



ESSENTIAL DOS AND DON'TS

FOR WHEN YOUR CHILD IS BEING

BULLIED

By Jo Hamilton

The thought of your child being bullied can bring out many varied thoughts and feelings in you. You might remember an experience when you were bullied or picked on as a child, and the loneliness and sadness it may have caused. You might experience feelings of anger towards people who feel entitled to be mean towards others. You might feel helpless, or even just tired ('Not this again!'). Perhaps the idea of your child being bullied is hard to believe: This couldn't happen to your child! Or, not at this school! Or if you know the kid your child has identified as the bully, that kid couldn't possibly behave that way!

"No matter how you find out your child is being bullied, you need to have a conversation about it with your child."

Whatever your response to hearing from your child that they have been the victim of bullying, you probably want to hold your child close to your chest and run away ... from the meanness of the world and the complexity of growing up. These are hard feelings!

However, your response to the news that your child is being bullied, and how you manage the circumstances that follow, are key to helping your child cope and recover from bullying.

Here are my top **DOS AND DON'TS** for when your child is being bullied.

DO:

1

Breathe! It's hard, but you need to get your own feelings under control. Our children take cues on how to react to the world from us, and when we fly into a panic or a rage, they understand the world or the situation they find themselves in to be life-threatening or terrifying and respond in kind.

Frequently, a parent's instinct will be to do something – approach the bully, their parents, the school. While such a response might be the right thing to do, it's important that you take the time to think about how you're going to respond. Jumping to the first instinctual reaction might be more harmful than helpful.

“You need to get your own feelings under control.”

So take the time to analyse your own feelings, then ...

2

Create an environment in which your child is comfortable to talk, and (this is very important) LISTEN to what they are saying.

If your child is the type of child who doesn't say anything, but you can tell from their body language that something is up, it can feel as though you are walking a tightrope as you search for the right things to say that will magically open the door, and not shut your child further up inside themselves.

Some kids don't give any indication to their parents that anything is wrong. They keep it all inside, and parents only find

out that their child is being bullied when another child blurts it out or another parent offers unsolicited commiseration or advice. The shock of the new information is doubled by the fact that you had no idea that your child was suffering.

Some kids spew it all out the moment they see their mum or dad. Often the words come out in incoherent sentences, along with lots of tears, snot, angry outbursts, physical collapses (like they can't walk, fasten their seat belts or even hold themselves upright) and general misery. Any seemingly rational comment or observation you might make to this distraught child will likely be shot down, bringing out further tears and angry outbursts, and accusations of "You don't understand!" or "You're just making it worse!"

When this happens, you don't need to worry about getting your child to speak, but rather how to respond to what he or she is saying. The shock of this kind of outburst might leave you reeling. You might be at a complete loss as to what to do, and you might even silently wish you were back at work, or wherever you previously were, where you had a sense of control, order and predictability!

"You will need to draw on your best communication skills."

No matter how you find out your child is being bullied, you need to have a conversation about it with your child. During this difficult talk, you will need to draw on your best communications skills. You must tap into your empathy, your inner strength and your patience. You will need to approach the interaction with imagination, and you need to model mature self-control for your child.

The most important part of this conversation is this: you need to listen to your child. I know this sounds simple, and you might be saying to yourself, “Yip, I do this – tick”. But, now more than ever, you REALLY need to listen to your child. Sometimes in our desire to fix and control things during our very busy days, we jump straight into the advising, fixing and action role and we miss out this crucial step – to listen.

You need to take control of YOUR reeling, shocked, angry, confused feelings and thoughts. Put them to one side for now and listen to your child. Listen to how they are feeling, try to follow the content as best you can, try to build a picture of what is happening. Try to remember being your child’s age: What was school like? What were friendships like? What was important to you then? It’s not easy, but in times like this, we need to avoid getting caught up in what WE think about how things should be, or what is important. Just hear your child out.

Right now, it doesn’t matter if the content of your child’s story is wrong, exaggerated or highly unlikely. It doesn’t matter if the details seem petty or immature. It doesn’t even matter, at this initial stage, that you fully understand what is going on. Just give your child your full attention and eye contact. Stop the car, end your phone call, turn off the radio, stop what you are doing. Look directly and compassionately at your child and listen. You don’t need to say anything yet.

