

Every tenth
student is subjected
to bullying



KiVa antibullying program

PARENTS' GUIDE



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Foreword

This Parents Guide' is part of the KiVa antibullying program, a research-based tool to prevent and reduce bullying problems. KiVa is a school-based program which was developed by the experts at the University of Turku, Finland. Additional information on the program is available on the KiVa website, www.kivaprogram.net.

Laws and regulations require schools to take action to prevent bullying and school policies have been established to protect students. The core of these laws and regulations requires schools to intervene in bullying and to develop antibullying policies. KiVa is a tool through which schools can comply with the antibullying requirements stated in these laws.

The aim of this guide is to offer parents information about bullying; what is known from current research and what can be done at home and at school. Cooperation between home and school is important in addressing bullying. KiVa says – let's do it together!

The main points are summarized at the end of each chapter. In addition, there is a recap of the guide on page 38 which provides a summary of the most important points.

In writing this guide we listened to parents, students and other experts. We would like to express our sincerest thanks to everyone who contributed to this guide.

In order to succeed, KiVa requires a supportive home environment where parents convey that they do not condone bullying and that they are willing to help their child if s/he is subjected to bullying!

I BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT BULLYING

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Arguments and disagreements are not bullying

Conflicts and disagreements are part of human relationships and they may occur when people have different opinions or want different things. As we strive to realize our own goals we do not always remember to take others feelings into consideration. A classroom of children is no exception to this. Children and adolescents settling disagreements and differences is not a bad thing as such. Even though these disagreements may at times upset us, they can also teach us valuable methods for handling emotions and settling conflicts. Arguments and disagreements differ from bullying in that they are usually passing and momentary, and the same child is not consistently targeted.

Teasing or rough play is not bullying

The intention behind game playing is not to hurt or insult others. It is important that all the participants recognize and accept the activity as a game. However, sometimes words and deeds meant as a joke or play may hurt and upset someone, and in such cases addressing the matter and an apology are in order. In the future both the parties should avoid behavior which they know hurts the other. Unlike in bullying, an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect exists between the parties involved in game playing activities.

Often you hear “We’re only playing, we’re not serious”. How should you deal with this? First, you should find out whether everyone involved in the activity feels it is just play. If you cannot be sure, you should discuss it with the children. In unclear situations you can talk about the difference between playing and bullying and stress that playing should be fun for everyone.

Bullying is when you consistently harm someone who is defenseless

Bullying is when the same student is repeatedly and deliberately harmed. The perpetrator is/are someone/s against whom the victim finds it difficult to defend him/herself.

Repeatedly is when the same student is subjected over and over again to mean and hurtful actions by others. Bullying can continue through several grade levels from elementary to middle school. Deliberateness means that the purpose or goal of the actions is to hurt, harm, and cause distress. Sometimes you may hurt someone by accident. In such cases the situation should be resolved even though they are not, by definition considered bullying. Saying that the victim has difficulties in defending themselves means that in some way there is an imbalance of power or strength or power between the bully and the victim. The victim may be physically weak, very timid or s/he might be new in the class and has not yet been able to acquire a circle of friends to provide a shield from bullying.

According to researches 10—20% of elementary school students and 5—10% middle school students are subjected to systematic bullying. Many of these students don’t tell anyone about the bullying. Often the cause behind this silence is the fear that the bullying might increase or be the result of prior experiences in which telling did not help. To admit that your friends do not accept you is difficult for anyone



WELL-MEANING COMMENTS, BUT...

In addition to affecting the victim, bullying also affects the victim's close circle of family, friends and acquaintances. Once the matter has come to light, we will take a stand and strive to make the victim feel better. Great! However, sometimes our comments can actually make the situation worse and create even more problems. Words uttered carelessly may evoke feelings of shame and guilt. Below are some comments which you may hear when talking about bullying.

“I was bullied in school too, but it didn't affect me in any way.”

These words are often uttered in an annoyed tone as if the one saying them was still annoyed by the events. If indeed the bullying had no effect, it raises the question whether it really was bullying or for example, quarrels between two people or the settling of a disagreement. For a bullied child such a comment may sound like you are minimizing his/her problem.

“You have to learn to stand up for yourself.”

Defending yourself is beneficial, and you can learn and practice doing it, but whether it is something you should learn in a bullying situation is a whole other matter. Bullying is harming someone who is defenseless or otherwise in a weaker position. Defending oneself in such a situation is extremely difficult, sometimes even impossible. When the victim is told to defend him/herself, the responsibility of handling the situation is put solely on his/her shoulders. Asking for help does not mean that you are incapable of defending yourself. Rather it is an expression of courage and self-knowledge in a situation where your own coping resources are not enough.

“Bullying builds character and the ability to survive difficult situations.”

Research shows that the short- and long-term effects of bullying diminish the victims' ability to cope in difficult situations. Bullying harms the victim's self-esteem and ability to trust others. Therefore, bullying does not enhance someone's ability to control situations, and no one should be given “character-building lessons” in the form of bullying. Personality and character grows and develops best in interaction between parties based on mutual trust and respect.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

Individual words, uttered for example during an argument, will gradually fade from memory, but verbal bullying which is repeated and systematic by nature will always leave a mark. The destructive force of words will hit the victim's self-esteem and self-concept over and over again, thus forming a risk to his/her current and future well-being.

“That isn't bullying. It's just children playing and teasing, you shouldn't get upset because of play.”

