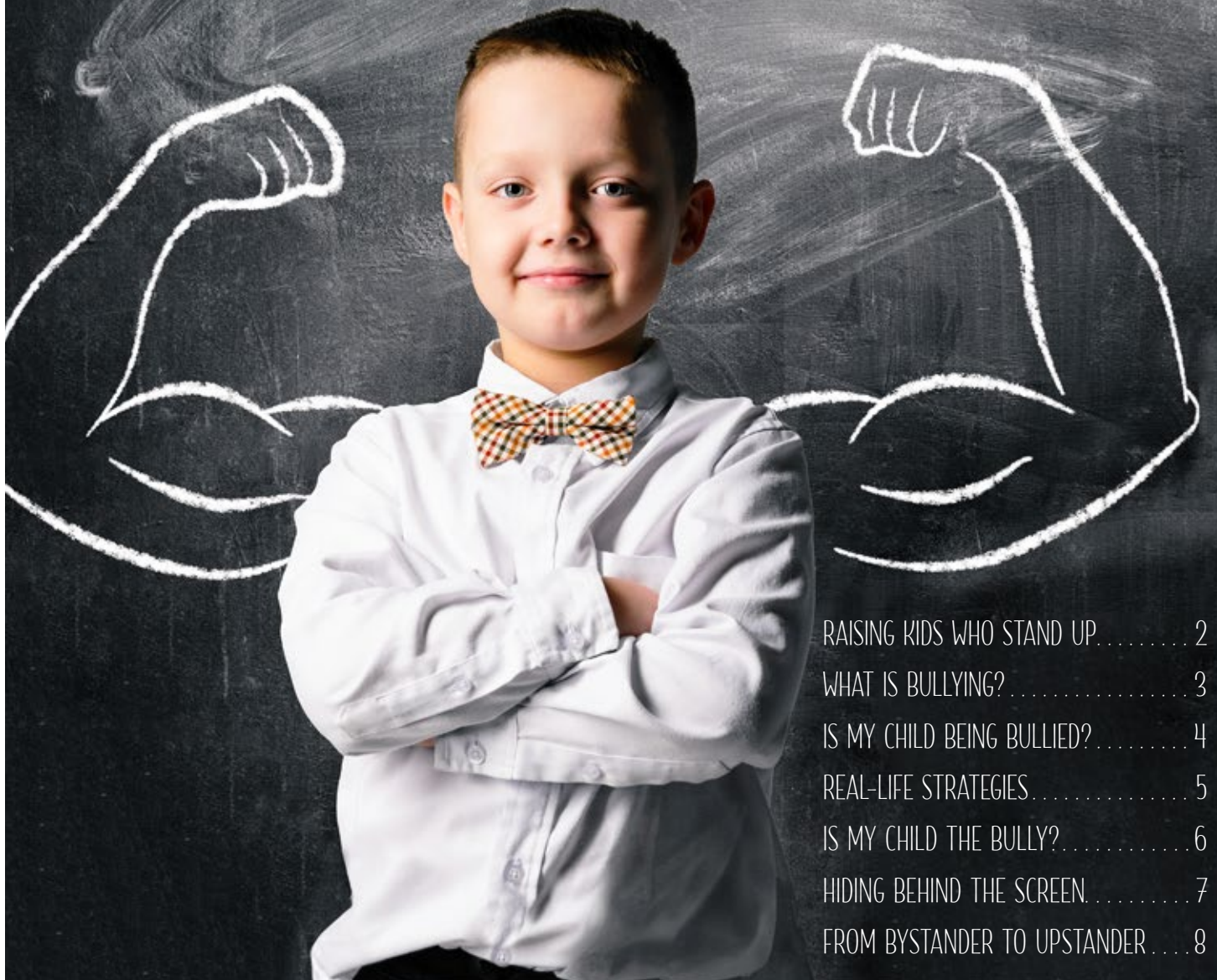


# STANDING UP AGAINST BULLYING

HELPING OUR KIDS SEE  
HOW THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



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CATHY YEULET-ISTOCK

## RAISING KIDS WHO STAND UP

by Jim Daly

**I**n the fall of 2012, high school sophomore Whitney Knopp heard some surprising news: She'd been nominated to her school's homecoming court. She was excited, but also a bit puzzled. By her own admission, she wasn't part of the "in" crowd, and she couldn't imagine why she'd been nominated.

When she was told the truth, it broke her heart. It was a prank. Some classmates thought it would be funny to nominate her, given her quiet and reserved nature.