As your child tells you about their experience, you can make compassionate noises, touch or hold your child if necessary. Listen to the tears, the anger, the frustration, the fear, the hurt, the sense of injustice and **SHOW your child that you are listening to how it feels for them.** Stroke your child, put your arm around them, make comments that indicate that you understand that how awful and hurtful it feels, without making very certain and definite comments. You

can say things such as, “Wow, that sounds terrible” or “I am so sorry to hear this happened” or “Shame my love, what a horrid day” or “Oh boytjie, that sounds awful”. Children need us to SHOW them that we understand them and hear their pain and anger. Kids know if we are being authentic or not, so only say and do what comes naturally.

“Children need us to SHOW them that we understand them & hear their pain and anger.”

Listening to your child’s feelings can also involve acts of service and love. Make your child a cup of tea, bring them a blanket, or change the afternoon plans to stop off somewhere for a moment or just be at home with your child. Slow down and make time available to listen. This shows your child that you take their feelings seriously. These acts of kindness and nurturing often provide the quiet kids with time to process their thoughts and feelings. Creating a safe environment might give them the courage and words to tell you what is going on. This is when you can ...

3

Let your child know that you are on their side.

This doesn’t mean that you think your child is ‘blameless’, that he or she played no role in the conflict, or that they are the most important person involved in the incident. This might not be true. But, before you get down to the nitty-gritty about who said or did what and when, you need to show your child that you are first and foremost there for him or her, no matter what has occurred. This is a sign of unconditional love.

You show your child that you are on their side by your empathetic, patient and NONJUDGEMENTAL listening. You

think about and imagine what your child is feeling, possibly provide words to help your child name their feelings, and show that you understand how tough the incident has been on your child.

Once your child feels that they are physically and emotionally safe and that their feelings have been heard and acknowledged, they can begin to process their feelings and to think about what actually occurred.

4

Establish some key facts about the incident.

Without making your child feel like they are being interrogated, you need to figure out the reality of the situation.

Is your child actually being bullied, or are they experiencing conflict (fighting) with someone? There is a difference.

I find that the word ‘bullying’ is flung around quite liberally by parents and children alike. Talking about bullying without understanding the definition of the behaviour can be unhelpful. Bullying is an intentional and repetitive behaviour. There is also a real or perceived imbalance of power or strength between the bully/bullies and the victim/victims. This is what makes victims feel so small, scared and stuck.

“Bullying is an intentional & repetitive behaviour.”

Bullying can take many forms, such as emotional, physical and psychological. Bullying can occur with words, actions, and even lack of actions (such as exclusion, or purposefully not acknowledging someone’s presence). Bullying is incredibly hurtful, mean, degrading and destructive.

The key element of bullying that children and parents tend to overlook is that it is INTENTIONAL behaviour. A bully will plan their actions, fully aware that they are being mean, and of the negative effects their behaviour has on their target.

The other important word to take note of in the definition of bullying is REPETITIVE. Bullying behaviour is not once-off. It will be repeated over days or weeks, perhaps in different forms.

*“A kid who is bullied has no idea
what they did to trigger the bullying”*

An important element of bullying to keep in mind is that the victim is blameless. A kid who is bullied has no idea what they did to trigger the bullying. If you look critically at your child's relationship and interactions with the other kid and can't see any logical reason or prior event that could justify or explain the destructive behaviour, then you can identify the situation as bullying.

Fighting, meanness and conflict can seem very similar to bullying. The difference between conflict and bullying, though, is that with conflict, something occurred that started it. Remember, with bullying, the victim did not cause and can't explain the destructive behaviour. When conflict occurs, one person has done or said something, however unintended, that has upset the other person and triggered a retaliation. Conflict can be sparked off by a misunderstanding, an unintentional act or comment, an over-reaction, a spilling-over of other internal feelings and thoughts, or it can just be a good ol' fashioned fight.

All adults and children experience conflict. Conflict is not all bad in that it can result in a deeper understanding between

people. However, the manner by which people deal with conflict can have some hurtful and damaging consequences – people don't forget what we say and do, even if they forgive our poor attempts to express our feelings and thoughts.

“Fighting, meanness & conflict can seem very similar to bullying”

Children report fighting, meanness and bullying to adults in much the same manner. It can be really confusing for parents, and that's why it is so important to find out what is really going on, so that you can identify whether your child is involved in a fight or if they are the victim of bullying.