Bullying is a cruel way to hurt someone verbally, physically or indirectly. Bullying is far from playing. The purpose of genuine playing and harmless teasing is to have fun together, not to hurt or harm someone

Helping and supporting the victim is paramount! People making statements such as those discussed above seem to not understand the basic nature of bullying and the harmful effect it has on the victim. Being bullied is an especially difficult experience for two reasons. First, bullying is not just a one time or occasional event, but a recurring situation which may continue year after year. Second, bullying does not happen outside the social life of the class. For the victim it often means a loss of dignity within their class and in their circle of friends.



Bullying differs from arguing and playing because bullying is ¹⁾ deliberate, ²⁾ repeated, and ³⁾ compared to the bully, the victim is somehow defenseless or in a weaker position. Comments made by others may make the victim feel worse, especially if the comments are insensitive and trigger feelings of guilt and shame. Bullying is *not* innocent play, one does *not* survive it by getting even, and it does *not* build character. Bullying is always a serious violation of a person's rights and degrades his/her human worth and dignity. Being bullied is a risk to the victim's well-being and future development.

FORMS OF BULLYING

Verbal bullying is the most common form

Verbal bullying includes name-calling, teasing or mocking, threatening messages, and ridiculing. These verbal insults do not leave physical marks, but their hurtful nature negatively impacts the victim's self-esteem, self-concept, and damages his/her way of viewing him/herself and others. According to research, the victim's self-esteem can remain low many years later and his/her trust in others can be lost forever.

Indirect bullying uses hidden methods to inflict harm

Indirect bullying means that the bully and the victim do not necessarily meet face-to-face; they are not always in the same place when bullying occurs. By nature indirect bullying often involves social manipulation, i.e. the bully strives for influencing other students so that they start avoiding the victim and viewing him/her in a negative light. Manipulation can manifest as the spreading of unfounded rumors about the victim which may result in damaging his/her relationship with other students. The victim of indirect bullying may gradually notice that s/he is alone in the class and has no friends. In the worst case scenario the whole class turns its back on the victim.

Physical bullying can be a cause for criminal prosecution

Pushing, hitting and kicking are forms of physical bullying. Extreme forms of physical bullying, such as severe violence and abuse, occur infrequently even though they often appear in the media. Involving law enforcement should be considered in cases that include physical violence.

Cyberbullying is a new form of bullying

Bullying online or by cell phone are fairly new forms of bullying. This form of bullying is technically easy; it requires only a click of a mouse or the pressing of a few buttons. The low risk of getting caught may tempt someone to do something s/he would not normally do. Sometimes cyberbullying is anonymous. With a cell phone or a computer one can spread rumors, post embarrassing photographs or personal information, or send mocking or threatening messages. School-bullying is often restricted to the school day, but online-a bully can basically reach his/her victim whenever s/he wants. Even at home, the victim is no longer safe from being bullied.





Bullying can be visible or hidden by nature. Visible forms are physical and emotional abuse. Verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying. Words hurt the victim's self-esteem and self-concept, and consequently hurt his/her way of viewing him/herself and others. Indirect bullying is a less noticeable type of bullying. It hurts the victim's social relationships and at worst leaves the victim completely isolated without any friends in the class. The forms of bullying described above are restricted to school, except for cyberbullying which reaches the victim whenever and wherever.



BULLYING CONCERNS THE WHOLE CLASS

Bullying does not occur in a social vacuum. Usually several students are aware of what is occurring and there are several witnesses to the bully's actions. Unfortunately many of them cooperate with the bully or laugh at the bully's actions, thus conveying that they approve of the bullying. Fortunately there are some people who do take the victim's side. However, most students do not intervene in bullying situations, but remain on the outside, and by doing so silently approve of bullying.

Studies have identified different ways in which bystanders (who are neither bullies nor victims) may react when witnessing bullying.

- **Assisting the bully.** Some children tend to join in bullying and assist the ringleader bullies in different ways (for instance, preventing the bullied child from escaping the situation; delivering nasty notes from the bully to the target person; spreading rumors that someone else has started).
- **Reinforcing the bully.** Some children gather on the spot to watch and laugh, rewarding the bully through gestures, facial expressions and words.
- **Silently approving the bullying.** Some children withdraw to the side in bullying situations and act as if they did not notice it.
- **Defending the child who is being bullied.** Fortunately, some children take the victim's side and try to support him or her. They try to make others stop bullying or console the bullied child in private.



“In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

The quote above by *Martin Luther King* effectively describes the experience of many bullied children that leads them to believe that no one cares or is on their side. This situation may persist for years. Why don't people take the victim's side? There can be many reasons behind their inaction. One reason is a lack of courage; the fear of being bullied themselves. Lack of knowledge is another factor that can prevent an individual from providing support; they don't know what they can do to help the victim. The goal of the KiVa program is to help children realize what even small things can do to convey the following; “I'm on your side”, “I want to support you” or “I think you're being mistreated.”

When bullying continues, many students will gradually start viewing the victim in an increasingly negative light. In a group it may become a habit to treat the bullied child badly. In such cases group norms make it impossible to defend the victim or even to be in contact with him/her. Students may also think bullying is acceptable if it is not addressed and is allowed to continue.