Whitney's mother told reporters that her daughter was continually mocked at school and online after the votes were counted and the results were announced. She said her daughter is a gentle, friendly girl who doesn't have enemies. But some classmates wanted to be mean—and Whitney just happened to be their target.

Fortunately, the story didn't end there. Word spread, and many students came to the girl's defense. A supportive Facebook page appeared, attracting nearly 100,000 "likes." Whitney's classmates contacted local businesses to get them to cover Whitney's expenses for the dance, from a beautiful dress to a new hairstyle. On the big night, CNN reported that the sophomore "shined as homecoming princess."

In many ways, it was a happy ending. Classmates and community members took a stand against bullying, inspiring others around the nation to do the same. Still, Whitney will carry the memories of the experience into adulthood.

The story reminded me again how important it is that we give our children an appreciation for treating all people with dignity. Are we raising our

children to defend the defenseless, to stand up for the underdog, to protect the vulnerable and befriend the friendless?

I care about my sons' academic progress, of course. But I'm more proud of Trent and Troy when they reach out and stand up for the student who isn't the most popular kid in class.

Let's take a stand against bullying. Focus on the Family created this download to help you keep the conversation going with your kids. Get them talking. Get to know their friends. Make your home the hub of the party, so you're more aware of the social dynamics in your kids' lives.

The world can be a difficult place. And while we can't control the behavior of other kids, we *can* commit to raising courageous children who will protect and defend others.

# WHAT IS BULLYING?

## Is it really a big deal?

**M**any parents think that a few scuffles with other kids are a normal part of growing up, especially if a child learns to stand up to an aggressor. It's certainly a popular theme in the movies. Who doesn't love it when the scrawny, unpopular kid gets the best of the locker room thug?

### AS PARENTS, WE ARE THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE.

While inspiring, these stories don't represent life off the silver screen. In the real world, bullying is abusive and ugly, with profound and sometimes lethal consequences. Its impact on children is now considered a serious health issue by professional organizations and government agencies.

Bullying goes beyond the usual horseplay and conflicts of childhood. It involves ongoing aggressive behavior intended to cause harm or distress, usually in relationships where there is an imbalance of power—physical, social or otherwise. Sadly, the targets of bullying are often poorly equipped to deal with it: the small, the weak, those who are different, who have difficulty making friends.

Simply put, bullying is abuse perpetrated by peers, and it may take a variety of forms:

**Verbal.** Insults, name-calling,

racial or ethnic slurs. These are experienced equally by boys and girls, and represent the most common form of bullying.

**Physical.** Hitting, kicking, shoving or other bodily injury, as well as destruction of property.

**Social.** Spreading gossip and rumors, exclusion or isolation.

**Electronic.** Another form of social bullying, amplified by the anonymity of the internet.

Statistics only dimly reflect the pain endured by victims of bullying. Aside from physical injuries, victims may also suffer from anxiety, depression and physical complaints such as headaches,

abdominal pain and fatigue. Even more worrisome is the connection between bullying and violence, by both the perpetrator and victim. Children and teens who bully are more likely to be involved or injured in fights, and to steal, vandalize, smoke, use alcohol, drop out of school and carry a weapon. Furthermore, those who have been repeatedly victimized may decide to seek spectacular and tragic revenge.

Detecting and preventing bullying requires the involvement of parents, schools, churches and sometimes law enforcement. But as parents, we are the first line of defense, and even if our kids aren't victims themselves, they can understand bullying and how they can take a stand against it.

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*Taken from the Complete Guide to Baby and Child Care, a Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. ©1997, 2007 by Focus on the Family.*

## START THE CONVERSATION

Use the following questions to talk about bullying with your kids

Is bullying a big problem at your school?

Why do you think some kids bully other students? Do you think it helps them feel better?

How could someone help a bully understand another person's feelings? Is it possible?

Do your teachers and coaches talk about bullying? What do they say?

Have you seen teachers get involved to stop an incident of bullying? Or have you seen some avoid the incident, thinking it wasn't a big deal?

How can you and your friends get involved to prevent bullying? What could you do to help a fellow student who is being bullied?

Have you ever been the bully? At the time, did you think of yourself as "the bully"?



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## IS MY CHILD BEING BULLIED?

### “How was your day?”

For parents, it can be hard to tell how a child’s day at school really went. They might suspect there were serious challenges, but the child says that everything was “fine.” Sadly, children are often reluctant to report what has happened because of a belief that nothing can be done about it. They may lack confidence in the school’s ability to take action, or they may fear retaliation from the bully.