For example, if your child says that no one wants to play with them at break, it could be that this perceived exclusion is due to your child refusing to play by the rules of the game. Perhaps your child feels isolated because they didn't get to play with the person they wanted to, but they didn't tell you there were other kids who were happy to play with them.

Maybe your child reports that another child is talking about them to other kids and giving your child mean stares. Your child probably feels distrustful and threatened, and that's not great, but is it bullying? Are the other children actually talking about your child, or could it be about something else? Could the stare be related to something else – like jealousy over your child getting the answer right?

Or, if your child says they are being purposefully bumped and knocked in the corridor, is it intentional or could it be an accident? Is it happening with the same child or group of children or is it random? Do other children get bumped and knocked in the corridor in the jostling of moving to class?

In order to find out if your child is being bullied or not, you need to ask the following key questions:

- Who was involved?
- What happened – who said or did what (including what your child said and did)?
- What was going on before the behaviour occurred?
- Explore the build-up - where were they (e.g. at break or in class); what were people doing or talking about?
- How was your child feeling before the kid was mean?
- What was the mean kid up to or what had they experienced (e.g. had the mean kid just been humiliated, received bad news etc)?
- Did anyone witness what happened? Did this witness say or do anything? How did the witness look (body language – where they shocked? Laughed? Cringed?)
- Has this happened before or has this kid been mean to your child before? If yes, WHEN and how often?
- What did your child do after the incident?
- How did your child feel?
- How did the mean child(ren) behave towards your child for the rest of the day?
- Ask your child how they survived the day? What kept them going and enabled them to see out the rest of the day?

HOW you ask these questions is very important.

As a parent you need to consciously ensure that your tone of voice is neutral and judgement-free, but you also need to make the necessary comments and reactions to show your child that you realise how hard it was for your child. It can be quite helpful for your questions to be posed in a tentative manner (so that it doesn't sound like you have already decided who is to blame before you have gathered all the details).

You ask these questions of your child to help you get a clear understanding of what happened before, during and after the incident. In this way, you create a timeline of events so that you can look for the patterns and possible consequences of actions and reactions. Children, just like adults, cannot remember all of the details in life. They will remember key events or words that are particularly meaningful to them. In your questioning, you need to gently help them think through the incident from both perspectives to help understand what is going on.

“Take care not to jump to adult conclusions to fast track this often time-consuming step.”

Children can and do resist this type of analysis for a number of reasons. It can be hard to explain to adults what happens at school. It's been a long time since we were at school and sometimes we forget what is important to children and the interpersonal dynamics of the playground. Take extra care at this point to be patient. If something about the incident is unclear to you, tell your child and ask them to tell you again. Take care not to jump to adult conclusions to fast track this often time-consuming step. Remember that our children don't perceive and value things the same way we do. Let your child teach you about and guide you through what happens at school and what it means for them. Be humble, inquisitive, interested, patient and respectful in how you follow their teaching.

I often use questions such as, “Can I ask you some more questions to just make sure that I understand what you are saying?” or “Wow, can I ask you some more about that?” or “Hang on, I'm confused, can you explain that again?” Your tone of voice must indicate that the child is the expert of his or her life and that you are respectfully learning what it means for them.

It's also good to pause and think about what your child has said.

It's okay to have moments of silence or to ask your child for time out to think about what he or she has told you. As adults, we don't have to have the answers always at our finger tips – we can model reflection and wondering to our children. This act alone shows how seriously and thoughtfully you are taking what your child tells you about their life. This respectful approach makes your child feel special and important, which they are!

These questions will help you establish whether your child is being bullied (according to the definition of bullying) OR if the reported behaviour is due to conflict – in other words, if your child is in the middle of a fight or if someone has been mean to your child but not in an intentional and repetitive manner.

“It's okay to have moments of silence or to ask your child for time out to think about what he or she has told you.”

5

Whether or not your child has been bullied, praise your child for their ability to survive the day. **Listen for moments of success, resourcefulness (like going to a friend or adult for assistance), strength and grit.** HOW we respond to our children when they share important things is crucial. If we get hysterical, threaten to harm others, scream and shout, swear and cry, what are we demonstrating to our children? How is this going to help them at school and what must they do with our surprising and sometimes frightening outbursts? Your child might feel responsible for your extreme reactions to what you have been told. If we don't handle ourselves well as parents, our children are going to be reluctant to share things with us. It is better to know what is going on, no matter how hard it is for you to process and handle it.

