

Talking with your Child about Bullying

**More than 160,000 U.S. students
stay home from school each day from fear of being bullied.**

While much of the current prevention-based thinking centers around bystander intervention, radKIDS focuses on empowering the targeted child because **no one has the right to hurt a radKID (radKIDS rule #1).**



radKIDS also know (radKIDS rule #2): radKIDS don't have the right to hurt anyone else UNLESS someone is trying to hurt them, then they have every right to defend against the aggression and stop the assault (supported by law in every state). radKIDS are not only given permission to stop anyone from hurting them they are taught to use the Block, Run and Tell ® technique learned in class in a context which clearly explains that radKIDS don't FIGHT the bully but they CAN STOP the assault by standing firmly in their radKIDS stance, using their voice to activate an alert system and block to protect themselves from physical assault (see below

Zero Tolerance? Think Again) until they can get free enough to find a SAFE ZONE and get help by telling an adult who can advocate and mediate the conflict.

radKIDS know that being bullied is not their fault and **it's not only OK for them to tell a trusted adult, (radKIDS rule #3)** it is encouraged. While "telling" may sound easy, without the essential groundwork in place, this can be difficult for a child if not impossible unless the foundation has been laid and systems are in place.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION (ground work) that will enable your child to communicate bullying activity before things get out of control.

Has your child ever come to you and told you that someone at school is being mean to them? What was your reaction? The most typical parent responses are 1. Tell your teacher and 2. Fight back. Let's look at these solutions through the eyes of a child.

Tell your teacher: Unless the conflict has escalated to a significant level, there is a high probability that the teacher will minimize the situation with a mild scolding and redirecting the children to the tasks at hand. *"You two need to stop bickering. We don't have time for this. We've got things to do. Ok? Good!"* somehow believing that the conflict is resolved.

In this scenario the bully wins knowing that he has laid the groundwork and will follow-up later, on the playground or after school. Further the bully has reinforced *to both of them* that even if the teacher is aware, little or no protection will be afforded the bullied child.

So, so far the child being victimized has told a parent and an adult at school and the result is that his/her vulnerability has only increased by challenging the bully and by receiving little or no support, his/her resources are quickly being diminished tipping the power balance in favor of the bully.

Fight Back: I think we all can agree that while this has historically been considered "the best" chance to deter a bully, escalating violence is not the solution. It's a risky choice considering the potential imbalance of physical abilities and with Zero Tolerance policies in place in most school districts, the consequences only re-victimizes the bullied child. *(See Zero Tolerance? Think Again.)* When your child comes to you, we suggest you don't tell them to fight back. When you do he/she is thinking *"Won't I get suspended? Aren't you going to get mad if I get suspended? What will my classmates think of me when I get suspended?"* and more importantly *"What if I lose the fight? I could DIE!"* (through the eyes of a child)

So what's the right answer?

Remind your child to activate their radKID plan for bullying: Avoid-Ignore-Move Away-Ask/Tell Them to STOP - Leave (using block, run tell if necessary) and Tell a Trusted Adult.

We know that bullies tend to pick on people who they can get a reaction from; they choose kids who get upset and who take the teasing personally. They also look for kids who won't stand up for themselves, or who they view as someone they can overpower. *Telling* is an important part of the plan because it lets the child know that there is a team in place and they are not alone. Telling will happen a lot sooner if the bullied child has a level of comfort and expectation of what is going to happen when they tell.

Take time now to let your children know what to expect when they tell you they are being bullied:

It's critical to let your child know that being bullied is not their fault.

It's nothing that they have done wrong. It's the bully's fault and the changes need to be made *in the bully* not in your child.

Remind your child of the differences in Telling vs. Tattling.

Telling is to help and Tattling is to get someone in trouble and that by "Telling" the bully will get the help they need to change whatever is going on inside him/her.

Let them know that you will listen to what he/she has to say and be supportive when he/she is talking. **If you are upset or angry, that it's at the situation, not at him/her.**

Because no one has the right to hurt them. Try not to over react. When you react too strongly to what your child is saying, he/she might stop talking because he's afraid he's going to upset you more and he/she needs to be able to count on you for "rational thought."

Finally, Don't ask your child why he's being bullied.

That implies that he/she knows what the bully is thinking. It doesn't matter why. It's not acceptable. Don't try to find a reason for it; there is no good reason or excuse for what's happening. If your child is being bullied, he/she is the *victim*. Ask instead what the circumstances are and focus on developing a plan with your child that he/she believes has merit and will work

Communication between you and your child during this time is essential and can be an opportunity to build resiliency and a trusted partnership between you both. Together you can make a difference.



9 New Venture Drive
South Dennis, MA 02260
508.760.2080/radKIDS@radKIDS.org
www.radKIDS.org