Students may be embarrassed by what is being done to the victim. Feelings of shame and embarrassment may increase other students' unwillingness to intervene in bullying. Gradually this lack of intervention will turn to indifference and the victim's situation may be erased from memory. When someone forgets, they can feel better. Once bullying is put out of one's mind it becomes trivial and one can stop paying special attention to it. At this point, bullying has become part of the daily life in a class and at the school, and an individual student has no reason, nor the tools or courage to intervene.

The objective of *the KiVa program* is to influence the entire class. The program helps to build a shared atmosphere of awareness, intervention and responsibility. The goal is to educate the students so that instead of silently approving or encouraging the bullies they start supporting the victim, thus showing that they do not condone bullying. Stopping bullying becomes possible when a sense of shared responsibility is developed and group norms are changed. This program attempts to achieve both of these things. Another goal is to provide students with concrete tools for intervening in bullying situations as well as creating a safe atmosphere where no one defending the victim has to be afraid of being bullied him/herself.



A bully seldom works alone. S/he usually has his/her assistants and reinforcers. The victim may have defenders, but most of the students withdraw to the side in bullying situations and become silent approvers. Fear and lack of knowledge make it impossible to take the victim's side. They forget about bullying and it becomes a normal part of the school day. The KiVa program offers research-based knowledge, tools and solutions which can help teachers tackle bullying and help students safely take the victim's side.

WHAT CAUSES BULLYING?

The most common question about bullying is what causes it. The answer is not a simple one. Is it because of the bully? Or perhaps the victim? The teacher? The school atmosphere? Society? What is certain is that bullying is never caused by just one of the elements listed above. Factors which increase a child's risk to become a bully or a victim however are known. It has also been shown that bullying is more likely to occur in some classrooms rather than others. There are also differences between schools, differences between countries, etc. In different cultures different things can increase the risk of becoming bullied. For example, in Western countries timid and quiet children may end up being bullied more frequently, whereas in China such children have a high status in their circle of friends. Therefore, what is valued in each culture also affects the bullying phenomenon.

Who bullies – and whom?

Research shows that there are certain characteristics which may put children at risk for becoming a bully. Some of these children may have severe problems in different areas of life, they may have an aggressive personality or they may have difficulty in feeling empathy for others. However, it is important to understand that *often bullies are quite ordinary, nice children who, when together, end up being mean towards a member of the group.*

The current view is that one of the main reasons behind bullying is the bully's attempt to reinforce his/her own social status or gain power in the group. Children who bully others often have the need to be seen and heard, to receive admiration and to gain power in the group. Therefore, the target of bullying is often a child or an adolescent who is insecure, timid, who already has a low social status in the group or who has few or no friends. By choosing this type of victim, the bully ensures that the group will not fight back to stop the bullying and is assured easy victory. Therefore, persistent beliefs that the bully is a problem child with low self-esteem and who vents his/her own bad feelings by bullying are incorrect. There are a lot of children who bully others for fun, to impress others or who just do it out of plain inconsideration.

At some point anyone can be bullied. Research studies have identified certain features and traits which *increase* the child or adolescent's *risk* of being bullied. These include visible features such as an abnormal physique, being over/underweight, clumsiness, or temperament issues such as shyness, being an introvert, and impulsiveness. Also children with learning difficulties have a higher risk of being bullied. Shyness, insecurity and low self-esteem are the most common predictors of future victimization. However, it is only an increased risk, not a certainty that the presence of these characteristics will in all cases and in all situations lead to victimization.

Even though the features listed above can increase the risk of being bullied, it does not mean that being bullied is the victims' or their parents' fault or even their responsibility. Physical differences, shyness and insecurity are not the victim's flaws, but features which s/he deserves to be accepted for. Also, it is important to note that the research results are based on vast data from hundreds of students. What is true when studying large numbers of students does not necessarily apply to each individual bullying situation. Therefore, children who are not particularly shy or insecure or who have a high self-esteem may end up being bullied.

Even though many bullied children and adolescents are non-aggressive, withdrawn and timid, there are also targets who are aggressive themselves. This easily "triggerable" and uncontrollable aggressiveness may increase a child's risk to be bullied. A small number of targets may themselves bully, for example, other younger and weaker children. With these bully-targets it is often especially challenging to stop the bullying. Due to the bully-targets' own aggressiveness and disruptive behavior their class-mates may consider bullying them understandable, even justified.

When children are asked to give a reason for bullying, they often say that the victim is “just so annoying”, awkward in social situations, “stuck-up”, talks too much, etc. It is important however to understand that bullying is always wrong, it is disrespectful, and no one deserves it. If someone’s behavior seriously annoys or bothers you, tell him/her that – bullying is not the solution.

In addition to the individual characteristics of children, many group factors affect bullying. The person in the bully’s role may be expected to behave in certain way. In other words, when a person acts according to his/her role s/he responds to other people’s expectations. For example, if the bully gives everyone “a bullying show” s/he may feel more part of the group, and that s/he is acting according to the group’s expectations. In addition to role expectations, the bully’s actions are also affected by the pro- or antibullying norms in the classroom and the overall culture of the school. It has been observed that in certain classes or schools, specific individual factors which may increase the risk of being bullied do not predict victimization after all. That is, bullying in these cases may be the result of group norms supporting bullying instead of being against it. Therefore, although certain factors may increase a child’s risk for victimization, it does not guarantee that s/he will be bullied. The norms within a group – a classroom or a school – are important to consider when trying to understand why bullying has taken place.

