

17 Signs of Bullying

How to KNOW if Your Child is BEING BULLIED

One day your child comes home and something seems different. Your child may be a Kindergartener, a Sixth's Grader or even a Senior in High School, but they just look or sound different than the last time they came in that door.

You ask them how school was today and they say, "Okay" and walk past you like you was a ghost, not even in the room. You may continue to question your child, "So Johnny, anything interesting happen at school today?"

"Nah, nothing" ...

It's clear your child does not want to talk about something, but you surmise that there must be a good reason so you let the questioning go, for now.

However, in the evening you think about how your child acted when he came home from school and you wonder if there is something wrong at school.

You are aware when Johnny is studying for a test so if he had flunked the test, that would be the first thing out of his mouth when he came through the door. "I blew it! I got a D on my History test!" ...And mom comes to comfort him.

Although I am giving you 17 signs of possible bullying, I am sure there are more signs I will not have covered, but these signs will be enough to determine if your child is having problems with bullying in school.

1 – Your child may refuse to talk about what's wrong

Why wouldn't your child tell you he is being bullied in school?

There are at least four reasons why your child will not talk.

- Fear of retaliation – Your child has been threatened in some way
- Your child believes they are at fault – he/she believes that he/she deserves to be bullied
- Your child doesn't believe adults will listen, understand, do anything, or can't do anything about the bullying
- Your child did talk to you or someone at school about the bullying but...

Unfortunately, it was not understood or even ignored as unimportant or no one listened or took it seriously – “Oh Johnny, that's just part of growing up. You can handle it.” If this happened with your child than you know the trust factor is low and must be built up again.

2 – Your child may be frightened of walking to and from school – Your child may change their usual route

If your child never complained about walking to school the year prior or never deviated from their usual route, something is causing that complaint. It's okay to ask your child why they are afraid. They may not tell you what is really going on during that walk to school but at least they will know that you are concerned.

What can you do?

If you have some friends that live in some of the houses along the route, why not ask them a favor, to watch and see if anything is happening to your child along the path to the school and report back to you. It is human nature for people to want to help if they can.

3 – Your child may not want to go on the school bus or they may beg someone to drive them to school

Again, has your child complained about riding the bus in a prior year? Ask your child if there is a reason they don't like riding the bus anymore. If they tell you that someone is bothering them on the bus than agree to drive them to school until the problem is resolved. Depending on how the school responds that could be one or two days, or the rest of the school year, so, be prepared to sacrifice for the safety of your child and drive them to school.

What can you do?

Call the school administrator that is in charge of school safety and have him set up a camera in your child's bus. If a bully is bullying your child, he will bully someone else's child and it will be caught on camera. Remember this – bullies bully because they can and because they can get away with it. Your child is not the problem, the bully is the problem. Your child has been targeted for the bully's emotionally warped reasons. When the bully is caught and punished (given consequences) then it will be safe to put your child back on the bus. Do not let the school use your child to experiment on (to see if your child is bullied on camera). Do not let your child on the bus until the bully has "repented," apologized to your child for his actions – in writing.

If your school will not help you than send a letter to your School District Superintendents and all members of your school board and tell them you are not pleased with the safety measures they are taking in your school district and that you will actively campaign against any future school bond elections based on their inaction in protecting your child. As a former member of a school board, my bet is that their tune will change very quickly. They will either worry about their liability concerning the safety of children on buses, or they will absolutely dislike you intensely, or both. But, you need to wake them up to their elected responsibilities.

4 – Your child may be unwilling to go to school (or may seem to be, 'school phobic')

Bullying might be one of the reasons your child might be unwilling to go to school. Be aware that your child might have had any number of bad experiences that might have caused a “school phobia” to develop. Keep asking the question, “why” and don’t let your child off the hook with avoidance answers.

Also, be aware that depression may cause a child to want to stay home from school. Psychologists have found that Depression can happen in children as young as 5 years old (Kindergarten age). There have been rare cases of children as young as 5 years old taking their lives so remember that depression is not something to be fooled with. In the future, I will be doing a special report on the signs of depression so stay tuned.

5 – Your child may feel ill in the mornings

The first determination you will need to make as a parent is whether your child is emotionally sick or physically sick. Both are real. Both can be damaging.