So be strong. Help your child look for his or her positives and strengths in the incident. Be truthful, affirming and impressed. Remember how young they are and how scary it is to handle conflict or bullying.

“Help your child look for his or her positives & strengths in the incident.”

6

Now, before you do something rash (like tell your child what to do, pick up the phone and admonish the other parent, list all the mean things you would like to do to the bully, storm off to school and confront the bully) **ASK your child if they would like your help to sort out this problem!**

Don't presume that your child wants you to fix their problem. Ask your child if they would like some suggestions as to how to manage the problem. Your child might surprise you. Sometimes children don't want help, they just want to vent and moan – just like we often like to do as adults (don't act so surprised, we all like to wallow in self-pity sometimes!)

Sometimes children tell their parents that they don't know what to do. This is your moment to suggest that you think together with them. You might get the “But you don't understand” comment. Don't overreact to the rejection of your kind gesture. Perhaps the timing is wrong. You could say to your child, “Well, if you would like to brainstorm some ideas, I have a few – let me know when you want to chat about it”. Remember, your child might need time to relax, process their feelings, and get some perspective before they are ready to talk about what to do.

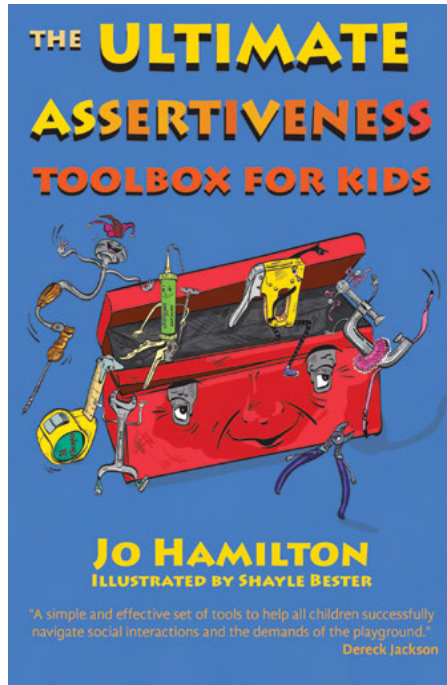
Be aware that any suggestion you make to your child includes the risk of failure, disappointment and ridicule. Sometimes, what we suggest can make things worse. It's no wonder children can be reluctant to discuss what to do with their parents. Not only do they have worry about their self-perception, but also the knowledge that they might let you down. Unfortunately, no action can have guaranteed success – social interactions are too complex and unpredictable to ensure this.

7

Empower your child with assertive comments and actions that will assist him or her to stand up to the bully or bullies. It can be helpful to brainstorm with your child ways they could have behaved differently during the course of the incident. This can help them be prepared should something like that happen again. Help your child to think of all the possible actions and reactions they could have tried. Take care that your child doesn't experience this as a form of criticism or an expectation from you that they feel is too challenging. Children are acutely aware of disappointing their parents.

At this point, you might find it helpful to take a look at my book, **THE ULTIMATE ASSERTIVENESS TOOLBOX FOR KIDS**. I wrote the book especially to help children in this kind of situation, and you might find your child more open to the suggestions in the book because it sort of comes from a third source (and not you!).

In **THE ULTIMATE ASSERTIVENESS TOOLBOX FOR KIDS**, I provide twenty tools to assist your child to be assertive – that's twenty different ways to help your child stand up for themselves! I have developed these tools over many years of work with children and their parents, and they are practical, realistic tools. Most importantly, they work!



I encourage parents to work through the book together with their children. In addition to sensible suggestions for kids, there is guidance and support for parents, with lots of different ideas and tools, including information on the role of the bystander in bullying incidents, tips on cyberbullying, and a clear explanation of why children behave the way they do.

THE ULTIMATE ASSERTIVENESS TOOLBOX FOR KIDS is a quick read, a pick-up-and-put-down resource that will benefit children of all ages. Print books and ebooks can be purchased from:

ClockworkBooks.co.za/assertiveness

When you are giving your child advice, it's important that it's practical and age-appropriate. Draw on your past experiences or observations from when you were at school. If necessary, ask some other family members what they found successful and helpful when they were at school.

Encourage your child to guide you as to what would or wouldn't work and what suits their personality. It's not helpful at all to ask your child to behave in a radically different way to how he or she normally acts. The advice needs to be simple, constructive and appealing to your child to have the best chance of success.

