

Michele Borba, Ed.D.

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End Peer Cruelty, Build **Empathy**

The Proven 6Rs of
Bullying Prevention That
Create Inclusive, Safe,
and Caring Schools



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Praise for

End Peer Cruelty, Build **Empathy**

“This book provides real results for bullying prevention, awareness, and education and will make a difference not only in the lives of children, but in our communities. Dr. Borba’s expertise in bullying is second to no one: she is a leader in her field and this book will change lives.”

—Sue Scheff, internet safety expert and author

“Dr. Borba compiles and succinctly summarizes the weight of available evidence about what works to prevent bullying at school. Building safe and bully-free schools is not easy and there are no shortcuts. It takes coordination and collaboration by all concerned community stakeholders. This book offers a potent and pragmatic road-map to help schools achieve that goal.”

—Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D., codirector, Cyberbullying Research Center

“Dr. Michele Borba’s contributions to the field are always practical, relatable, and powerful. Her newest book is no exception and provides a valuable step-by-step guide to help school communities reduce peer harassment and hate from the inside out through policy and programming.”

—Dr. Sameer Hinduja, codirector of Cyberbullying Research Center and professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Florida Atlantic University

“An important addition to any educator’s toolbox for breaking the cycle of bullying violence and creating a more deeply caring school environment.”

—Barbara Coloroso, educator and author of *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Not-So-Innocent Bystander*

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(612) 338-2068

help4kids@freespirit.com

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the unsung heroes of the world: educators. Your compassion, competence, and commitment to children are the best hope for bullying prevention and producing a generation of empathetic, caring, and courageous upstanders.

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No book is ever written alone. Countless people were instrumental in helping me develop these ideas, and I express my heartfelt appreciation:

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Introduction

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” is a myth that needs to be dispelled. Bullying means that a child is intentionally causing another child pain. That pain may be inflicted emotionally, verbally, physically, or electronically, and it is *always* harmful. Whether a child is bullying others, witnessing bullying, or the target of bullying, the behavior wreaks havoc on children’s emotional, moral, and cognitive development; demolishes feelings of safety; and, if not stopped, can shatter young lives. In fact, bullying is viewed as one of the most serious public health problems in the United States and Canadian school systems.

The effects of peer cruelty are far-reaching and can cause immense stress, anxiety, health problems, depression, and humiliation that may result in serious mental health issues for children. Bullying also induces fear and insecurity, which impacts students’ concentration, academic achievement, and learning performance. This is the reason why educators need to make an earnest effort to prevent bullying on school campuses, and it’s why I wrote this book.

I’ve spent nearly three decades studying youth violence and bullying and working with hundreds of educators, counselors, and law enforcement officials around the world. I know the horrors of school shootings and I’ve held the hands of too many parents whose children have ended their lives because of peer cruelty. I’ve also spoken to countless kids who have witnessed or been involved in bullying at their schools for years and feel powerless to stop it. We need to put an end to childhood aggression, and this book provides a concrete plan to do so. Bullying is learned, and it can be unlearned. Caring, committed educators using research-based strategies can turn this terrible trend around, and I will show you how.



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“I used to tell the teachers I was bullied but I stopped because they never did anything. I don’t think they believed me . . . but maybe they didn’t care.” —Kara, age 11*

“I was bullied for three years. The school librarian finally realized I was hurting and let me stay in the library at recess. If it wasn’t for her, I don’t know what I would have done.” —Jamil, age 10

The Facts About Bullying

“Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-age children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time.”
—*StopBullying.gov*

Bullying has no boundaries and impacts all geographical regions. Though it is more prevalent in the middle school years, it affects all school-age students of both sexes. Here is a sample of the latest data about school bullying from *StopBullying.gov* and other sources that reveal the urgent need for educators to find solutions:

- Bullying happens every 7 minutes in every kind of school: private and public; rural, urban, and suburban¹
- Over 70 percent of students say they have seen bullying in their schools²
- Nearly 50 percent of students report being bullied at least once during the past month²
- More than 40 percent of students say they are *frequently* involved in bullying (two or more times in the past month)³
- Approximately 30 percent of students in grades 4 through 12 report bullying others³
- More than 70 percent of school staff has seen bullying; over 40 percent witness bullying once a week or more³
- Only 20 to 30 percent of students who are bullied notify adults⁴

* Note: The student quotes throughout this book are ones I’ve personally gathered in my trainings; all names have been changed to protect the individuals’ privacy.

1. National Education Association, October 2011.

2. Espelage et al., 2003.

3. Bradshaw et al., 2007.

4. Ttofi et al., 2011.

Bullying Prevention in Schools Today

“Children and youth who are bullied are more likely to be depressed, lonely, and anxious; have low self-esteem; feel unwell; and think about suicide.” —Dr. Susan Limber, bullying expert

“Students who watch as their peers endure the verbal or physical abuses of another student could become as psychologically distressed, if not more so, by the events than the victims themselves.” —American Psychological Association

“School bullying is the single most enduring and underrated issue in U.S. schools.” —The National School Safety Center

Long ago bullying behavior was considered almost a child’s rite of passage and largely ignored. After all, many thought: “Kids will be kids.” Some even believed that “bullying will toughen up kids, it builds character.” Then a deadly chain of incidents on school campuses made us rethink everything. Most infamous was the shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999. Two teens brought guns to school, killing thirteen people and wounding more than twenty others. During the years that followed, dozens more school shootings transpired. A 2002 report by the United States Secret Service, who studied thirty-seven school shootings on American campuses, confirmed that bullying is a key factor in many shootings. Their report stated:⁵

Almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident. In several cases, individual attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was long-standing and severe. In some of these cases the experience of being bullied seemed to have a significant impact on the attacker and appeared to have been a factor in his decision to mount an attack at the school. In one case, the attacker’s schoolmates described the attacker as “the kid everyone teased.”

