

WORKING WITH CHILDREN WHO BULLY

by Katherine McKenney, M.A.

Bullying can happen wherever children gather to live, work, and play, including at Scouting meetings. By addressing bullying early on and following the suggested guidelines below, leaders can ensure that Scouting remains a positive and rewarding experience for everyone.

Leaders set the tone for their sections, and children are sensitive to what the leaders do and say. It is important for leaders to remember to speak the way they want children to speak and to behave in a positive manner as an example to follow. If leaders are supportive and respectful of children's differences and difficulties, children will adopt that style.

While leading is a rewarding experience, it can also be a challenging one. It is natural to become tired and

frustrated with difficult children, but there is a danger in letting these feelings show or affect your own behaviour. If leaders roll their eyes or make demeaning comments (e.g., "How many times do I have to tell you things? Why can't you just get it the first time like everybody else?"), they inadvertently give the other children permission to bully the troubled child. If you find yourself becoming frustrated with a child, remember to take a deep breath and count to five before responding to ensure you are being supportive and respectful. Remember, the feelings of frustration and dislike you may experience towards a difficult child are likely the same feelings that other children have as well. These difficult children need as much support from leaders as possible.

When bullying occurs, the consequences must be educational and formative. Formative consequences not only provide a clear message that bullying is unacceptable, but also build awareness and skills to promote children's responsibility, and positive leadership. When children bully, their privileges can be withdrawn and replaced by an

Formative Consequences that Leaders can use to Address Bullying

To encourage empathy

- 1:** Help children learn the language of emotions to identify their own feelings and those of others. Help them identify and label feelings of shame, embarrassment, anger, fear, sadness, etc.
- 2:** Have the children who bully create a poster, collage, or drawing of what it must feel like to be bullied. Talk about the feelings that children who are bullied might experience.
- 3:** Have the children who bully interview an adult or adolescent about their bullying experiences and the impact it had on him/her.
- 4:** Have the children watch a movie about bullying and describe the characters and the consequences of their actions (e.g., *Mean Girls*, *Back to the Future*). Encourage them to focus on the feelings of the victimized character. Help them to identify these feelings by looking out for facial expressions, body posture, and tone of voice.
- 5:** Have the children identify instances of bullying in the media (e.g., television, newspapers, radio, magazines, websites) and talk with them about their reactions to these instances.
- 6:** Talk with your youth about their own strengths and weaknesses and how they can use power to help, not hurt, others.

To make amends

- 7:** If they are sorry for their behaviour and genuinely want to make amends, have the children who bully write a letter or card of apology to the children who were victimized.

- 8:** Encourage the children who bully to make a verbal apology that includes taking responsibility for the behaviour and indicating what they will do to ensure the children who were victimized feel better. It is important that the children who were victimized want to participate in this process and that the apology is given privately rather than publicly.
- 9:** Encourage youth members to repair or restore property or personal belongings that were damaged as a result of the bullying. You may need to involve their parents to accomplish this.

To help children associate power with kindness and prosocial activities

- 10:** Encourage the children who bully to perform five acts of kindness and describe how they felt after completing each act.
- 11:** Encourage the children who bully to observe other children in the section or community and look for acts of kindness. Have the children describe what they observed and how they think the people felt.
- 12:** Identify strengths and abilities possessed by the children who bully and provide them with opportunities to highlight these skills in ways that help others. For example, if a child who bullies excels at knot tying, have the child assist with this activity with younger children.

instructive activity, such as the ones listed in the sidebar. Consequences must be applied immediately and consistently in order to have an impact. It is important to recognize that a bullying episode rarely involves just one child. One child may be the instigator, but others may be watching, joining in, or encouraging the bullying. All children who are present during bullying and do not intervene must be included in the discussion and consequences for bullying. You'll find that including bullying in your Code of Conduct will make these consequences easier to administer.

When working with children who bully, it is important to focus on positive behaviour, both yours and the children's. Children thrive on positive attention and reinforcement from adults and they will work hard to get it from you. It's vital, therefore, that leaders recognize and encourage children when they are engaging in healthy relationship behaviours, rather than only paying attention when they are bullying or being negative.

Children who bully need positive relationships with adults in order to learn how to be positive with their peers.

In responding to bullying, it is important that leaders model positive problem solving strategies – and avoid bullying themselves. If children are disciplined in a harsh way, they take away the message that those who have the power are able to use it aggressively. Children who bully need positive relationships with adults in order to learn how to be positive with their peers.

With children who bully, leaders can promote respect and positive engagement in relationships by noting and reinforcing children's small behavioural steps in the right direction.

Remember, children are works in progress and they can't always get it right. With your help, the children in your section can learn healthy relationship skills, which will ensure a positive Scouting experience for everyone involved, including yourself. ✕

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Welcome to PREVNet

Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence
La promotion des relations et l'élimination de la violence

Launched in 2006, PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence) consists of Canadian researchers, child/youth focused national organizations (including Scouts Canada), and governments working together to promote safe and healthy relationships for all Canadian children and youth. Through our partnerships, we are developing a national strategy to address bullying in Canada.

Tips to Share with Children who Bully

- ☞ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent, teacher, or coach. They can help you find ways to get along with others.
- ☞ Ask a friend to help you stop if you start to bully others.
- ☞ Set goals each day to make it easier not to bully (e.g., keep cool; today I'll help others rather than hurt them).
- ☞ Understand that you may not like everyone around you but you do have to treat them with respect.
- ☞ Appreciate kids' differences...different doesn't mean worse or better than you.
- ☞ Put yourself in other kids' shoes...would you want to be picked on, put down, or left out?
- ☞ Apologize to the kids you have bullied.
- ☞ Know that if other children watch and laugh, it doesn't mean they like it when you bully.
- ☞ Be a real leader...Real leaders treat others with respect.

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