Ask your child, again, if something is going on at school that you need to know about. Sometimes, in a weak moment, this is the time a child will talk. Be calm and listen.

6 – Your child may do poorly in their school work

If your child has had no problems in the past and then suddenly begins to do poorly, some specific problems are not being resolved. It is a parent's job to find out what is going on in your child’s life. Of course, bullying could be one problem as there are many other things to look at. Has your child been on medication? Was there a death in the family? This could also be a sign of depression.

If the bullying problem is not solved, in the emotional long run, your child will experience some damaging academic effects such as truancy, decreased class participation, poor

concentration and dropping out of school early. Imagine how stressful it is for a child who is abused by his/her peers every day and on top of that, cannot keep up or perform well in their classes. I personally believe that 90% or more of the kids who drop out are, or have had relationship and bullying problems at school. Kids just simply give up and choose the less stressful road.

7 – Your child may come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed

This is a sure sign that bullying is going on at school.

Tell your child that if they will not tell you what is going on you are going to call their teachers, administrators, friends and all your neighbors to find out if anyone knows, or has seen anything. They may decide to talk rather than have you “investigate” what happened.

8 – Your child may come home seemingly starving (bully is taking or extorting lunch money, or even the sack lunch). Your child continually “loses” pocket or lunch money.

Bullies love to exert power over others. Bullying is always about power and control. Taking away something from their victim is part of exerting power. Bullies won't see it as stealing, but part of the control they want to take on their victim.

What can you do?

An easy way to solve this problem is to take the lunch money into the school office yourself and pay for lunches a month ahead of time. For extra cash, tell the school what is happening and ask them to keep an eye on the bully. It is likely the bully is stealing from other children as well.

Also, a really neat idea that is being implemented in some schools is a “School Bank” and “School Store” where parents and kids can put money in and take it out as needed for products and services (food snacks, office supplies, copy services, etc.). You might

suggest this concept to your school administrator to cut down on bullying behavior that could lead to jail time in the future. *(Of course, I just have to say it...the bully might learn some bank robbing skills too, if the bank is not run properly and securely or if the bully gets a job in the School Bank.)*

9 – Your child may have their possessions go missing, ask for money or start stealing (to pay the bully) ...Shoplifting

If this is happening, have a sit-down, eye-to-eyeball talk with your child until the whole truth comes out. Do not delay or let your parenting responsibilities relax. What you do here can make the difference between a child who grows up with strong moral and social values or one who may go into the juvenile system and possibly prison – all because they are being extorted themselves.

The FBI did a report after Columbine a few years ago. They stated in this report that they believe that 75% of bullies end up in prison before the age of 24. I am going to bold here and make a guess that half of those kids were also victims of bullies. According to a study by Dr. Dan Olweus, a renowned bullying expert, half of the children who are bullied, turn into bullies themselves. Again, it is about power and control and when some victims feel like they have lost their own personal power and control over their own lives, they feel they have to take back what they lost and they begin to bully in turn.

A Warning: Be aware that YOU will probably be the one your child will steal from first. Do not take this lightly. If you do not take strong action and create some stiff consequences, your child will continue stealing or shoplifting until someone who WILL demand strong consequences catches them.

10 – Your child may become withdrawn, start stammering, lack confidence, become distressed and anxious

Some kids will turn their anger (for being bullied) inside and become withdrawn, distressed and anxious about everything in their lives, even the smallest thing. I remember how my son, Jared, would become frustrated when his bigger sister would go into the bathroom before him. Never mind that there are three bathrooms in our

house. He would come to tears because big sister got there first...a small thing, but an after-effect of a larger thing, bullying.

Becoming withdrawn, lack of confidence, becoming distressed and anxious are all possible signs of depression. A visit to a mental health therapist would be a good choice.

11 – Your child may stop eating – or eat too much

If your child is being bullied and has a (real or perceived) weight problem, the bully is targeting your child because of that weight problem or because they know which buttons to press to upset your child. Your child may react in several different ways:

- Eat like there's no tomorrow because food is the only comfort he/she is getting
- Stop eating in public – or pick at food and pretend to eat
- Stop eating in public but overindulge when alone and stressed out
- Stop eating to lose weight, becoming bulimic or anorexic.