In addition to homicidal violence, bullying victimization has also been shown to inspire youth suicide. There is even a disturbing term for those who take their own young lives due to bullying: *bullycide*. The list of these victims is long and growing: Tyler Clementi, Ryan Patrick Halligan, Megan Meier, and

5. Vossekuil et al., 2002.

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Phoebe Prince, among dozens of others—and those are just the ones whose names made news headlines. Who knows how many more there have been.

“School got to be unbearable. All I could think about was what the boys might do to me at recess. My grades went down, and all I wanted to do was get home safely. Being bullied puts your whole body in nonstop ‘fear factor’ mode.” —Jacob, age 12

Another dynamic adds to our concern that bullying needs to be taken far more seriously: the electronic age ushered in a new form of peer torment called *cyberbullying*, in which young people use devices such as cell phones, tablets, computers, and digital cameras to bully others. A large global survey scanning eleven countries and almost 5,000 children revealed that one in five teens is cyberbullied. Roughly 85 percent of the time the bullied child knows the child doing the cyberbullying, and that means the child may have to endure seeing his tormenter at school. Though the majority of cyberbullying attacks occur off school grounds, they cause severe distress among students. Forty-one percent of teens said cyberbullying made them feel depressed; one-fifth felt suicidal.⁶

More than half of teens think cyberbullying is worse than face-to-face bullying and 43 percent believe it is a bigger problem for young people than drug abuse.⁶

The impact of bullying on our children’s mental health has led to heightened demand among educators for answers. Today, school bullying is finally receiving the attention it deserves from educators, governing bodies, law enforcement officials, and medical professionals, as well as parents. In recent years, the White House held a special conference on bullying, while state and provincial governments began passing mandates for school districts to implement anti-bullying practices. At this writing, fifty states, several Canadian provinces, and a few other countries have passed anti-bullying legislation, and a lucrative cottage industry of products for schools to use to combat bullying has flooded the market. Schools across the United States, Canada, and other countries have implemented hundreds of these “bullying prevention programs”; unfortunately, current studies show that at best only a quarter of them will actually reduce bullying behaviors.⁶ The problem is that the majority of these programs are not research-based so there simply hasn’t been solid research in the field. That is, until a few large studies on bullying were published—some of which I’ve already cited here—and for the first time pointed to hope: educators *can* make a difference and bullying *can* be

6. Vodafone, 2015.

reduced. But there is a caveat: only certain procedures and approaches work to reduce aggression. One mistake educators make in trying to stop bullying is failing to base their efforts on proven evidence and faithfully apply those findings. While our aim may be to stop bullying, our approach is too often not scientific, systemic, or sustained, and so our results are mediocre at best.

What Works and Does *Not* Work to Reduce Bullying

Bullying is learned behavior and can be unlearned, but solutions to peer cruelty are not simple. All those eye-catching posters and buttons, T-shirt contests, song competitions, one-day trainings, pack-aged worksheets, or “stamp-out bullying campaigns”—while they may mean well—are not effective solutions. Bullying prevention is not a one-size-fits-all approach that uses the same strategy for the targets, bystanders, and students who bully. After all, each bullying incident differs in motivation, type, and dynamics, just as each student’s learning needs differ.

Educators *can* make a difference and bullying *can* be reduced. But there is a caveat: only certain procedures and approaches work to reduce aggression.

The best way to reduce bullying is with the ongoing, homegrown, data-driven efforts of a committed, informed school community trained in anti-bullying. The approaches that are most promising tackle bullying dynamics from many angles and involve all stakeholders—students, parents, administrators, teachers, and *all* school staff, including bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, yard supervisors, counselors, psychologists, secretaries, school nurses, librarians, volunteers, coaches, and crossing guards. The foundation is always based on building a culture of respect and changing destructive attitudes and behaviors by replacing them with healthier habits and views. Applying the right classroom management and discipline policies is also crucial: zero tolerance and expulsion have proven to be ineffective and can backfire.

Ultimately, what works to reduce bullying is *not* implementing a specific program but consistently using a few key evidence-based bullying prevention principles, policies, and practices. Those proven elements form the basis for this book.

Proven Strategies That Decrease Bullying

Researchers Maria Ttofi and David Farrington conducted a meta-analysis of fifty-nine evaluations of bullying interventions such as the KiVa Anti-Bullying Program, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, and Second Step to identify the features that had the greatest impact on decreasing bullying behaviors. They found that the most important components were:⁷

- parent training
- improved playground supervision
- appropriate disciplinary methods
- student-run school assemblies that raised awareness of the problem
- classroom rules against bullying
- classroom management techniques for dealing with bullying
- tapping the power of peers to combat bullying.

All of these proven strategies are described throughout this book.