When you consider the effect the group has on the bully’s actions, the goal is not to take away or diminish the individual’s (the bully’s) responsibility for his/her actions, but to view bullying as a phenomenon which is affected by other factors beyond individual characteristics of the bully. These matters will be addressed in the KiVa lessons, but they can also be discussed at home.



What happens to the victim, and to the bully?

Bullying is a risk for both *the victim and the bully’s* development and well-being. Bullied children are, among other things, more depressed and anxious than other children. They may be afraid to go to school and their trust in other people is damaged.

If not addressed, bullying also poses a risk for the bully. The bully may think that similar actions in the future will also have no consequences for him/her, and s/he may start to believe that putting others down is a good way to achieve attention and power in a group. At worst such development can lead to problems later in life such as further problems in interpersonal relationships, escalating aggression that may lead to violence, etc.

If a child who is bullying others is allowed to continue his/her behavior:

- His/her attitude and beliefs towards bullying and violence will become more positive. S/he will adopt an even greater disrespectful attitude towards others and view hurting others acceptable or even fun.
- S/he will learn to use bullying as a means to control social situations. Bullying can be rewarding; s/he receives attention, it gives him/her a sense of power, a self-confidence boost, and even pleasure.
- On the other hand the bully may also feel trapped if s/he cannot change his/her behavior. S/he learns that no one can help or stop him/her.

According to follow-up studies children and adolescents do not necessarily just “grow out” of bullying. Therefore bullying does not stop on its own, and children who bully frequently have a higher risk of developing into adults who are prone to aggressive and violent behavior.



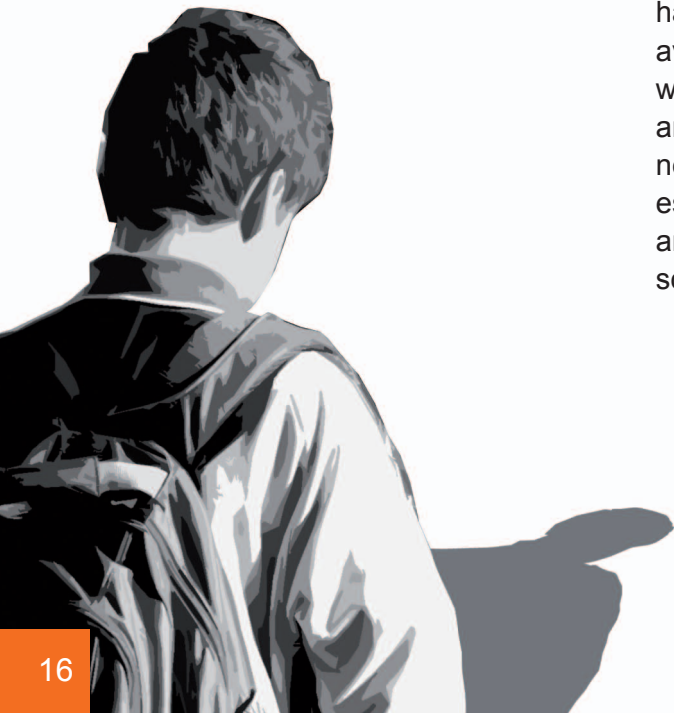
Even though certain common features (aggressiveness, lack of empathy) characterize some bullies, ordinary children and adolescents also bully and behave nasty towards a member of the group – sometimes due to inconsideration. Children who bully others, often have the need to be seen and heard, to receive admiration and to gain power in the group. Therefore, the target chosen for bullying is often a child or an adolescent who is insecure, timid, who already has a low status in the group, or who has few or no friends. You do not end up being a bully or a victim solely on the basis of individual traits. These roles are also influenced by other students' expectations and the class norms. The bully may feel that s/he is more accepted in the group by offering others a fun "show". The victim suffers from bullying and in later life it can cause him/her visible consequences such as depression and distrust in others. Bullying is also a risk for the bully. If the bully's behavior is not intervened in a timely enough manner, his/her well-being and development can be severely jeopardized.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE A BULLIED STUDENT?

Changes in behavior

The consequences and effects of bullying can manifest in the student in many ways. Many signs pointing to bullying may also be the result of other problems in the child or adolescent's life. Sudden illnesses of family members, parents' divorce, conflicts between parents and siblings, or unemployment may make the whole family's life difficult and manifest in children and adolescents as symptomatic behavior. The signs described below are therefore not the only signs of being bullied. It is also worthwhile to remember that each parent knows best the ways their child expresses distress and when everything is not OK.

Often the best clue is a change in the student's behavior. If, for instance, a student who has previously had positive feelings about school becomes uninterested in school and avoids it, that is reason enough to pay attention to the situation more closely and consider what might have brought about the sudden change. Bringing up the matter is the clearest and the most direct way. You should note however that a child or adolescent may not necessarily be willing to talk about the situation even to his/her parents. It is important to establish ground rules for conversations that are based on speaking in a respectful manner and conveying support. It may also be necessary to contact the classroom teacher or the school's KiVa team.



Some signs implying being bullied

Unlike in the past the student...