How can parents tell if a child is being bullied? Reluctance to go to school is a common symptom. When a child has frequent school absences, especially due to physical complaints that lack a specific cause, bullying should be considered a potential cause.

Some other warning signs:

- Injuries—unexplained bruises, cuts or scratches.
- Torn, damaged or missing clothing or other belongings.

- Anxiety, tearfulness, moodiness. Withdrawal from her usual happy self. More time alone, curtailing activities, not much social activity.
- Not caring about her appearance.

If you are suspicious, ask questions that express your concern: “How are things at school? Is anyone giving you a hard time?” Your child may be reluctant to reveal what has happened. Be persistent. If bullying has occurred, assure your child that you take it very seriously, that you’ll take action and that keeping silent protects the bully.

Get as much information as possible: who, when, where and what happened. If there were witnesses, get information from them, as well.

Make an appointment with the principal or administrator. This person will likely be ready to intervene, but he or she will need specifics. Be sure to take note of the response, and follow-up with this person later if necessary.

You may also want to arrange a meeting with the perpetrator and his parents in a school official’s office. Your posture should be calm, but resolute: Make it abundantly clear that the bullying will not be tolerated, and you expect his parents to cooperate.

If the harassment continues and the principal or parents of the perpetrator appear unwilling to take appropriate action, they should be put on notice that the problem may be taken to a higher level of school administration, an attorney or the police. If the problem involves risks of extreme violence, you should seek advice from law-enforcement personnel. In a worst-case scenario, a change of school (or home schooling) may be necessary to help your child survive this situation. Do whatever it takes (within the bounds of the law) to protect your child’s safety and self-respect.

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## REAL-LIFE STRATEGIES

by Ray Baldwin

We can't always intervene right away on behalf of our kids, especially if they are at school during the day. But kids can use a few practical strategies to help them while away from home:

**Tell an Adult.** Even if the bullying is more verbal than physical, it always has the potential to escalate. To ensure that your kids' safety is not threatened, let them know that it is appropriate and necessary to tell an adult.

Talk with your children about which adult, in a particular setting, could help most the next time bullying occurs. Make sure the adult your children turn to will not treat their concerns lightly but will properly deal with bullying behavior.

**Avoid/Walk Away.** Encourage your children to avoid areas where the bullying is taking place, even if that means taking another hallway or using a different bathroom.

Of course, encountering bullies may be inevitable. If your children encounter bullies who begin picking on them, have your kids practice walking away and simply ignoring them.

**Deflect/Use Humor.** Deflection can be used to get bullies' attention on something else for the moment, creating an opportunity for your children to remove themselves from the situation. If your kids have a quick sense of humor, using humor appropriately could be a working tactic as well. Bullies often like a good joke just as much as the next child. (In fact, they may need it more.)

**Take a Stand.** If responding to aggression or physical bullying, teach your children to stand up to bullies.

"Be strong and courageous," Moses encouraged God's people

(Deuteronomy 31:6). "Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Encourage your kids with this verse and remind them that the Lord is always with them. Then, practice phrases your kids can say at a time of particular need, such as "please stop" and "that's not cool."

Have your children practice deliberately looking you in the eye and responding. But be sure there is ample space between you as you practice—you don't want bullies to get the impression that your children want to escalate the encounter into a fight.

It is our job as parents to teach kids how to handle real-life situations with confidence

### HAVE YOUR CHILDREN PRACTICE DELIBERATELY LOOKING YOU IN THE EYE AND RESPONDING.

and maturity. Remember to talk through the situation with your children, discuss their options, and then practice at home. Have fun with it so that the exercise does not become a high-pressure situation. Rather, create an opportunity through which your children learn to thrive!

## IS MY CHILD THE BULLY?

What to do if your child is accused of picking on other kids

Whatever you do, don't shrug it off ("boys will be boys!") or deny that there's a problem. Get the facts. You should get your child's side of the story, but also diligently seek input both from school officials and from whomever else was involved, including the victim(s) of the bullying. If the evidence (or your child's or teen's own admission) points to involvement in bullying, you will need to have a number of serious conversations:

- You must make it clear not only that this behavior is unacceptable, but that if continued, it will lead to serious consequences imposed by you, the school and possibly the law.
- Contact the parents of the