How This Book Is Unique

“My seventh-grade teacher figured out that my grades were so bad because I was being bullied. I couldn’t think. She told the other teachers to watch out for me and not to let the kid near me. I survived the terror because of her.” —Will, age 12

No single program (not PBIS, not Olweus, not Second Step, not Responsive Classroom) provides a one-stop shop for preventing bullying and improving school climate. All programs have blind spots, biases, and flaws. *End Peer Cruelty, Build Empathy* is not a program; it is a process to reduce peer cruelty with an “inside-out” approach that relies on those who have the best pulse on the issue: the actual stakeholders. This book will strengthen any program you already have in place by drawing on the best elements from all evidence-based programs and helping you integrate those elements into your own program so your program is rooted in research, culturally specific, and addresses your unique learning environment and students’ particular needs. And if you don’t

⁷ Farrington and Ttofi, 2009.

have a program already in place, I'll share which ones are proven to be most effective.

I'll also share new research, best practices, social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, and character habits that are most likely to reduce the cycle of youth cruelty and create a safe and respectful school community. By far the best result of any of these efforts is when your students perceive their school as a caring place they want to be part of.

The strategies in this book are designed to be incorporated school- or district-wide. Each activity can also be adapted for individual classroom use, but research is clear: the most favorable outcome of bullying reduction involves a three-tiered approach: school-wide, classroom-wide, and addressing individual students. This book is based on a systemic, sustained approach that involves *all* school staff: classified and certificated personnel as well as students, parents, and the community. Each person offers a different set of eyes and ears to identify why and where bullying may be happening as well as solutions to solve it. When adults exert a joint effort to make all students feel respected and welcomed at school, wonderful transformations take place.

THE INSIDE-OUT APPROACH TO THE BULLYING PROBLEM

“Creativity is a lot like looking at the world through a kaleidoscope. You look at a set of elements, the same ones everyone else sees, but then reassemble those floating bits and pieces into an enticing new possibility.”
—Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *The Change Masters*

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a Harvard Business School professor, is the author of the best-selling book *The Change Masters*. She is also a famous business innovator who has worked with dozens of Fortune 500 companies. Though her book focuses on corporate leadership, the basic principles also can apply to schools. Too often, Kanter tells companies, we make a major mistake of looking to the outside for sources of innovation and change. A more effective approach, she states, is to look within. Kanter calls her approach *kaleidoscopic thinking*.

To understand the concept, recall a time in your childhood when you looked inside a kaleidoscope. Each time you twirled the cylinder, colorful new patterns formed. In fact, you could literally spend hours turning the dial to create beautiful new patterns, but not once did you stop to put in new pieces. Instead, you re-created new schemes and structures by using what was already

inside. That is precisely what kaleidoscopic thinking entails. Kanter urges leaders to look at what they already have in place in their organization and restructure from the inside out, and that is the method you'll use in this book.

End Peer Cruelty, Build Empathy is a radical new approach to reducing bullying: I am not advocating one particular program to purchase or strategy to adhere to, but instead will guide you to use the kaleidoscopic thinking model to develop the most effective organic prevention approach. Instead of bringing in new pieces from the outside, I'll guide you to restructure your key elements for change, which are the critical parts of any organization: your programs, practices, policies, principles, and people. Not only will rethinking and restructuring those elements save enormous expenses and time, but what you create will be homegrown. Your bullying prevention efforts will be more likely to succeed because the approach is customized to fit *your* students' needs; match *your* culture, demographics, and beliefs; and apply to *your* evidence.

THE GOALS OF THIS BOOK

This book aims to help you develop an approach to bullying prevention that not only reduces aggressive behaviors but also teaches students proactive skills and cultivates a respectful school climate. Here are the core goals of this approach:

- Ensure that your entire school community supports a comprehensive, systemic bullying prevention effort and train them so that everyone is on the “same page.”
- Create a safe, caring school culture based on respectful relationships and social responsibility as the foundations for bullying prevention.
- Engage *all* stakeholders—staff, students, parents, and community—in bullying prevention efforts.
- Implement bullying prevention practices that are evidence-based and address your school culture as well as your students' unique needs.
- Use a three-tiered systemic approach that addresses bullying prevention school-wide, classroom-wide, and with individual students.
- Replace aggression and bullying behaviors with prosocial behaviors by teaching SEL skills.
- Use a systemic and sustained implementation process based on your evidence and needs to create real and lasting change.

About This Book

End Peer Cruelty, Build Empathy is a comprehensive guide to bullying prevention that offers the most effective proven strategies to stop bullying and create safe, caring school climates. It provides detailed guidelines for strategy implementation, data collection, team management, student and parent involvement, skill building, and assessment—everything your school needs to reduce peer cruelty and teach all students proactive, healthy behaviors to replace inappropriate ones. The practices, policies, and procedures herein are culled from a review of hundreds of studies on bullying as well as my thirty-year career working in violence prevention in schools around the world.

I wrote this book with a broad audience in mind—namely, any member of a school community who is or wishes to be involved in bullying prevention. But I expect the book to be of particular interest and usefulness to administrators, principals, assistant principals, behavior program coordinators, bullying prevention teams, and teacher leaders, as well as individual teachers and counselors who are especially committed to reducing peer cruelty. While the strategies here work best when implemented school-wide, they can also be modified for use in classrooms, clusters of classrooms, grade levels, or youth programs. Unlike some highly structured programs that require a “top-down” approach to implementation, the strategies in this book are flexible and can be tailored to meet the needs of many different audiences—from a school principal looking to engage her staff in optimizing existing anti-bullying efforts; to a behavior specialist who is part of his school’s bullying prevention team and wants to share the latest research and best practices; to a math teacher who is looking to form a book study with fellow teachers and model some of these practices, and perhaps even convince other teachers, staff, and school administration to join in (a “bottom-up” approach). However this book is used, the goal in each case is the same: employ evidence-based practices with as many stakeholders as possible to address all facets of bullying: from creating rules for behavior to replacing aggression with acceptable skills.