- is afraid of walking to/from school or of taking the usual route to school
- does not want to take the school bus
- frequently asks to be taken to school by car or wants to be escorted to school
- is unwilling to go to school, is absent from school or classes with no clear reason
- complains s/he's ill in the morning on school days
- comes home from school with his/her clothes or school bag messed up and torn
- comes home hungry (is afraid to go and eat in the lunchroom)
- becomes withdrawn, quiet and seems to have lost his/her self-confidence
- becomes stressed and anxious
- has lost his/her appetite, often says s/he does not feel like eating



- cries him/herself to sleep, has nightmares
- loses his/her property (baseball cap, hat, books, booklets, pencil case, etc.)
- asks for or steals money (in order to give to the bully or his/her assistants) or frequently loses his/her allowance
- has mysterious bruises, scratches or cuts
- becomes angry, easily irritable and “difficult”
- is often alone without friends, no longer brings friends home
- refuses to talk about what is wrong or frequently gives unconvincing explanations to matters mentioned above





No single sign indicates being bullied.

Each parent knows their child and the ways s/he expresses distress. Often the key indicator is a change compared to the student's previous behavior, e.g. a child who used to like going to school no longer wants to go. If there seems to be no apparent reason for the change, it is worth discussing with the child and the school staff the possibility that the child is being bullied.

II

ANTIBULLYING ACTIONS AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME

ACTIONS AT SCHOOL

KiVa program

KiVa is based on research findings and it has been developed as an antibullying tool for educators.

Measures at school

KiVa provides school staff with information about bullying and how to address it, and strives to obtain the commitment of all the adults in the school to engage in antibullying work. The program contains material for school meetings and back-to-school nights with parents (parents' evenings). Recess monitors are given vests made out of reflective material to increase their visibility and to remind both the students and the monitors that the monitors' important task is being responsible for everyone's safety.

Measures in the class

The KiVa program consists of 10 lessons (2 x 45-minute sessions) and assignments to be conducted over the course of one school year. Students in targeted years/grade levels have KiVa lessons once or twice a month.

The lessons consist of discussions about bullying and respecting others, how to function in a group, and different kinds of exercises and group work. The lessons and the themes are complemented by the KiVa computer game. In the game students go into a virtual school to practice antibullying actions and are given feedback on their actions. Students who have Internet access at home can also access the game from there. Ask your child to show you the KiVa game!

The goal of the work done at the classroom level is to educate students about their role in stopping bullying. So instead of silently approving bullying or encouraging the bullies, children start supporting the victimized classmate, and by doing so convey that they do not condone bullying. Putting an end to bullying becomes possible when a shared sense of responsibility is developed and group norms are changed.



Measures in individual cases of bullying

The KiVa program does not solely concentrate on preventing bullying, but also addresses individual bullying cases as effectively as possible. Each school implementing the program has a *task force* – the KiVa team – consisting of at least *three teachers or other adults*. In their training team members are familiarized with measures to address individual bullying cases. They function as experts on bullying-related matters in their school.

When a parent contacts the school with concerns about bullying or a student tells the teacher about bullying, the first step the teacher takes is determining if they are dealing with systematic bullying, more of an unintentional conflict, an argument between children, or a misunderstanding that has caused distress. All cases that fulfill the criteria for bullying are shared with the KiVa team whose members will address the case and discuss it with the children involved. First the team members talk with the victim, and then individually with each student who has taken part in the bullying. After that, all the children who participated in the bullying meet together as a group. Once agreement has been reached on how the bullies will change their behavior, a new meeting - follow-up discussion - is scheduled. These follow-up discussions are to ensure that the bullying has indeed stopped.

Parents are informed about all cases concerning their child that are being handled by the KiVa team. If necessary, parents may be asked to come to the school to discuss the matter. However, the bullying-related discussions are primarily held between the adults at school and the students.



At the school level the purpose of the KiVa program is to offer school staff basic information about bullying and ways to tackle it, and to get the staff to commit to antibullying work. Recess monitors will receive highly visible vests with a KiVa logo reminding everyone of the program. *On class level* the purpose is to affect the students so that instead of silent acceptance or encouragement of bullies they support the victim, thus conveying that they do not condone it. *On student level* the purpose is to focus on tackling acute bullying cases as effectively as possible. Tackling a case always contains a follow-up discussion to ensure that the situation has changed.



MEASURES AT HOME

Questions are important

“How was school today?” or “How were things at school?” are important daily questions parents can ask their children. They provide information about the student’s school day, his/her feelings, moods and his/her relationships with friends. Questions indicate that parents are interested in what is happening at school. They can also function as openings to discuss possible problems with friends.

The next time you ask about the school day, don’t settle for a short answer of “Fine” or “OK”. Take more time so that you can discuss the topic as long as needed. In addition to words, it is important to “listen” to feelings, the tone of voice, and to pay attention to facial expressions and gestures. The purpose is not to interrogate, but to have a dialogue where both sides exchange stories about the events of the day. It’s good to ask questions which cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.



The following questions can lead you to the topic:

- What was the best and the worst thing that happened at school today?
- Who were you with at school today? What were they like?
- What did you do with friends today? Was it fun?
- What did you do on the way to school/home?



” How was

school today?”



”Well fine!”



”I got a B in math and on the way to school
Jake made me laugh.”



”Me and Janice made a record”

”I was picked last during recess
again for the soccer game.”





Supporting a child who is being bullied

The knowledge or the suspicion that your child is being bullied at school can cause many kinds of emotions. Feelings such as anger, fear, shame and guilt, are natural and even expected in such a situation. Even if you are overwhelmed by emotions, try to avoid overreacting because doing so may lead your child, the victim of bullying to believe that s/he has caused the parents' distress. Another danger is under-reacting, which may lead your child to feel that you are minimizing the situation. Difficult matters should not be avoided by under- or overreacting, but you can learn how to address them. The goal of addressing the matter is to support the child, to increase his/her self-esteem, and to ensure that bullying is stopped.