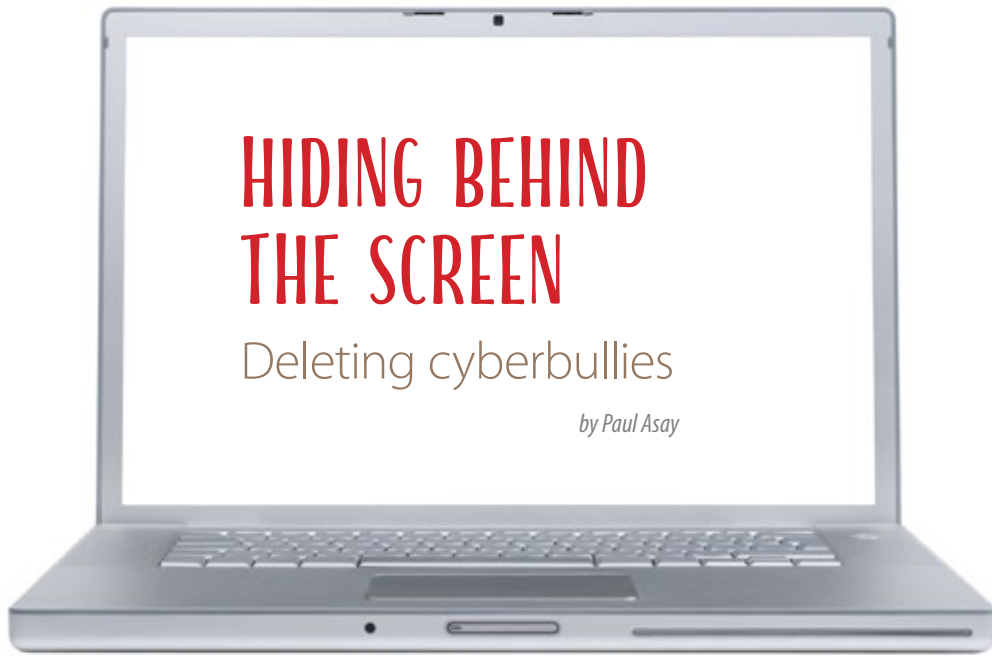
KRISS RUSSELL-ISTOCK-THINKSTOCK

children involved to apologize and express your determination to prevent further episodes. As a gesture of integrity and courage, you might want to arrange a meeting with the other family at an appropriate location so that a formal apology can be made by your child, as well as an offer of restitution for any expenses related to the bullying.

**WHATEVER  
YOU DO,  
DON'T  
SHRUG  
IT OFF.**

- If others have been involved in bullying—perpetrators often act in groups—you should take the lead in contacting their parents to encourage corrective and restorative action.
- If your child or teen has been involved in multiple bullying incidents, you should arrange for him to undergo counseling, both for evaluation and prevention of further episodes. Other issues—depression, drug use, impulse control and even prior victimization (since some bullies have been bullied themselves)—may need to be addressed. This is a family issue, so be prepared to participate in some important discussions in the counselor's office yourself.

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## In movies, bullies are easy to spot.

Sometimes they run in packs, like the hooligans in *Back to the Future*. Or maybe they're cunning intimidators, like Harry Potter's nemesis Draco Malfoy. Whatever form they take, they're impossible to miss. We know them by their sneer, their snarl, the way they spit when they talk.

Real bullies are harder to identify. Today, bullies lurk online, posting insults and starting rumors. They can be anyone, even the "good kids" who get A's and attend church. Sometimes, they don't even realize they're bullying.

In 2012, 15-year-old Phoebe Prince killed herself after being harassed, online and off, for months. After she died, bullies defamed her Facebook page, then told police they'd done nothing wrong. One classmate said the harassment Prince dealt with wasn't all that unusual. "If you want to label it 'bullying,' then I've

bullied girls, and girls have bullied me," she told *Slate*.

Since kids may not know they're causing damage, as parents we must be ever watchful of our children's online activity, to detect whether they may be silently suffering victims—or cyber bullies themselves.

**Be nosy.** Spot-check your kids' online behavior and keep computers in high-traffic areas of the house. You're the parent. You have every right to be involved and aware of your child's online life.

**Limit access.** Make sure your children simply aren't spending all that much time on social media or in texting friends. Set reasonable limits and discuss the wisdom of those constraints with your kids.

**Protect information.** Tell your children to never give out personal information online—passwords,

addresses, telephone numbers—and caution them about doling out less sensitive info (class schedules, employment, etc.) that might be used against them.

**Model healthy behavior.** If you gossip in front of your kids, it's more likely they'll gossip, too—and they might do it online. Make sure they know that sending cruel messages about or embarrassing pictures of someone is no joke.

**Save every message.** If your children become the target of cyber bullies, they may be tempted to purge the offensive comments. But by saving or printing them, you'll have the evidence you need to report a pattern of abuse.