“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
—Frederick Douglass

A Note About Terms Used in This Book

No *victims* or *bullies*. I've deliberately refrained from using the label *bully* or *victim* in this book, and I strongly urge you and your colleagues to do so as well. Labels can become self-perpetuating, so children might grow to see themselves as *bullies* or *victims*. Terms also typecast kids, affect their self-esteem, limit their potential, and impede their willingness to change. What's more, roles often shift: a child who bullies at recess may be the bullied child on the bus or the witness after school. For all of these reasons, educators need to do away with these labels. Good alternatives to use include *bullying student*, *child engaged in bullying-like behaviors*, *target*, or *bullied child*.

Also, throughout this book, I use the term *parents* to denote a student's primary caregiver(s) or legal guardian(s), while realizing many children have a single parent and/or may not use the term parent.

THREE PARTS OF *END PEER CRUELTY, BUILD EMPATHY*

The book is set up in three distinct parts and each is crucial to bullying prevention.

Part I: Establishing the Foundation of Bullying Prevention—Respectful Relationships and a Positive School Climate

The first part of the book addresses how to create a positive school climate and nurture beneficial relationships among students and between students and school staff. You'll learn why creating such a climate is crucial to preventing bullying and will find dozens of positivity-building practices, including:

- Building caring connections and a more inclusive environment
- Helping students be more kind and respectful with peers
- Creating positivity practices for playgrounds, cafeterias, and student clubs
- Empowering students to shift their school norms from cruel to kind
- Restoring student relationships to reduce bullying
- Conducting class meetings and developing a code of ethics
- Teaching SEL skills to help students get along
- Learning problem-solving and conflict-resolution strategies to reduce friction

Part II: Getting Started to Make Real and Lasting Change

The second part of the book addresses how to get started implementing bullying prevention efforts at your school site, in your classroom, and with your students. You'll learn how to form and implement student bullying surveys and focus groups and how to use the resulting data to select the best programs and practices to reduce bullying in your school. You'll also learn how to create and sustain a bullying prevention team to support your efforts (if you don't already have a team in place).

Part III: The 6Rs of Bullying Prevention

The third part of the book presents the 6Rs of preventing bullying: *Rules*, *Recognize*, *Report*, *Respond*, *Refuse*, and *Replace*. Together they offer a blueprint to implementing the best research, policies, and practices for effective prevention. Each of the six chapters is instrumental in creating what all students deserve: a safe and caring learning environment that breeds acceptance and respect. Implementing each "R" as a whole school and community will optimize success.

For more than three decades I've researched how to stop the cycle of violence in schools, which led me to develop the 6Rs. I've shared this model with hundreds of educators worldwide, including in the United States, Canada, Germany, South Korea, Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, New Zealand, Egypt, and on U.S. Army bases. I continue to help educators implement the 6Rs in their classrooms, schools, and districts, and even in whole counties. Each chapter described here provides specific, no-cost ways to apply the Rs to your setting.

R1: Rules—Establish an Anti-Bullying Policy and Expectations for Respect. Here you'll learn how to create and disseminate an anti-bullying policy that fits your school values, focuses on prevention, features strong parental involvement, builds a respectful climate, and gets *everyone* onboard.

R2: Recognize—Teach Stakeholders How to Recognize Bullying. This chapter addresses the importance of all stakeholders understanding what bullying is, recognizing indicators, and receiving ongoing training so they can intervene appropriately and consistently. Then, it shows you how to achieve those goals.

R3: Report—Create Procedures to Report Bullying. The third R shows you how reports about bullying incidents from staff, students, and parents provide crucial evidence of bullying frequency, locales, and participants, and

boosts student security. It offers efficient, easy, and effective options for stakeholders to report incidents and for staff to analyze the reports.

R4: Respond—Teach Witnesses How to Respond to Bullying. In a caring climate where staff, students, and parents are united, kids are more likely to take responsibility for reducing bullying. This chapter shows you how to mobilize your students' compassion and teach specific skills so they can safely step in to help stop bullying incidents, become upstanders, and change your school norms so "it's cool to be kind."

R5: Refuse—Help Targets Refuse Provocation and Cope with Victimization. Ongoing training is essential to help everyone in a school community identify and support targets and potential targets of bullying. In addition, this section offers strategies for targets to reduce future victimization and learn coping strategies.

R6: Replace—Help Students Replace Aggression with Acceptable Skills. The goal of this chapter is to help students displaying bullying behaviors adopt prosocial habits and beliefs. It offers proven skills to replace aggression with socially acceptable behaviors.

Consider the 6Rs as your major decision-making rubric to help you select the best prevention and intervention strategies and the most effective anti-bullying techniques for your students. In addition, you'll find the following repeating features throughout the book:

- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Skill Boxes.** These include crucial skills related to each section's topic with suggestions for how to teach the skills to students to nurture their social and emotional learning, prevent bullying, and cultivate kindness.
- **Brave Staff Chat Boxes.** These are ideas for courageous conversations to have among your staff—in weekly meetings, professional learning communities, or informal groups—to help them reflect on their own habits and performance related to crucial bullying topics. It is not always easy for a staff to admit that the school may not have the best bullying prevention policies or even could be contributing to the problem. That's why these chats are often necessary to create needed change.
- **Tip Boxes for Administrators, Counselors, and Teachers.** These offer simple, actionable bullying prevention strategies and tips specifically designed for each of these core audiences.