What to do?

- If you know or suspect that your child is being bullied, discuss it with him/her. S/he might not want to tell you, so be prepared that s/he might deny it at first.
- Encourage your child to talk about it and assure him/her that you want to help him/her no matter how difficult the situation may be. Let your child know you are on his/her side 100%.
- Say clearly and frequently that being bullied is not his/her fault. There is nothing wrong with him/her which justifies bullying.
- Do not promise to keep the matter a secret because then it is impossible to intervene! Promise, however, that you will not do anything without discussing it with him/her first. This way you will maintain trust and an open dialogue.
- Together think about how to survive individual bullying situations. Simple actions are the best. Bullies want the victim to react in a certain way; by crying, getting confused, being afraid, exploding etc. If possible, the victim could try to appear indifferent, say NO to bullying and/or leave the whole situation. It is difficult for the bully to continue when the victim doesn't react or walks away. The assertiveness needed in bullying situations can also be practiced; how to say NO, STOP IT or DON'T BULLY in a convincing manner.
- Together think about how to avoid such situations where it is likely your child is bullied easily. For example your child should not be the last to leave the class or the lunchroom, should not take money or valuables to school, and should not stand away from other students or the recess monitor. It's good to be close to others even if you do not know them. You are more secure in a group.
- Think about how to increase the victim's self-confidence. You could make a feel-good poster for your child, for example. Find a picture in which your child is happy and content. Glue it on the paper. Around the picture write supportive, nice and encouraging comments that others have made about him/her. Also write comments about his/her strengths and situations in which they excel. Once the poster is finished place it somewhere visible.
- As a consequence of bullying, victims may be timid and withdrawn. The KiVa lessons include discussions about how to make friends, and exercises on the skills needed for forming relationships. You can ask the teacher about the lesson topics and you can also discuss them at home. Think about different ways in which you make friends and maintain friendships.
- You can encourage the child to invite friends home, perhaps just one at a time at first, so that s/he can practice social skills in a familiar and safe surrounding.
- You can encourage your child to take part in hobbies where s/he can meet and make new friends.
- It's worthwhile to contact the school's KiVa team. The team members have been trained to address bullying cases. Tell the team members what has happened, and what you have done at home to support the victim.

NO

Coping with bullying situations can be practiced together

Coping with bullying situations can be practiced at home. Ending bullying is not the responsibility of the student/victim; the responsibility always lies with the adults, and, when at school, the teachers. The words *NO* or *STOP IT* can function as the first step in the situation. They might end the offensive behavior being directed at you in that particular situation.

It's important to ask your child:

Are you able to tell the bully convincingly **NO** or **STOP THAT?**

In many bullying situations you can tell the bully **NO**. You can practice it together with your parent/s at first. At home, find a quiet place where you have privacy and will not be disturbed. Read out loud the thoughts from the **I KNOW** section listed below. Discuss them. Then move on to the **I CAN** section where you practice using the word **NO**. Finish with the **I DO** section where you use the word in a real situation. Together you can think about situations where you can and should use the word **NO**.

I know. **NO** is a short but very powerful word. It conveys to others that you do not like what is being done to you. If you feel threatened or someone is treating you badly you can use this word. If it feels difficult to say **NO**, you can practice saying it.

I can. With practice you can become very good at saying **NO**. You can start practicing for example by standing in front of the mirror. Look at your reflection in the mirror. Stand up straight with your head held high. Take a deep breath and say clearly and firmly **NO**. Say it out loud again with a louder and deeper tone. **NO**.

You can also practice it with a member of your family. Look him/her in the eye and say in a firm and clear voice **NO**. You do not have to be angry or upset, just be firm and determined when you say **NO**.

I do. After practicing, start using the word in real-life situations. Think back to how well you said **NO** when you were practicing and say it now in real-life situations when you are being bullied or being treated disrespectfully. Leaving the situation amplifies the effect of the word. There is no point in staying and arguing. If these situations continue to happen make sure to tell your teacher or another adult about it.

How could bystanders help the victim?

In addition to the bully and his/her assistants there are often bystanders present in bullying situations. They are not responsible for bullying, but they can do a lot to reduce and prevent it.

- Encourage your child to take a stand in putting an end to bullying. Bullying can be stopped more quickly if an outsider intervenes.
- Ask your child what watching bullying from the outside feels like? What feelings does it evoke? Discuss these feelings.
- Suggest that your child talk about bullying with his/her friends. What could they do together to end bullying? A group of people who view bullying negatively can have a strong influence on stopping bullying. Bullying will stop when there is no audience to watch it!
- You can also discuss different types of bullying. Bullying is not only hitting and name-calling; it can also be indirect or cyberbullying. None of these are acceptable!
- Encourage your child to tell an adult about bullying. It is not gossiping or telling on someone. Telling adults is an acceptable and effective way to help the victim in need. Silence will only prolong the victim's suffering.
- Tell your child about the KiVa team (the school's antibullying team) which is responsible for addressing bullying cases. Contact team members to tell them about bullying.



If your child is bullied by cell phone or online

What to do about insulting messages?