All of these are dysfunctional eating behaviors and some, like bulimia and anorexic disorders can cause some long-term health problems.

12 – Your child may cry themselves to sleep

No one cries himself or herself to sleep as a normal part of sleep behaviors. There is something wrong and it needs to be dealt with. If your child will not talk about what is going on in school than make an appointment with a mental health care professional.

13 – Your child may have nightmares

Nightmares are not a normal part of sleep behaviors. Again, there is something wrong and it needs to be dealt with. Ask your child about their dream and surmise if your child is feeling unsafe as a part of his/her nightmare. Common "unsafe" dreams might encompass "chasing," "running away," or even "dying" nightmare/episodes.

After Jared was bullied, he had many problems with his sleep patterns, waking up at all hours of the night and noting on his clock what time it was. It seems he made a daily report to us the exact times he had woken up in the night. Even stranger, Jared took his clock with him when he would sleep at another place or when on vacation. He had a...“clock-fixation disorder.”

What can you do?

Make an appointment with a mental health care professional and get your child some counseling.

14 – Your child may have unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches

Your child might have all kinds of excuses for these unexplained bruises, cut, and scratches, but again, sit down and have a heart-to-heart about what is truly going on. If your child is being assaulted in school, and likely he/she is, this needs to be reported to the police. The police may or may not do anything but what you want is a written record made and a copy of the report. Then send a copy of that report to your discipline officer at school for his records. That puts your administrator on notice that your child is being abused at school. ...At least they should take notice, if not for liability purposes. They had better take notice because once they get a police report into their records they can no longer plead ignorance if the bully or bullies abuse or bully your child physically again.

An assault: Is any sexual or physical attack on an unintended (a bystander for example) or intended victim (planned or unplanned).

15 – Your child may begin to bully other children or siblings

As mentioned in number 9, the FBI did a report after Columbine a few years ago and found that about 75% of bullies end up in prison before the age of 24. A study of a half-million European children by Dr. Dan Olweus, found that half of the children who are bullied turn into bullies themselves.

Remember, bullying is about power and control. When your child begins to feel that they have lost that power and control they begin to feel they have to take back what they lost and they begin to bully in turn. What better place to start than with siblings?

16 – Your child may become aggressive and unreasonable – out of character

See number 15.

As a parent, you have a responsibility to create a safe environment in your home. All members of the family must feel safe. If your child begins to bully or hit/assault other family members, including you (father or mother), have a sit-down, eye-to-eyeball talk with your child about why he/she is acting this way. Do not put it off, delay or let your parenting responsibilities relax. What you do here can make the difference between a child who grows up with strong moral and social values or one who may go into the juvenile system and possibly prison – all because they are being abused at school themselves.

Deal with your child's anger. You may need professional help. I recommend you find a mental health care professional and/or therapist to help you deal with your child's anger. Do not let your child's anger get out of control and become dangerous to your family and in his/her school environment.

Becoming aggressive, unreasonable and out of character are signs of depression, an even bigger reason to get your child the help he/she needs.

17 – Your child may attempt or threaten suicide

If your child attempts suicide and either failed purposely or because his/her attempt was discovered in time, you have big problems that must be solved immediately. The cry for help must not go unanswered.

In our own son's case, we had no warnings and no "attempts." Jared just took his life and we had no chance to save him. If you are 'lucky' enough to discover your child's intentions to die by suicide, thank The Lord that you were (or are) given the chance to change that tragic outcome.

If your child feels that the bullying is serious enough to end his/her life, you must take immediate action.

If you believe your child's attempt was meant to be a cry for help and not a suicide, (and its risky trying to decide) then make an immediate appointment with a therapist, like, that same day! ...My husband was actually looking about his employers mental health options for Jared when Jared called to say goodbye. We were an hour and a day too late.

If your child actually attempted suicide and you know they intended to die than immediately put your child into the care of a mental health hospital with a professional program that deals with suicidal children. Your child may be there for a few days, a couple of weeks or even a few months. Do not miss any visiting times, even if it is for a few minutes. Do not let your child come home until the doctor says that it is time. They WILL beg to come home and say they are better, but until the doctor says they are well, DO NOT let them come home.