- **Ways Educators Are Empowering Students.** These provide dozens of examples of ways educators are empowering students to make a difference in reducing bullying in their schools.
- **Ways to Involve Parents.** These important sidebars present ideas for how to create stronger home-school partnerships so your bullying prevention results are more effective.
- **Further Resources.** Whenever you would like more information, turn to the Resources section on pages 243–256. This section lists books for teachers, staff, parents, and students to enhance your efforts to make your school cruelty-free.

Finally, the book includes a digital download that contains customizable PDFs of all the reproducible forms in this book for your personal use and sharing and a PDF presentation for use in professional development. See page 275 for downloading instructions. If you wish to use this book in a professional learning community or book study group, a free PLC/Book Study Guide can be downloaded at freespirit.com/PLC.

“Bullying is never okay. Period.’ If the whole school just used that one rule my life would be so much easier and I could breathe! When you’re bullied, the air gets sucked out of you.” —Henry, age 10

How to Use This Book

This book is designed for use in a variety of ways so it is relevant to your needs. Effective bullying efforts involve implementing the combined elements of Parts I, II, and III, so your aim is for prevention *and* intervention, but use your judgment as to which sections are most relevant to your immediate concerns. Delve in anywhere you want to begin. For example:

- Consider reviewing your survey data (see Part II) to assess what your stakeholders feel is most pressing and then honing in on the sections of the book that address the areas of concern.
- Some readers may already have a safe and caring school initiative and/or a bullying prevention team in place, so feel free to skim one or both of the first two parts and go straight to learning about specific interventions for students in Part III.

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- You may come to this book with a particular concern about bullying, for instance: a student who is a target, a child who is chronically bullying, or helping your students who witness bullying have the courage to step in. Dig deeper into those particular chapters.

The bottom line is to make this book work for you and your needs.

In Closing

KEY BULLYING PREVENTION POINTS IN THIS BOOK

- Bullying affects *all* kids, including the children bullying, the targets, and the witnesses.
- Effective bullying prevention is a process, not a program.
- The best bullying prevention approach is research-based, systemic, sustained, and homegrown.
- Bullying is learned and can be unlearned, but solutions are never quick fixes.
- Bullying prevention doesn't have a "cookie cutter" approach: the specific needs of each student involved in the bullying dynamic need to be identified and the appropriate intervention applied.
- Tackling bullying involves all stakeholders—administrators, teachers, *all* staff, students, parents, and community members—committed to creating a culture of respect.
- Change happens when stakeholders exert a joint effort to increase the positive tone of the school and make all students feel welcome and respected.
- Bullying prevention is not a poster campaign or a school assembly. It's an ongoing process that aims to change a culture of cruelty to one of kindness.
- The true indication of success is positive and lasting change in student behavior and attitude.

"It takes a whole village to raise a child." —African Proverb

Over the past three-plus decades, I've worked in too many communities torn apart by youth aggression or racked with grief when one of their own ended her or his life due to bullying. I still carry a photo of a sixth-grade boy

who hanged himself when he could no longer endure the endless brutality of two peers. The boy's father handed me the photo after I had given a speech on bullying in Canada, and asked me to make a promise. "Please," he said. "Don't stop. Keep training adults about bullying. It would have saved my son. Hopefully it will save other children, too." Writing this book is one way I've kept my promise to that grieving father. I won't stop, and I hope you're with me.

The good news is that while bullying is learned, so too are peace, respect, and compassion. Working together in a committed, sustained effort as a staff and applying proven practices to reduce bullying and create caring communities is the way forward. Our students deserve school experiences that provide them with the opportunity to grow into adults who are kind and respectful of others and who work to resolve their differences peacefully.

We have work to do and not a minute to waste. Let's get started!

I'd love to hear how this book has helped your bullying prevention efforts. If you have stories or questions for me, or if you would like me to speak to your staff or parents about *End Peer Cruelty, Build Empathy*, you can reach me through my publisher at help4kids@freespirit.com or visit my website micheleborba.com. Follow me on Twitter @micheleborba.

All the best!

Michele Borba

Part I

Establishing the Foundation of Bullying Prevention

Respectful Relationships and
a Positive School Climate





In Part I, you will learn:

- four ways to build respectful staff-student relationships and why they are key to a positive school climate
- strategies to build positivity and inclusiveness in classrooms, in cafeterias, and on playgrounds
- how to remedy bullying “hot spots” in your school
- eight ways to help students gain a sense of belonging, resist cliques, and make new friends
- six ways to stomp out put-downs and boost kindness
- classroom practices that encourage student cooperation
- effective methods for problem solving and conflict resolution
- how to empower students to shift their school norms from cruel to kind

The first part of effective bullying prevention is creating a safe and positive learning community to support *all* students’ cognitive, social, moral, and emotional development. Doing so will not only prevent bullying and other forms of aggression, but, according to research by the National School Climate Center, it will also increase student achievement, enhance school connectedness, and reduce potential drop-out rates—all because you’re developing an environment where students want to “drop in” not “drop out.”¹ Creating a caring climate requires schools to build respectful relationships among staff and students and a culture where students can relate to and appreciate one another.

