facts.

When you get a report of bullying, take your time gathering the facts. Take notes, interview witnesses, and open a file for documentation. Don't be in a rush to react—and don't overreact. You need to find out precisely what happened.

Separate immediately.

Once you're clear on the facts of the incident, and know who is responsible, act immediately. Separate the bully or bullies from their classmates in an in-class time-out. Tell them why, but don't lecture, scold, raise your voice, or even ask for a response.

Report the bullying.

If the bullying behavior in any way triggers a consequence in the school's policy, you must report it—and always if it's physical in nature. Keep in mind, regardless of how it's handled in the office, you will still follow through with your classroom bullying policy.

Speak to the bully's parents.

Call the parents of the bullying student and set up a conference. Be kind and respectful. Just give the facts during the meeting, reading straight from your notes. Tell them simply that bullying is unacceptable, and inform them of how you're taking care of the problem and how the student will be held accountable.

Speak to victim's parents.

Let the parents of the student being bullied know exactly what happened and how you're handling it. Assure them that you'll do everything in your power to make sure it doesn't happen again. This is now a critical responsibility and highest priority.

Extended time-out.

Keep the bullying student(s) in extended time-out for one week. Also, keep him (or her) with you, or under adult supervision, during recess. If his behavior is perfect and he is kind to his classmates during the week, then give him a tryout; allow him to rejoin the class on a probationary basis.

Prepare an apology.

Sometime during the one-week extended time-out, ask the bullying student to write an apology to the victim and then memorize it. Ask the victim privately for permission to have the bully address the class. Most of the time they will enthusiastically say yes. If not, writing the letter is instructive and therefore still worth doing.

Send a message.

After checking the work, have the bullying student address the class. Reciting an apology publicly puts her (or him) on record in front of her classmates that she acknowledges her behavior and promises not to do it again. It can be a powerful, humbling, and behavior-changing experience.

Supervise .

Keep a close eye on both the bully and the victim for weeks after the incident. Know who they're with on the playground and where they're playing. Have your leaders keep an eye on them—preferably playing with them. Trust your students, but always verify.

Check in often.

Talk to both students often. Ask how things are going and if they're having any problems. Never hold a grudge against the bullying student. Give him or her an opportunity to put the past where it belongs.

Check in with parents.

After a couple of weeks check in with both parents and let them know how their child is doing. They need to know that you haven't forgotten and that you're going to see it through to the end of the year.

If it happens again...

If you see or hear of more bullying behavior from the same student, which is unlikely if you follow the steps above, then place him or her immediately back in extended time-out for an indefinite period of time.

If the student can't be trusted, then you can't leave him or her alone with others. It's as simple as that. This is the promise you made to each of your students and is the right thing to do. Keep the student in extended time-out until you can trust him/her again—which could take weeks.

When to consider counseling.

If you notice the victim of the bullying incident becoming withdrawn, less social, or unable to enjoy your classroom, then consider referring the student to professional counseling. The bullying student, too, should be referred if the bully-like behavior is repeated.

Be an expert in classroom management.

The truth is, bullying rarely if ever happens in well-run classrooms. When standards of behavior are clearly communicated, when students are held accountable using an effective classroom management plan, and when the teacher is well-versed in fair, effective strategies, then students don't bully.

Build rapport.

One of the keys to effective classroom management is to build trusting rapport with students. When students like you, trust you, and believe in you and your message, they are tremendously influenced and much less likely to be involved in bullying behavior.

Make your classroom remarkable.

When you create a classroom your students love being part of, they experience a sense of belonging and kinship that spurs them to be both inclusive and protective of one another—regardless of background or personality.

And when *all* students are considered valuable members of the class, when they're engaged and motivated, and when they're busy learning and contributing to a class they really care about, then bullying doesn't even enter their mind.

Protect Like A Parent

When parents send their children to school, it's with the assumption that they'll be safe. It is our responsibility as teachers to make sure that they are—not just from bullies, but from anything that interferes with learning, building friendships, and enjoying the school experience.

Parents instinctively will do anything to protect their children. They'll go to the ends of the earth to care for them. They'll stand in front of anyone or anything wishing to harm them. They'll lift a car above the ground to save them.

We must have a similar mindset toward each of our students. After all, in the classroom we are the last line of defense.

Bullying doesn't have to be a problem. It doesn't have to take place in your classroom. It doesn't have to be part of the daily lives of our students.

You have the power to put a stop to it. You're the only one with the power to put a stop to it.