Call the school and tell them your child may not be attending school for a long time, or ever again, because of the bullying and that you will have a doctor's note sent to them telling them the details. You may even decide to officially remove your child from school at this time. *(You might want to remind the school about confidentiality laws too, as many school officials may forget this.)*

Think seriously about this. Your child went to school and dodged cars all day long until one day they (your child) decided he/she would just let the car hit and kill them. Why in the world would you as a parent let your child go back to that kind of stress? If you do, and nothing has changed, be prepared for another suicide attempt. A child can only stand the stress of bullying for so long before they crack – A child can only pretend they are okay with the bullying for so long before they give up, again.

Do not send your child back to school because “it will help them become stronger and learn to deal with their problems.” That attitude is so dangerous. Do not take a chance on whether your child can endure more abuse over the possibility of suicide.

Do not be embarrassed about talking with others about what your child is going through. ...Better to be embarrassed than to have one less child.

Some of my readers may not agree with me on this, but I will say it anyway. There is no use in sending a child back to school that has been traumatized by bullying so much that they wanted to kill themselves.

Your choices:

- Send your child to another school
- Send your child to a private school
- Homeschool your child

Maybe later, (the next school year) when your child’s school has appropriately disciplined the bully, initiated a school-wide anti bullying program and your child has healed from his/her bullying experience; then you can send him/her back to school.

Listen to your child when they tell you what is going on in school. Then put your heads and hearts together to come up with the solutions that will make school a safe place to learn.

So, your child **IS being bullied...WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?**

Section II

11 Tips to Solve Bullying

Tip # 1 – You must do what it takes to help your child!

Hindsight is not a pleasant experience for most parents who have had children bullied at school. We have all made mistakes when dealing with our schools over bullying incidents. The good news is that my mistakes can be your lessons, if you will apply them for your circumstances.

Your child deserves the right to a safe and secure school environment. And, you must do what it takes to secure that safe and secure environment for him/her.

After Jared was bullied and then assaulted by one specific bully, he became more depressed. Before Jared took his life, we began a search for an attorney to take legal action against our school district for Jared's physical and psychological damages. However, an attorney who would represent a 12-year-old boy bullied in school was very hard to find. We didn't give up because we felt Jared's rights had been violated - the right to a safe and secure environment as well as other basic human rights - there was no doubt they had been violated. We searched diligently for a special attorney who would represent a young boy who was wronged by a bully and his school.

We were ready to secure an attorney we found in Seattle Washington, when Jared died. But, after Jared died, everything changed. The lawsuit became a "wrongful death" lawsuit instead of a suit for retribution, punishment and damages. We were fortunate enough to find two wonderful attorneys in Spokane, Washington, who would support our cause through a long legal process, over four years, and then bring our case to a close.

In January 2003, eleven days before the planned trial was to begin, we settled our case. In my opinion, the money was almost nothing, \$140,000 (much less after costs associated with Jared's death, deposition costs and attorneys fees), but the trial briefs that our attorney had prepared were worth their weight in gold. Those trial briefs have been the

basis of advice, lessons, relayed warnings, writings, WebPages, and telephone conversations for all the years since the settlement. They have helped numerous parents and students fight the system and right the wrongs in their own school districts. School districts have learned lessons because of these briefs too...the main lesson - good record keeping is the key to the prevention of lawsuits.

So, tip # 1: **You must do what it takes to help your child and don't forget to KEEP GOOD RECORDS ABOUT THE BULLYING** so that there are no denials that the bullying is really happening ...and don't expect your school to do the record keeping for you.

Feel free to visit www.jaredstory.com/the_lawsuit.html for more details about the lawsuit process and trial briefs.

Tip #2 – Does your child need medical treatment?

First and foremost, if your child was injured or assaulted, get your child to a medical facility and have him/her checked out. Get a copy of the doctor's report and notes for your records and take pictures if there are any visible injuries.

It is better to err on the side of your child's safety. Unless you are trained to pick up on medical conditions such as concussion or internal bleeding, you need to make a trip to the doctor or hospital for a checkup. ...I'm sure you have heard about people who have been in car accidents getting out of their car and walking away only to collapse at a later time and die.