Research shows that *respectful relationships* among students and teachers are key elements of a positive school climate.² Indeed, improving relationships can be effective in reducing bullying and antisocial behavior—especially if that approach is comprehensive and involves *all* school stakeholders. Bullying breeds in climates where there are negative relationships between teachers and students and destructive behaviors are left to flourish.

Included here are ideas, skills, and best practices to teach prosocial behaviors and nurture caring climates that you can implement at your school, in your classroom, and with individual students. All of these elements will serve as a foundation for the chapters to follow.

1. Cohen and Freiberg, 2013.

2. Wang et al., 2013.

“ Brave Staff Chat: What Behaviors Are We Modeling for Our Students?”

To create a positive school climate, all adults need to promote and model attitudes and behaviors such as caring, empathy, and respectful interactions. What behaviors are most of your staff modeling for students? If you were to ask students, would they give the same response? How can you better model respect and caring for your students?

Practices That Build Caring Connections and an Inclusive Environment

“Once the staff began to build one-to-one relationships with students, some of the most hardcore bullying students began to change their ways. I guess they just needed to know that someone cared!” —teacher, Los Angeles School District

Ultimately, bullying prevention practices are only as effective as the people who deliver them. Thus, school staff members play a pivotal role in creating the type of environment to help students feel safe and respected. This section offers ways to build caring connections with and among students and develop positivity and inclusiveness in all areas of school life: to create, in the words of the theme song to the television show *Cheers*, a place where everybody knows your name, and they’re always glad you came.

The Four Factors of Strong Staff-Student Relationships

- Adults connect with students and create the trust that helps students come forward if they are bullied.
- Adults create a safe and welcoming environment that promotes inclusion, respect, and acceptance.
- Adults model respectful, empathetic behaviors and reinforce those behavior expectations in students.
- Adults take bullying seriously and monitor inappropriate behaviors. This helps students take bullying seriously and shows them that the staff cares.

WAYS TO BUILD RESPECTFUL STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Here are several no-cost practices to nurture caring, respectful relationships between staff and students.

Adopt a student. Staff volunteers are each assigned one student who needs special attention, such as a bullied child or a child who bullies. The adopter's job is to support that student in any way possible, such as reinforcing new prosocial skills, monitoring aggressive behaviors, or just taking the time to say "hello." This extra TLC can have a miraculous impact on the student's behavior, simply because someone cares.

Instate a teacher advisor-advisee program (or "TAP"). The TAP program was initiated at Jefferson Davis Junior High School in Duval County, Florida. Students with academic or behavior problems were "tapped" into the program and assigned a special teacher advisor. Each advisor oversees no more than six advisees and contacts each student an average of nine times per quarter. The advisors also contact the students' families twice per quarter to encourage parents to participate in school activities, discuss academic progress, and counsel students on personal and academic problems, including bullying incidents. Whether the contact is for two or thirty minutes, the at-risk students appreciate the personal attention and their grades and behavior improve while aggression declines.



Use "guardian angels" (or caring mentors).

At Desert Middle School in Desert Hot Springs, California, "guardian angels" are caring adults who volunteer to work with at-risk students, targeted kids, or those who bully. The staff creates a list of these students, and volunteers each choose one or more students to connect with. The adult may send notes of encouragement and spend a few minutes (or more) with the students during the school day to reinforce new skills and create respectful relationships.

Form "family" groups. Staff members as well as community members volunteer to lead a group of students once a week through the year in teaching the bullying prevention strategies and SEL skills in this book. A certificated

teacher, counselor, or other bullying prevention team member plans activities that reinforce the school’s bullying prevention efforts. Students’ names are randomly selected from the school computer and paired with a staff or community volunteer. Groups generally consist of ten to twelve students representing various grade levels. Since there will be more groups than classrooms, other meeting places need to be considered, such as the principal’s or secretary’s office, faculty lounge, nurse’s room, cafeteria, or library. Each group (called a “family”) meets with the same adult (or “family head”) in the same location throughout the year. Many schools are so committed to the approach that they elect to keep students in their same “family” each year. For some students, these group meetings may well be the only time they get to feel a real sense of family.

Tip for TEACHERS



University of British Columbia researchers found that children who perform small acts of kindness may help counteract bullying. One student group was asked to perform kind acts throughout the week, like sharing their lunch or giving their mom a hug if she appeared stressed. A second group of students kept track of pleasant places they visited, like the playground or a grandparent’s house. At the end of the week, both groups reported a boost in happiness, but the group who performed kind acts said they wanted to work with a higher number of classmates on school activities.³ Ask students: “How can you act kindly toward others throughout the day?” Students can also create an ongoing poster of “ways to care about friends.” Most important: encourage your students to be kind!

WAYS TO CREATE A POSITIVE RECESS

Recess is often identified as the time when bullying is most frequent. Boost adult supervision in “hot spot” locations and offer more proactive play opportunities (see page 26 for more on remedying hot spots). Here are two approaches.

Playworks. In 1995, Jill Vialet got an earful from a principal in Oakland, California, who told her that recess was a hotbed for bullying and discipline. Jill founded Playworks to make recess more positive and a place where kids belong and contribute. The approach teaches elementary students how to play with each other and resolve conflict amicably using trained coaches who guide students to play hard but fair. In a randomized control trial, research

3. The Canadian Press, 2012.

found that schools using the Playworks program experienced less bullying and exclusionary behavior, an increased perception of safety, easier transitions to learning, better behavior, and more attention in class than schools without the program⁴ (see playworks.org).