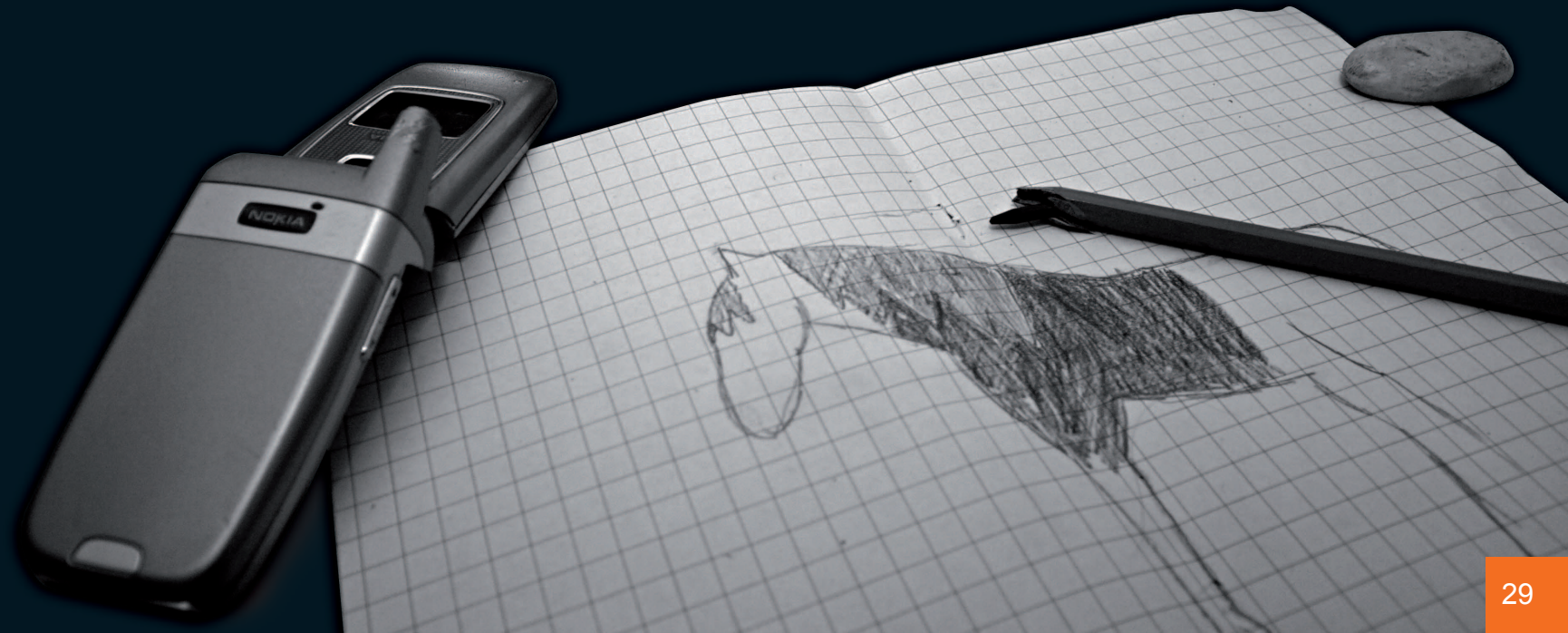
- Advise your child that s/he does not have to open messages sent by bullies or complete strangers.
- Encourage your child to answer bullying messages once, usually there is no point in responding more than that, and keep your response brief and to the point, making sure to indicate that you want the bullying to stop.
- If it turns out that the sender of the message goes to the same school as your child, contact the school staff.
- If the bullying continues, changing the child's email address or phone number is worth considering.
- If necessary, the bullying messages can also be saved or documented in case further measures to address the bullying become necessary.
- You can also set your email-program to filter messages from certain senders into a specific folder so that your child will not have to read them.



If insulting texts or photographs are posted about your child

- Contact the website administrator. The administrator can remove the text and possibly find out who the perpetrator is.
- Save all the webpages where bullying is occurring in case further action need to be taken.
- If the bullying is particularly severe, contact law enforcement officials.

The most important duty of a parent is to love his/her child unconditionally and to provide encouragement to him/her. The main message to convey to the victim is: ¹⁾ the bullying is not your fault; ²⁾ don't worry, you are allowed to feel bad, we'll get through this together; and ³⁾ you'll get help and support and the bullying will be stopped. In many bullying situations the first step can be a forceful use of the word NO. If need be, using it can be practiced together with parents before using it in actual bullying situations. If your child has been bullied online or by cell phone, tell him/her how to deal with insulting and inappropriate messages. It is worth contacting the KiVa team to discuss what has happened. The team members can talk about what has been or will be done at school in order to address the case and to put an end to the bullying. If the bullying is particularly severe, contacting law enforcement officials is worth considering.





MY CHILD IS TAKING PART IN BULLYING – WHAT SHOULD I DO?

What should I do if I am informed that my child is accused or suspected of bullying others? This kind of information can come as a surprise, and your first reaction may be anger, doubt and guilt. Such feelings are justified and understandable, but it is better to try to stop and think before addressing the matter.

We do not want to consider that our children could take part in bullying. We usually see bullies as students who are aggressive and disturbed in some way. The truth is that most students who bully are regular children and adolescents who come from everyday homes and families.

What to do?