8

You will know, as a parent, when enough is enough.

Children will often tell their parents that they don't want them to get involved. It is important that we give our children the space to try and counter bullying themselves. However, depending on the frequency and nature of the bullying, there may come a time when you need to override your child's fears and pleas to leave things alone.

It is our job as parents to weigh up our child's wishes against what we know is the right thing to do. Some of the hardest things we need to do as parents are for the greater good of the child, such as inoculations, forcing a child to take medication for a serious illness, taking away a desirable but dangerous object, and so on.

To begin with, if your child is reluctant for you to raise the subject of bullying with their school, you might want to let your child know that you will monitor things for a while, but make it clear that should the bullying persist or worsen, you WILL talk to the school. Let your child know that you will do what you can to help them be empowered to handle the situation. Assure

your child that they will be the first to know if you decide to take action. Your child deserves some feeling of control and power in their own life, especially if they are being bullied. Take care not to be just another person who disempowers and manipulates your child.

Children are mostly concerned about the consequences they will face when the school is informed of the bullying. We can't promise our children that things will improve. Frequently, adults' attempts to stop the bullying can make things worse for the victim. We need to accept that the victim and the bully play the central roles in the problem. Our children's thoughts and feelings must not be overlooked in our desire to be helpful and fix the problem.

“Frequently, adults’ attempts to stop the bullying can make things worse for the victim.”

9

If your child is being bullied, keep a written record of each incident – when it occurred, who was involved, where it occurred, what was said or done and, ideally, who witnessed it. Bullying can often be an accumulation of many small incidents. Each incident on its own can appear innocuous, but the cumulative effect can be extremely destructive. So keep a record of it. Should you need to report the bullying to the school, you will need to be able to recall and describe each incident. When it is recorded in a factual manner, it is easier to look at the behaviour in a serious and unemotional manner. This is far more effective than trying to recall who said and did what to your child's teacher when they ask.

10

If your child has been bullied – intentionally and repetitively – and assertive techniques have not brought an end to the bullying behaviour, **when you report the bullying to the school, follow the correct chain of command.**

Most often, your child's class teacher would be the first person to report the bullying incidents to. Don't catch the teacher in a free moment, when the teacher's attention might be distracted or short. Make an appointment to go and see them. Take your notes along with you.

“Try to be calm & rational in your dealings with your child's teacher.”

11

Remember that you only have one side of the story – that which your child told you.

Many people exaggerate and fabricate details in an attempt to capture the attention of the listener and to ensure that the listener understands how intensely the storyteller experienced the feelings and details. Try to be calm and rational in your dealings with your child's teacher. Acknowledge that you only have one side of the story, but also express your serious concern as a parent about what is happening to your child. Share with the teacher the efforts you and your child have gone to to try to stand up to the bullying and explain how you would like the school to assist your child and yourself.

This is not the time to point fingers and blame the school for their lack of knowledge, lack of supervision, or any other faults you might have in mind. You need to decide in advance what you would like to achieve from the meeting, and ensure that you stick to your goal.

It is important to share with the school that you would like their assistance and that, as a parent, you are willing to assist wherever you can to ensure the safety and well-being of your child. Parents and teachers need to work together with children, as a team, to promote their development and well-being.

You then need to give the school some time to follow up on your report and concerns. Remember, you have known about the bullying for sometime and they need time to understand what is going on, to gather information that perhaps you do not have, and to put forward a plan of action.

“It is important for children to see how parents calmly, yet seriously & relentlessly, follow up on reporting their issue.”

12

Do follow up with the school, after a period of time. If you feel that your concerns have not been heard or acknowledged, it's time to progress up the chain of command. **Share your concerns and understanding of the situation with each staff-member you talk to until someone does listen to you.** It is important for children to see how parents calmly, yet seriously and relentlessly, follow up on reporting their issue. Find out what the school's plan of action is, see how this involves your child, and ask how the interventions can be monitored and reviewed. If necessary, offer advice.

While this is happening, continue to listen to your child. Empathize with and support their feelings. Look for daily strengths and other areas of pleasure and success in their lives – at school, at extra murals, and at home. Encourage your child to have a balanced outlook on life. I know it can be hard

during this time, but if you only look at what is going wrong, what is unfair and hurtful, you can overlook small or big signs of support, care, love. Sometimes, surprising strengths and relationships can emerge during times of adversity.

“Encourage your child to have a balanced outlook on life.”