A Bully Police WA volunteer, **Monica Bolden**, made an important suggestion:

"While reviewing my daughter's records, I found no documentation in their files of a head injury that my daughter received from a student in the school. I also noticed that the anti bully harassment document and contract was missing from her records.

"I wholeheartedly suggest, that when a parent is advocating for their child, they must take an active role in monitoring their child's medical and academic files on a regular basis."

Who will pay the doctor's bill? Well, in all honesty, you will. It's not fair, I know, but you must do what you must do. Now, here is something I'm going to recommend to you... Send a copy of that bill to your school district office and request that they pay it. They probably won't pay it, unless you scare them, are a VIP in the community, or they really like you (but how rare is that!). The point you need to make with your school is that your child was injured under their watch and you believe they are responsible. You can only hope that their eyes will be open just a little wider after seeing the medical bill(s).

If your child was physically injured, or appears to have emotional injuries, call the police and have a police report filed. Get a copy of this report too. Ask the police to press charges against the child who assaulted your child. They may balk at this plan of action, but if they do, tell the police that your child has a constitutional right to press charges and have a police report filled out and added to their records.

If they refuse to “take the time and effort” to press charges, you might suggest that they send the report to the juvenile authorities to handle.

What you really want is the record of the assault to be on file - who knows if the bully, who beat up your child, may hurt your child again, someone else's child, or become a career criminal. You want to do your part for justice, just in case.

Now, send a copy of that police report, along with your medical bills to your school district. Wait and see what their reply is...if there is one. If these behaviors continue, your school district will begin to smell a lawsuit on the horizon and, at this point, hopefully, they will begin to take some preventative action to ward off a lawsuit.

Tip #3 – Get the ENTIRE story

Get the story from all sources

Conduct your own investigation. Find out from all sources what happened and write it down or record it. We learned from our own experiences that accurate documentation of all events is critical. Ask your child to be totally truthful about the events leading up

to the bullying and the bullying or assault. Be aware that your child might be traumatized and may have a difficult time talking about what happened. Listen to your child with your heart and with your mind. Let your child know they have done the right thing by coming to talk to you and that you will find a way to help solve this problem.

If you find that your child did something to encourage or provoke the bully, record it. This does not mean your child deserved to be bullied, because no child deserves to be bullied, only that he/she may have made himself a (bigger) target in the mind of the bully. This can be useful information to consider for behavioral changes that may help your child avoid such things in the future.

Tip #4 – Document, Document, Document!!!

Based on all the lessons I have learned, there are several steps that parents can take to stop the bullying in their schools and reduce the effects of a child's suffering and victimization at the hands of a bully or bullies.

Document everything!

Keep accurate notes and records. The process of documentation for bullying incidents is a parental responsibility that only ends when your child is no longer in your home. You must keep meticulous records, just as if you are the attorney representing your child. Ask your child to do the same. If you want to make it a fun exercise - grab a long handled spoon and pronounce on your child, "I now dub you a special junior attorney." Empower your child. Who knows, they may even become an attorney some day, or find a profession that utilizes such skills.

Conduct an interview with your child and then write down a synopsis in bullet points. If there were witnesses to the bullying, get their statements and get signatures on those statements in front of an adult if they are a minor. Do not forget to add dates, names, times and all the, "who, what, when, where and why" information you can find. Write down any comments made by administrators or teachers. These written notes may not seem like much at the time, but later, they may be a deciding point for justice in your child's favor. These records may aid in procedural changes that could dramatically reduce bullying in your school, and of your child.

In our case, I got the information from Jared, as well as some witnesses, but I didn't write all of it down. Consequently, I had to remember many of the details later, during the lawsuit interrogations and depositions. However, there was one comment by a Vice-Principal that I did write down, which came in handy later. When I asked the VP if he allows violent children to wander his halls stalking student-prey, particularly the bully who beat Jared up, he replied, "He's not that bad now, you should have seen him before he came to the middle school." That comment told me that this bully had a record of bullying other children, and the school knew it. That was valuable information. I was also able to do a lot more investigating because of that one comment.