- Find out exactly what happened. Is it really bullying or a disagreement or an argument between students? Disagreements or arguments might need to be addressed too. When you ask your child about the situation do not criticize, accuse, or judge.
- Find out how and why your child is taking part in bullying. What is his/her role in bullying situations? Is s/he the main perpetrator, an assistant, or a reinforcer? Remember that children may often deny that they have taken part in what has happened or minimize their part in it.
- Do not accept explanations such as: “We were only playing, we weren’t serious.” Make it clear that you do not approve of bullying and help your child understand the difference between playing and bullying.
- Talk about how scary and unfair bullying is for the victim. Stress that nothing justifies bullying.
- Explain that bullying must stop because the situation can get even worse for both the victim and the ones taking part in the bullying.
- Condemn bullying, not your child. Make it clear that you do not support bullying, but you do support your child. Assure him/her that you are ready to help and support him/her in putting a stop to the bullying.
- Think about whether your child needs more adult supervision and guidance. Set clear rules for hobbies and staying out. Be informed about where your child is and who s/he is with at all times.
- Teach your child to respect others and to accept people’s differences.

Difference is richness and it is not a threat or a reason for ridicule.

- Tell your child that you know s/he can change his/her behavior. Say that you are sure that s/he does not really want to injure others or hurt their feelings. Support his/her confidence that s/he really is able to change his/her behavior.
- Change is possible, for example by developing social skills, being with friends who view bullying negatively and acquiring new hobbies. Together think about actions your child can take which can help in getting along with friends and receiving positive attention in a group.
- Give positive feedback for not taking part in bullying and for taking small steps towards putting a stop to bullying.
- Make it clear that if the bullying continues it will result in negative consequences both at school and at home.
- If you have to resort to punishments, use fair methods. Punishments should not involve physical methods. Such punishments may actually increase bullying behavior. Again, the essential thing is to tell your child that you accept and love him/her, but that you do not accept the fact that s/he bullies others.
- The members of the KiVa team have been trained to address bullying cases. Trust them! If you would like to, talk with them about what is being done at school to end bullying.





There are many ways for you to support your child who has been bullying others.

Be calm and determined when you discuss the topic with him/her. Make it clear that you do not condone bullying. Try to evoke empathy for the victim. Talk about how scared the victim must be and how bad s/he must feel. Stress that nothing justifies bullying. Tell your child that you will support him/her to put an end to bullying. Together think of different methods your child can use to control anger and to deal with disappointment. You can also consider what your child could do to support the victim. For example, s/he could say “hi” and encourage him/her with a smile. At the very least, s/he can agree to not take part in bullying in any way.



Chapter	Summary
KiVa School is an antibullying school (p. 3)	Parents' guide is part of the KiVa program; an antibullying tool developed for the parents or guardians. The purpose of this guide is to offer information about bullying at school; what is known about it and what can be done about it at home and at school.
What is bullying? (pp. 4—7)	Bullying is when the same student is repeatedly and deliberately harmed. The perpetrator is/are someone/s against whom the victim finds it difficult to defend him/herself. Bullying is not innocent playing, it does not build character, and you do not survive it by getting even. Bullying is always a serious violation of a person's rights and degrades his/her human worth and dignity.
Forms of bullying (pp. 8—9)	Bullying can be visible or hidden by nature. Visible forms are physical and mental abuse. Indirect bullying is less noticeable. It damages the victim's social relationships. The manifestation of such forms of bullying mentioned above is restricted to school whereas cyberbullying reaches its victim whenever and wherever.
Bullying concerns the whole class (pp. 10—12)	A child bullying others seldom acts alone. S/he usually has assistants and reinforcers. The victim may have defenders, but most of the students in bullying situations withdraw to the side and become silent approvers. Bullying can gradually become part of the day-to-day life at school.
What causes bullying? (pp. 13—15)	Children who bully others often have the need to be seen and heard, to receive admiration and to gain power in the group. Often the target chosen for bullying is a child or an adolescent who is insecure, timid, who already has a low social status in the group or who has few or no friends. You do not end up as a bully or a victim solely on the basis of individual traits; these roles are also influenced by other students' expectations and class norms.
How do I recognize a bullied student? (pp. 16—19)	Individual signs alone do not mean your child is being bullied. Each parent knows their child and the ways s/he expresses distress. An important thing to look for is a change in the student's behavior compared to what it used to be; for example, if a child who previously liked going to school no longer wants to go.
Antibullying measures at school and at home (pp. 20—21)	At the school level the goal of the KiVa program is to offer basic information about bullying and addressing it. At the classroom level the purpose is to educate the students so that instead of silently approving of bullying or encouraging bullies they start supporting the victim, and therefore convey that they do not condone bullying. At the student level the key actions are discussions to address the situation. The discussions always include a follow-up to ensure that the bullying has indeed stopped.
Measures at home (pp. 22—29)	The purpose of addressing the situation is to support the victim, to increase his/her self-confidence, and to assure him/her that the bullying will be stopped. It's worth contacting the KiVa team at your school to discuss what has happened. In their training team members have been familiarized with measures to address individual bullying cases.
My child is taking part in bullying – what should I do? (pp. 30—32)	Be calm and determined when you discuss bullying with your child. Make it clear that you do not condone bullying. Tell your child that you want to support him/her in putting a stop to bullying. Together think about different methods your child can use to control anger and deal with disappointment. You may also think about what your child can do to support the victim; s/he could for example say hi and encourage him/her with a smile. At the very least, s/he can agree not to take part in bullying in any way



KiVa™ program

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