13 When you see your child at the end of his or her school day, try not to linger too much on the bullying and what went wrong at school. Remember to also find out about what went well, or what your child did well during their day – it doesn't only have to refer to their time at school. **Continue to empower your child with assertiveness skills and strategies to support their self-esteem and self-perception.** Ensure that their home life is as safe, supportive, accepting and loving as possible. These alternatives are important indicators to your child that the bully cannot and does not impact on all areas of your child's life and that there are people who care for, like and love them unconditionally.

14 **Be prepared that the school might not identify the culprit or bully.** Without adult witnesses or clear evidence, it can be very hard for a school to accuse another child of bullying – even if they suspect it. Especially amongst girls, bullying can be covert, so subtle that it is hard for teachers to witness. Children are clever – they don't bully other children in front of adults or teachers. They don't plan to get caught.

Think about what support you need from the school and how you would like to go about asking for this. It doesn't help to

become aggressive and make accusations if the school can't name the bully you suspect. Don't forget that the school would be required to report the incident to the other child's parents, who are likely to question the accuracy of the comments and findings. Confronting the situation may not work as clearly or as easily as you may expect, and always remember you are familiar with only one side of the story. If you feel very frustrated and concerned, you might need to make some serious decisions about where your child goes to school.

- 15** **If necessary, consider the possibility of moving schools.** If you have exhausted all your support avenues, if the school has intervened to no avail, and if you and your child feel that this is your only resort, this might be the right decision for you. Moving schools might not solve all of your child's difficulties. There are definitely pros and cons, gains and losses. But, if you have thought it through carefully, sometimes a fresh start at a new school that is well suited to your child might be the answer. Don't see the move as a sign of failure or giving up.

DON'T:

- 1** **Don't tell your child that you are sure there is a good reason the other child has been mean to them** – don't rationalize or excuse the bully's behaviour. Don't suggest that the bully behaves the way they do because they come from a broken home, or that they have troubling learning difficulties, or perhaps that they are experiencing serious personal problems. Even if you know this is true, don't

let your first response to your child be one which supports the other side. Your child is hurting, angry, scared and confused. You need to first support your child by listening to his or her side of the story and demonstrating your understanding. Only then should you help your child to think of the possible factors that might be contributing towards the conflict.

2 **Do not hound your child with questions as to what happened, when, who said or did what, especially if your child is finding it hard to explain him or herself.** Be patient and gentle in how you find out what is going on. Be aware of your tone of voice – ensure that you do not sound accusing, critical or judgemental. Rather try to sound interested, inquisitive and concerned.

“Ensure that you do not sound accusing, critical or judgemental.”

3 **Don't ask your child why he or she didn't do or say something during the incident that you think would have been helpful.** Everyone can think of better ways to handle things in hindsight. Pointing out where your child went wrong or what they should have done doesn't help them at all. It just exacerbates your child's feelings of failure, anger and disappointment. Be aware that your child might already be belittling or admonishing themselves. You don't need to add to the pain and embarrassment. None of us like to be told where we went wrong while we are still feeling the sting of remorse. Give your child some love, support and space before you review what could have happened.

4

Don't fire off recommendations and solutions to your child. Don't tell them what to do when they next get to school. Remember, you don't have all the information and, most importantly, it's not YOUR life. Take the time to find out IF your child wants advice and what they think would be helpful. Don't overlook your child's inner resourcefulness in your desire to fix the problem.

“Don't overlook your child's inner resourcefulness in your desire to fix the problem.”

5

Don't just tell your child to not play with the bully or to have no contact or interactions. Distance is a good thing, but this advice is hard to follow and it doesn't necessarily address what is going on. It's a quick fix move that doesn't really fix anything.

It's very easy to say that you just want the mean child or bully to leave your child alone. Sure. Have you found out if the children were friends before, or previously liked each other? You can't really force your child to not play with certain kids. Is this child in the same class, grade or school as your child? How are they going to get along for the remainder of the months or years together? Unless you move schools, these children will have to interact in some way – even if it is to do a group work task in class. You cannot isolate children at school from each other. It is impossible.

6

Don't phone the bully's parents or guardians until you have your child's permission to do so. Also, do not do this until you are sure that you have all the facts, both sides of the story –

and children, just like adults, exaggerate and fabricate details. Ensure that you have the FACTS, not ASSUMPTIONS or PERCEPTIONS. When you approach another child's parents, they will naturally be defensive of their child. They might be thrown, unaware of the incident. You might need to give the parent time to find out from their child what happened.