Game cans. The staff at Edmonton Elementary School in Edmonton, Canada, noticed that behavior problems and bullying were increasing at recess and many students had no awareness of how to play games (sadly, this may be a growing trend in today's play-deprived childhoods). So the staff collected game

Empowering students to work together to create a caring environment is one of the most overlooked strategies in bullying prevention.

donations from local businesses and purchased large plastic garbage cans for each classroom labeled with their room number. Inside the cans they placed a number of inexpensive, easy-to-learn, and cooperative games and play materials children could use on the playground, such as jump ropes, Frisbees, rubber balls, and sidewalk chalk (for hopscotch).

At recess, upper-grade students taught the younger students how to use the items. Game cans were rotated from class to class so that students had the opportunity to play different games. In a short time, bullying playground problems were minimized.

WAYS TO BUILD INCLUSIVENESS IN SCHOOL CAFETERIAS AND LUNCHROOMS

The school cafeteria or lunchroom can be a place of frequent bullying and peer exclusion. Here are a few ways schools are reducing bullying and making lunchtime a more inclusive experience.

Lunch bunch groups. Stout Field Elementary is an inner-city school in Indianapolis with a high population of at-risk students and an abundance of committed staff members who recognize the kids' need to connect. The teachers brainstormed groups of kids who could benefit from a more inclusive place and the list was endless: those with recently divorced parents, targets of bullying, fatherless boys, socially isolated girls, and so on. The staff grouped students according to similar issues, then volunteer staff members met once a week with a small group who became their "lunch bunch." Students shared their common problems and the staff guided the students to generate

4. Bleeker et al., 2012.

productive solutions, such as goal setting and problem solving. The students also formed caring relationships with an adult and made new friends.

Family-style meals. This activity helps students experience a true “family meal” and practice social skills as part of the process. Once a week, a class eats lunch in the cafeteria with their teacher or other staff member (para-professional, custodian, school nurse, secretary, and so on). Meals are served family-style, with each selection of food placed on a separate platter. Platters are passed from student to student and manners such as saying, “please pass,” “thank you,” and “excuse me” are practiced. It is an opportunity for students to gain a sense of group belonging and learn prosocial skills that help nurture a caring climate.

Cafeteria clubs. The student council at Black River Falls Middle School in Wisconsin has reduced cliques, intimidation, and bullying in their cafeteria by setting up randomly assigned lunch tables. The new lunchroom environment gained the principal’s approval after a student survey found that the majority of students favored the new seating arrangement. The strategy reduced bullying and exclusion.⁵

Mix-it-up lunch days. In surveys, students often identify the cafeteria as the place where divisions are most clearly drawn. So the organization Teaching Tolerance launched a national campaign more than a decade ago called “Mix It Up at Lunch Day” to encourage students to identify, question, and cross social boundaries. One day of the school year, students are asked to move out of their comfort zones and connect with someone new at lunch. Many schools extend that yearly event to a monthly or weekly occurrence and are discovering that bullying is reduced as well. (See “Mix It Up at Lunch Day” at tolerance.org.)

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT CONNECTIONS

Empowering students to work together to create a caring environment is one of the most overlooked strategies in bullying prevention. Dozens of connection possibilities exist; the key is to create opportunities where *all* students from different cliques or groups can connect, make new friends, gain a sense of belonging, and be empowered to influence their school climates.

Kid clubs. After-school activities and student clubs are rich opportunities for students to connect. Survey kids about the types of clubs they might be interested in joining. Possibilities are many and varied, including drama, math competitions, robotics, speech and debate, skateboarding, chess, music, yearbook,

5. Roux, 2004.

movie making, computer lab, study hall, sports, marching bands, character clubs, service learning groups, and bullying prevention teams. A volunteer community member or staff member leads the group of like-minded students at least once a week. (Some schools hold club meetings weekly, during the last period on Fridays.)

Student greeters. Clover Park School District in Washington recognized an untapped talent: students with strong social skills who could serve as models to other students. Every school has friendly, kind kids whose skill set can be a powerful model for peers. The staff identified these students and asked them to serve as student greeters. They wore red baseball caps so they were easily identified (other schools have made special vests). Greeters were stationed at the front door and welcomed entering students (“Hi!” “Glad you’re here!” “Have a good day.”) The staff reported a positive change in climate in just a short while. Students began to look forward to the greeting. And many arriving students began to return the same positive statements to the greeters. (You could also place greeters in areas identified as bullying “hot spots” to help reduce negative behavior.)

Welcome wagons. New kids can feel the pain of exclusion and are more likely to be bullied. Many schools now provide positive ways for these new students to connect. Initiate a “Welcome Wagon Committee” of students to greet newcomers, give them a school tour, and pair them with “veteran” students. Photos of new arrivals can be featured on a faculty bulletin board to alert staff members of these students. Some schools with highly mobile populations arrange “get acquainted” sessions with new students where they learn about their school, connect with others, and view bullying prevention videos so they are up-to-date on school rules and expectations.

Cross-age tutors or buddies. This approach has been effective in boosting academic achievement and creating positive student connections. Student helpers are typically two to three grade levels ahead of the peers they tutor. Not only can they tutor students on academic tasks, but they can also teach the SEL skills in this book. The experience can help build empathy in a child who bullies, especially if the tutor assumes the role of a big brother or sister to a younger child.