Tip #5 – Meet with the School

Think first, about how you will approach the school. If the school has no knowledge that your child is being bullied, then it is fair to give them a chance to deal with the bullying problem according to their guidelines. Give the school a reasonable time-frame, say a couple of days, to deal with the bullying problem, but let the school know you will be conducting your own investigation as well as following up to make sure the problem is being addressed. I really believe that most school administrators and teachers have a desire to have safe and bully-free schools. I hear many complaints of the bad schools because of the bullying prevention work I do. When you run an organization and website based on bullying, most of the news, unfortunately, is bad. So, go in with a positive attitude and give your school a chance to change things for your child. It is much more cost effective for a school to head-off a bullying issue than it is for them to wait until a serious crime has been committed (and perhaps a lawsuit comes their way). Communicate with your school about exactly that. Help them to take the issue, and their responsibility, seriously.

Ask for a meeting with the administrator in charge of school safety and/or school discipline. In most cases that would be the Principal or one of the Vice-Principals. If you need emotional support or you have reason to believe that the meeting may be hostile, take a friend or adult relative with you as a witness. I once met with an administrator, alone, while I was a member of the school board. He made some sexually inappropriate comments that surprised me - I would have loved to have had a witness to that!

Let the administrator know that you will be keeping notes and that he/she will get a copy of the notes when you are able to type them. Why do we do this? The answer is that too often, reports of bullying seem to disappear like a sock in a washing machine. They get lost, never to be found again, unless, of course, the parent and the administrator keep a written record, a paper trail.

After meeting with your administrator, again, type up the meeting minutes and send a copy to him/her for their records. If your meeting with the administrator was hostile or confrontational, make a note of it and send a copy of all your notes to the school superintendent and all members of your school board. Once you get the ball rolling with official documentation, in addition to feeling more compelled to resolve the issue, the school will recognize a legal obligation to act.

Tip #6 – Listen to your Gut Feelings

As a reminder, Jared was assaulted on a Wednesday afternoon, at the same time I was leaving town on a business trip.

The next morning, Jared was kicked out of school for "fighting" and when I came back that evening, I was told what had happened.

On Friday, I took Jared to his Chiropractor and then to his Doctor. Then I went to the school to talk to the Principal. After talking to the principal, I believed Jared would not get justice, or the help he deserved from the school. I felt that the bully would hurt my child or other children again. The school asked me if they could handle this "fight" in-house, but, by continuing to deny that my child was the victim of an assault, I could see that they were not qualified to deal with my child's safety. After talking with the school, I came home and called the Sheriff's office to make out a report and press charges against the bully. A Deputy came to my home and made out the report calling the incident an assault.

On Saturday, I contacted a friend who was an attorney and asked him what I should do. Looking back to those first four days, the only mistake I made was to listen to his advice, as well intentioned as it was. What was his advice? He advised me to give the school time to handle the assault, or "fight/incident" as they called it, because he felt that the

school "really did care" about my son. As the time wore on, in what seemed like slow motion, I found that this wouldn't be true in Jared's case. If only I had known. Waiting for help, or justice for my son chipped away at the legal burden, the school's duty, to protect my child. After all, if I wasn't firm in raising concerns about my child's health and well-being, then Jared must be okay. This was the wrong thing to do. I should have continued to apply verbal and written pressure. (To find out more about the assault go to www.jaredstory.com/assault.html)

Listen to your gut feeling. If you have not been satisfied with the response you have received from School Administrators within a reasonable period, then hire an attorney. If it is a case of a major harassment, such as a physical or sexual assault, call an attorney within a couple of hours. DO NOT let your school become your sheriff, your medical doctor or your attorney! Who has your child's best interests in mind?

Looking back, I wished that Jared's school administrators had said two simple words, "We're sorry", and agreed to get Jared some medical and emotional help. That would have been all that was needed to make a young boy feel important and needed by the adults in his school.

Tip #7 – Help your child to heal

Keep listening and communicating with your child. Ask them questions, daily, about how they are doing in school. Some examples might be, "Did you play with anyone on the playground today?" or "Did you sit with anyone at lunch today". You are checking to see if your child is spending any time with friends. A lonely child is at great risk for depression. Keep the communication lines open with your child. Ask your child often about the bullying and whether the situation has improved.