Before you make contact with another parent or guardian, decide what it is that you want to achieve – what is your goal? Ensure that your goal is constructive and assists your child to have a happy and safe experience at school. Make sure that your child also thinks that your idea would be helpful. The children are the ones who have to go to school and to go out onto the playground during break. Take care that you are not responding from YOUR feelings of anger, fear, helplessness and frustration. Take some time to talk about and reflect on your feelings and ideas with another adult. Perhaps wait a day or two to see what transpires before you decide to contact the other parent. You must be calm, focused and clear as to your goal and aspirations should you decide to phone another parent.

7

Do not, EVER, confront the child or children involved, at school or anywhere else.

You are an adult and automatically there is an unequal amount of power. You might think that you are just talking nicely and calmly to the children who are being mean to your child. But you might overlook how your feelings affect your tone of voice. You might overlook how frightening the experience might be to the children on the receiving end of your comments. Remember, you only have one side of the story.

The child you confront, out of politeness or fear, might not share the other side of the story with you. They might feel scared to disagree with you, or walk away from you, because you are an adult. They will probably be left feeling scared, shocked, angry and stuck. They will definitely go and tell another adult who will see the imbalance and inappropriateness of your confrontation and that will outweigh what you were saying. Your act of confronting a child will be viewed as aggressive and an unsolicited invasion of the child's space and well-being.

Yes, you might be feeling frustrated, angry, desperate, but **do not** confront the children. You are an adult and must address this matter with other adults - teachers, school management, or the children's parents themselves.

“Your act of confronting a child will be viewed as aggressive & an unsolicited invasion of the child's space & well-being.”

8

Don't tell all your friends or other adults that your child is being bullied. You might enjoy the opportunity to vent your feelings and thoughts, but how will this help your child? Your child is likely to feel embarrassed and humiliated if they know that you are talking about their difficulties. You might be adding salt to a wound.

Take care who you talk to for support and advice. Choose your audience with care and ensure that they are asked to keep your conversation with them to themselves.

“Take care who you talk to for support & advice.”

9

Don't advise your child to be mean back to the bully. Don't teach them how to be mean.

This might be tempting. Perhaps from your past experience as a child, a quick punch or retaliation worked for you. But remember that your child is NOT you. School is different to when you were younger. Your child might get into trouble for reacting aggressively. This could result in the mean things the bully has done to your child being minimized or negated due to your child's equally mean behaviour.

I find that when a child is mean back, they often get caught in the act as this is not their usual style of behaviour and his or her desperate feelings tend to make a scene. The bully can report and exaggerate to teachers how wronged they were and the measure of the bully's destruction and hurt will be minimized. Remember, unless an adult witnessed the bullying incident, it is very much a case of 'he said, she said' – it is hard for a teacher to establish the facts of an incident. Even if other children witness the incident, their statements cannot be viewed as absolute fact. Children under the age of 12 years are minors, and the accuracy of their descriptions and reporting is questionable.

10

Don't bad-mouth or name and shame the bully.

This is defamation of character and the child's parents or guardians will retaliate. Once again, your purpose and the details about the bullying will most likely get lost in the inappropriateness of your behaviour. Remember, you don't have all the facts. There is a strong possibility that people will find errors in your comments and you will be viewed as being aggressive. This might impact on how other children view your child and other children's parents desire to encourage or foster a relationship with your child. Families tend to shy away from children who have aggressive, demanding, conflict-orientated parents – they just don't seem like nice people or families for their child to spend time with. Your behaviour might result in your child feeling ostracized or isolated by their peers.

This is a hard time for you and your child. It's frightening and frustrating to see your child in pain. And the more disempowered you feel as a parent, the more extreme your emotions become.

However, you have an important role to play in helping your child overcome this difficult situation.

I hope these pointers will help you and your child cope with the bullying and find a path to growth and healing. You will need bucket-loads of strength and patience, and I hope you find the support and wisdom you need. If you continue to feel at a loss, please see these additional resources for advice and support:

www.childlinesa.org.za

www.nobullying.com

www.sadag.org

www.cyberbullying.org.za/south-african-law.html

Regards

Jo



To find out more about Jo and her book

THE ULTIMATE ASSERTIVENESS TOOLBOX FOR KIDS

visit her online at

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