Peer helpers. Students are more likely to report bullying to a peer than to an adult, which is why many schools are adopting peer counseling. Peers are *not* responsible for resolving bullying incidents, but they are available to support

bullied peers and help report bullying to the staff if desired. A first step is to identify students with “peer clout” by using a simple survey: “If you had a problem, name a student at this school you would turn to,” or “Name a student who is easy to talk to and you can trust.” Choose students who represent different groups or cliques and then train them in communication and problem-solving strategies.

Adopt-a-class. This structure involves one class “adopting” another class, usually at least two or three grades younger. Older students can help younger students with academic tasks like reading, math, or science; teach outdoor games; serve as escorts on field trips; or teach SEL and bullying prevention skills. A protective bond often forms in which the older student looks after a younger student who may be targeted by bullying.

Learning buddies. The teacher assigns each student to be the learning buddy of another student in the classroom every week or month. Students pair up with their partners a few minutes a day. The practice builds connections and enhances achievement. A few ideas for learning buddy activities:

- *Direction agreement.* Students quickly turn to their buddies and agree on the task directions before they work on the task alone.
- *Problem management.* Any time a student has a problem, she must first ask her buddy if he can solve it *before* asking the teacher.
- *Homework review.* Buddies discuss three main points from their homework assignment or from the task they just completed.
- *Affirmations.* The buddy calls or emails an absent partner to say: “We miss you,” provides missed assignments, or makes a get-well card with class signatures.



Home-base teams. The learning buddy strategy can be extended to teams of four students formed by the teacher. You could also give index cards to students and instruct them to write the names of “three people you want to be on a team with.” (Keep the names confidential.) The key is to discover marginalized students who are not mentioned on anyone’s card and place those kids in groups with more “included” kids. Students remain in their home-base teams

Over 13,000 students in a survey by Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon of the Youth Voice Project said that the most helpful things peers can do for targeted students are to include and encourage them.⁶

for a week or more (some schools keep the same teams all quarter to build relationships) and meet for three-minute morning check-ins (“How are you today?”) or end-of-day connections (“Do you have all the assignments?”). They can also practice SEL skills, character themes, and study skills. It’s a great opportunity for kids to create new friends from different groups.

Remedy Bullying “Hot Spots” in Your School

Three decades ago New York City was racked with crime, and tourists and city residents alike feared walking the streets. Today crime is down and the city is safer. The approach New York used to restore order and create a safe environment is one that schools can also use. The technique is called “broken windows” and it is a simple notion: Disorderly conditions or unmonitored areas encourage further and more serious levels of disorderly behavior.⁷ In other words, if criminals know that certain banks, stores, or neighborhoods are “easier” to rob because they’re unmonitored, that’s where they prey. And if students know that the back of the bus or certain hallway locations are untended by adults, that’s where bullying is more likely to happen.

Bullying is *situational*—it does not happen everywhere. Instead, it generally happens at the same times and places in and around school sites. A key element of bullying prevention is to identify the spots and times when bullying is most frequent, and then boost adult supervision at those locations.

If you are consistent with your monitoring, you should find a sharp decline in bullying behaviors at those identified locations within a short time. This section shows techniques and ways to reduce bullying in those high-frequency areas to create safer learning environments for kids. (See pages 50–53 in Part II for details on surveying students to identify your school’s hot spots.)

According to a survey of 25,000 U.S. secondary students, bullying was *most likely to occur*: 45 percent in a hallway or stairwell; 33 percent in a classroom; 22 percent on school grounds; 18 percent in the cafeteria.⁸

6. Davis and Nixon, 2010.

7. Keizer et al., 2008.

8. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 2013.

“ Brave Staff Chat: When Was Your Last Staff Walk-Through?”

How often has your staff “walked your school walls”—particularly the cafeteria, playground corners, hallways, and restrooms—to assess school safety? Encourage staff members to walk through such areas and look through a new lens: “If I was a student, would I feel safe in these spots? Would I perceive our school to be safe and caring?” What can you do to increase a positive school climate in *all* areas of your school? You might also choose to take a few articulate kids with you on a walk around the school. You’ll be surprised at how much information you learn if you ask the right questions. High school students in Corpus Christie, Texas, told me that security guards should board up the space under the stairwell (“Bad stuff happens down there and nobody ever checks”). Elementary kids in New York said that the back of their playground was “a really bad place for bullying because the yard duty teachers can’t see it.” Ask your students about safety concerns. They rarely let you down!

STRATEGIES TO REDUCE BULLYING IN SPECIFIC HOT SPOTS

There are various ways to reduce bullying in designated hot spot areas. Boosting adult presence in the spot is one of the simplest and often least-used strategies. A middle school principal in the North Penn School District shared one of the best ideas: she analyzed her student bullying surveys, identified a hallway as a top hot spot, and made a full-size cardboard cutout of herself to put in the middle of the hall. She taped a note on it that read, “We are a bully-free school. I’m watching you, and you’ll never know when the real me will show up.” The students loved it, and bullying in that spot was eradicated. Be creative! Here are other “hot spot” ideas passed on to me from dozens of creative educators.

School entrances. Administrators and staff can rotate meeting students in the parking lot as they arrive at school, which can send a powerful message to students (and their parents). A school in Bremerton, Washington, created a student group to be “Safe School Ambassadors” and meet peers in the morning bus lines. It set a friendly tone and reduced verbal put-downs, which had been a problem at the bus stops.

Surrounding barriers and gates. If possible, remove elements on school property that may obstruct staff’s view of students. Pay attention to the far