Most important, if a child becomes a victim, help him understand that he's not to blame, that his sense of self-worth shouldn't be dependent on what others think. That can be difficult. Kids naturally seek approval from peers. So it's up to parents to reassure them that they are precious gifts, even if others don't see it.

Bullying, online and off, remains a part of many young lives. But with a little vigilance, common sense and prayer, you can minimize the risks and guide your children through this season of life.



YURI ARCURS - PEOPLEIMAGES.COM

# FROM BYSTANDER TO UPSTANDER

by Vance Fry

It's easy to stay on the sidelines, to avoid getting involved in trouble. This is true for kids and adults. However, being a bystander to bullying is nearly as bad as joining the bully's actions. Bullies need a passive audience to continue bullying. Lack of intervention enables their actions.

Help your kids not to be bystanders, but "upstanders," kids who recognize that something is

wrong and work to make it right. This is real heroism, standing up for what is good and true and protecting someone who is being hurt.

An effective way to help your kids stand up against bullying is to role-play through different scenarios that may lead to bullying, or where bullying is already happening. Use the cards on the next page to initiate conversations and work through solutions to the problems posed.

## How to use the cards on the following page:

Cut out the cards on the dotted lines and toss them in a bowl. Pick and read a few of these situations together with your child. For each scenario, identify both the aggressor and the victim of the aggression. Then discuss whether actual bullying is taking place, or if the situation could lead to future bullying. Finally, talk about ways the bystanders could become upstanders.



Some kids from your church's youth group start sending one of your close friends sarcastic and even outright mean text messages. They sometimes pressure her to give them things or do things for them if she wants to continue being friends.

A group of kids from your homeroom are spreading painful rumors about you. Many kids have heard the rumors now and exclude you at recess and lunch time. **How do you respond?**

An older girl in the cafeteria always pulls your ponytail every day as she walks by your table. It's a bit strange. She never does anything else, but you really don't like having your hair pulled. **What should you do?**

In your reading group, you have a teacher's aide who frequently makes disparaging remarks after a certain classmate gives incorrect answers. Once this aide said quietly, but audibly, that he shouldn't bother helping "stupid" kids who can't learn. Other children have started calling this child names. **What should you do?**

A girl in your gym class isn't very athletic, but she always makes fun of the way other kids run and throw. She says you run like a cartoon.

In gym class, a group of boys you're friends with has started teasing a heavier boy. You didn't think it was a big deal for a while, because the kid seemed to not be bothered by the teasing, and sometimes even laughed. But now he's always quiet and doesn't talk to you.

You don't think of your friend as very mean, but she often makes "blonde jokes" whenever another friend, Jennifer, is around. You can tell the jokes are hurtful to Jennifer. She seems afraid to say anything about it.

Your neighbor tells you that his older brother will sometimes sneakily punch him when his parents aren't looking. The bigger boy says that if his brother ever "ratted" on him, he'd get two punches next time. **What should you do?**

One classmate often makes fun of your best friend, but after every hurtful comment, she smiles and says, "Oh, I'm totally just kidding!"

Your friend would like to play basketball with you and the other kids at recess, but every day the other kids tell him the game is a special practice only for kids on the team. You're on the team, but your friend isn't.

You're in fifth grade, the highest grade at your elementary school. Your good friend has started making fun of younger kids on the playground. The friend pushes kids down the slide before they are ready to go, and often stands around the swing set, pressuring the younger kids to give up their turn. **What can you tell your friend?**

A boy in your group of friends calls you "wittle 8 o'clock boy" because your parents don't let you stay up late on school nights. He's not really mean, but . . .

There's a girl in your class who is from a different country. Her English isn't great, and the teacher will often spend more time helping her and answering her questions. Two kids from your table enjoy making fun of her and calling her names, even though they pretend to be kind and playful to her face. **What should you do?**

It's hard to know what's funny! You've sometimes teased one of your friends because he's pretty poor at spelling. Now, he doesn't want to practice the weekly spelling lists with you anymore. He'll sit in the back of the room, looking over his list. **What should you do?**

At recess when you pick teams for soccer, some kids begin arguing about which team will be "stuck with" a player who isn't very athletic and doesn't have many friends. This child doesn't say anything, but you can tell the comments are hurtful to him.

There is a new student in your science class who doesn't know anyone in the school. During group lab time, he will often start working by himself, and the other kids in class will loudly protest if they are assigned to do their lab work with him.

On the school bus every day, there's another kid who picks on your younger brother. The driver doesn't seem to notice, but you know your brother is afraid of this boy.

# FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®

Compiled by Vance Fry

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