Consider getting your child in to see a counselor or therapist. Check with the school district to see if they have any qualified counselors who have dealt with bullying and the conditions it may cause (depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorders).

Follow up frequently with the school and continue to hold them accountable. They need to be proactive in intervening and keeping a close eye on the bully or bullies' behavior.

Find out whom else in your area has children being bullied or who have dealt with bullying. Find out if you can get a current and accurate perspective from them, as they might be a resource for you or your child. Perhaps they have succeeded in eliminating the problem.

Find healing extracurricular activities for your child. There are Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and self-defense classes, volunteer and service organizations in the community, church activities, community events, or athletics. Find out what your child's interests and talents are and encourage your child to develop a hobby to support that interest or talent. They are likely to make friends who share their interests. These friends can be a valuable support network to help your child mature naturally, and even thrive, in spite of bullying.

An extremely positive and proactive approach would be to work with your school district to get a quality anti-bullying program into your local schools. This can be a "healing" activity for the entire family. If you raise enough awareness for the subject, then surely your child cannot be quietly bullied any longer. And working to get something positive accomplished in your school may help take away the anger and isolation that victims of bullying harbor inside. Get creative - bullying decreases when students, parents and child activists show their numbers, demanding positive changes inside their schools.

Tip #8 – Stay United as a Family

Remember that you are not alone. There are a good number of families who have experienced or are experiencing the same problems. You may need to make some hard decisions about your child's safety. If the school refuses to take the steps necessary to protect your child then you will need to take the necessary action to keep your child safe. The new plan may include removing your child from the school and enrolling him/her in a private school, in an internet school, a different school in your city, even a different school district, home schooling or arranging for a private tutor.

Put this in perspective - If a child were being abused at home, the Social Services would have the duty to protect that child and remove that child from the home. Why is it any different if his peers or anyone else is abusing your child at school? You, as a parent have the duty and the right to remove your child from that school. You must make safety decisions for your child's sake.

Why not take a self-defense class together as a family? Your child has had his/her personal power and self-esteem taken from them by bullies. A family can empower each other by learning self-defense techniques and learning self-defense is a proven self-esteem builder.

Tip #9 – Who is Accountable?

It is understood that a parent has the primary duty of care for his/her child. I believe that anyone and everyone reading this email would willingly, fervently, and tirelessly protect their child from bullying.

Where our schools are concerned, some states have passed anti bullying laws that protect victims. In addition, parents and children have some basic human rights in the absence of a state anti bullying law or a school district policy.

In the **Supreme Court's 1989 decision, DeShaney v. Winnebago** County Department of Social Services, certain questions about a child's safety are answered. This case concerned a young boy, who suffered permanent injury from a severe beating by his father after the local department of social services failed to remove him from his father's custody. Using this case, we learn that because school districts are government entities, they too must follow the same due process as social service agencies. Under that Due Process Clause:

- Government agencies (including school districts), breach its duty of care if it fails to prevent abuse (bullying). Note: **By law, schools must "act in behalf of the parent."**
- If a Government agency (which includes a school within a school district), has **prior knowledge that there is a risk to the safety of a child** (student, or students), the agency, (school), either creates or increases the risk that a child will be exposed to acts of violence, by not acting on that knowledge.

- Government agencies (including school districts) **may be found civilly liable for violating the due process rights of victims of private violence** (bullying) under the doctrine of state-created danger.

What this case also tells us is that it is NOT the school's first duty to educate. A school's first duty is to protect each student from being harmed just as if they were a parent protecting their own child.

It must be clear to parents, however, that a school can only be held responsible if the school has failed to take reasonable care and reasonable precautions. Just because a student has been bullied doesn't mean a school is automatically responsible for it. **Schools cannot be held legally liable for something they had no knowledge of.** Again, the key to holding the school accountable is record keeping and persistent activity in trying to solve the bullying problem.

Tip #10 – Become Proactive

Become proactive in obtaining laws, rules, Policies and procedures to stop the bullying

Bullying is a severe problem in our country. Unless anti-bullying laws are mandated, schools have, at best, a murky incentive to acknowledge school violence. Families and parents are relying on schools to take the initiative to:

1. Embrace dedicating classroom efforts and disciplinary practices to stamp out bullying, and
2. Accept responsibility for the safety of their children

This has not happened at most schools.

As was the case in our lawsuit, (www.jaredstory.com/the_lawsuit.html), there was confusion amongst the parents, teachers and administrators about what the definition of bullying is or how to deal with it when it occurs.

Recent school shootings and the publicity they have received has surprisingly not motivated schools to get organized either. A law however, usually provides the motivation that schools need to actively, consistently, and effectively deal with this issue.

Many schools may have some form of anti bullying policy that simply isn't being consistently enforced and implemented. Too often, anti bullying curriculum and practices are just suggestions that teachers may use, and are not required material enforced by school administrators. You can change that.

Kids have nowhere to turn, and they know it! They feel it. Right now, many students can only hope that the bullying goes away on its own. Moreover, since the practice of "Zero Tolerance" has penalized kids for physically defending themselves, the victim becomes a victim again. Often kids take the abuse in silence; they see no alternative. This is another reason that an actively managed openly enforced anti bullying program should be installed on school campuses.

For a child who is being bullied, time is of the essence. Inactivity can be very costly. How long can bullied children hold out before adults do something to protect them? Every day a child is bullied is an eternity to them. We worry about terrorists coming into our country and doing us harm, but a victim of bullying walks into their school each day knowing their terrorist could strike any moment and destroy their wounded spirit again, and again.

Tip #11 – Work with your school board

Our federal elected officials are responsible for the safety of all U.S. citizens and our state elected officials are responsible for the safety of the citizens in their state. Likewise, elected school board members are responsible for the safety of their school district citizens, their students and faculty. I challenge all of those who are reading this chapter to go to your school district offices and ask what the written policy is on bullying. If there is no policy, go to a school board meeting and ask the board members to make a policy on bullying. In a day and age of school shootings, assaults, cyberbullying, sexual assaults, cyberbashing, cyberattacks, and numerous other criminal activities, how is it possible that there would NOT be a school district policy on bullying? Maybe, it's because no one asked the board to get one. Maybe board members did not think it was important enough. Well, it is time to take some action to help curb the epidemic.

As a former school board member/president myself, I know the importance to act on safety and welfare issues. If, during a meeting, I found that a student's safety was in question because of bullying, I would have a moral responsibility, and a legal obligation, to act. Board members are not beyond being personally sued - the legal questions would be, "what did I know, when did I know it, and what action did I take?"

Don't think twice about replacing a board member at the next election cycle if they do not care enough about your child, or any child, to enact an anti-bullying policy. They were elected to be sure all children have a safe environment to learn in. If they are not doing their job, vote them out and put someone on the board that will care.

How long can a child play on the freeway dodging cars before the experience finally becomes too much and the child is "hit" and goes over the edge? Will that child hurt another, or will they hurt themselves to solve their pain?

Bullying is a lifetime sentence that victims never forget and some will, or have, never gotten over it. Think for just a moment, do you remember the name or face of your school bully? I'm in my 60's now, but I can still remember the name of the girl who bullied me when I was 15...Debbie.

Looking forward –

It is time that every school in America has a clear direction to stop the hurt and pain that goes on every day in a place where our children should feel safe and secure.

Contact Information

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A little about myself

I am not an Attorney, a Police Officer, a Therapist or a Doctor. In fact, I am not a “Professional” at all. I am a mom who lost a child to bullycide, a suicide as a result of bullying. As a result, I am now “on a mission to stop school bullying” so MY bad experiences do not become YOUR bad experiences. If you or your child is in need of professionals, please contact them within 24 hours of the bullying incident.

You can check out these websites to learn more about my work –

- www.BullyPolice.org – a non-profit organization, Bully Police USA, was founded in 2003 to help State lawmakers enact common sense anti bullying laws. Currently, all 50 states, as of March 2015, have anti bullying laws. This is largely due to Bully Police USA Volunteers talking to lawmakers and making a difference in their communities.
- www.Bullycide.org – the website supporting my book, *“Bullycide in America: Moms speak out about the bullying/suicide connection”*
- www.JaredStory.com – The memorial website in honor of my son Jared
- www.BrendaHigh.com – My personal website

To you and your child's success,

~Brenda High