1. How to Deal with Bullying and Teasing

At a Glance…
Parents will teach their child how to deal with bullying and teasing in an appropriate matter.

Time Required
60 minutes

Core Concepts
- Bullying is wrong behavior and is a significant problem among our youth.
- Bullying must be taken seriously; too many children are being emotionally or physically injured as a result of bullying.
- Bullying and teasing are tough problems parents must deal with.

Objective
Participants will identify and practice strategies to help their children deal with bullying and teasing.

Materials
- Flip chart and markers or chalkboard and chalk
- Tray with 20 unrelated items (for example, rubber band, pencil, sunglasses, fork, matches, fingernail file, small book, business card, paper clip, bar of soap, etc.).
- Cloth to cover the tray
- Paper and pencil for each participant
- Prize for the winner of the Ice Breaker game (candy bar, hand lotion, notepad, etc.).
- "The Facts About Bullying" handout (D-1-a)
- "Signs of Bullying and Common Mistakes Parents Make About Bullying" handout (D-1-b)
- "If Your Child is the Bully" and "Preventing Bullying" handout (D-1-c)
- "Helping Children Deal with Bullying" handout (D-1-d)
- "Suggestions for Handling Teasing and Put-Downs" handout (D-1-e)
Ice Breaker

"Are You Alert?"

**Items Needed:**
1. Tray with 20 unrelated items (for example, rubber band, pencil, sunglasses, fork, matches, fingernail file, small book, business card, paper clip, bar of soap, etc.).
2. Cloth to cover the tray.
3. Paper and pencil for each participant.
4. Prize for the winner (candy bar, hand lotion, notepad, etc.).

**Activity:**
This is a fun and quick activity to stress the importance of being alert and observant.

1. Before the meeting, prepare a tray of 20 unrelated items, and cover the tray with a cloth.
2. Give each participant paper and a pencil.
3. Tell the participants that they will have 1 minute to look at the objects on the tray, and then the tray will be recovered. Then they will have 2 minutes to write down as many things as they can remember.
4. Explain that there will be a prize for the person who remembers the most items.
5. After the activity is over, talk about the importance of being alert and knowing what is going on around them ... especially as it relates to their children.
Facilitator's Script

At one time or another in our lives, we've probably run into bullies. They often are portrayed in movies, books or on TV.

1. Let's begin by defining what we mean by bullying.

Go around the room, asking each person in turn to describe behavior they consider to be bullying. Write these suggestions on the chalkboard or flip chart.

Here is a definition you might share:

Bullying is when someone keeps doing or saying things to have power over another person. Some of the ways people bully others are by:
- Calling them names
- Saying or writing nasty things about them
- Leaving them out of activities
- Not talking to them
- Threatening them
- Making them uncomfortable or scared
- Taking or damaging their things
- Hitting or kicking them
- Making them do things they do not want to do

Have any of these things happened to you? Or have you done any of these things to someone else?

Guide the participants in a discussion. Don't go into detail yet about why people might bully others.

Bullying is wrong behavior. It is not limited to children. In fact, parents sometimes may have bullied their own children.
So, what makes a bullying incident? Certain conditions must exist for a bullying incident to occur. Lots of kids joke around with each other, call each other names, or are involved in some fairly physical horseplay. And yet these incidents are not deemed as bullying when they occur between certain children. The difference lies in the relationship of the bully and victim, and in the intent of the interaction.

Bullying usually, although not always, occurs between individuals who are not friends. In a bullying situation, there is a power difference between the bully and the victim. For instance, the bully may be bigger, tougher, physically stronger, be able to intimidate others, or have the power to exclude others from their social group. The intention of bullying is to put the victim in distress in some way. "Bullies seek power."

Let's take a look at this handout, which discusses the facts about bullying and lists some of the warning signs.

Give participants the handout "The Facts About Bullying" (D-1-a). Discuss the information.

2. Why do some people bully? There are a lot of reasons why some people bully such as:

- They may see it as a way of being popular or making themselves look tough and in charge.
- Some bullies do it to get attention or things, or to make other people afraid of them.
- Other might be jealous of the person they are bullying.
- They may be being bullied themselves.
- Some bullies may not even understand how wrong their behavior is and how it makes the person being bullied feel.

3. So, let's look at why some young people are bullied. Some young people are bullied for no particular reason, but sometimes it's because they are different in some way -- perhaps it's the color of their skin, the way they talk, their physical size, or their name. Sometimes young people are bullied because they look like they won't stand up for themselves.
4. Do you think bullying is harmful?

Give participants a few moments to comment.

Some people think bullying is just part of growing up and a way for young people to learn to stick up for themselves. But bullying can make children and teens feel lonely, unhappy, and frightened. It makes them feel unsafe and think there must be something wrong with them. They lose confidence and may not want to go to school anymore. It may make them sick.

5. If you knew that someone was bullying or teasing your child, what do you do? What would you do if your child was the bully?

Write their responses on a flip chart or chalkboard.
If you have only one or two participants, have them write their responses on a piece of paper and then ask them to read their response.

There are certain warning signs of bullying. And sometimes parents give their children incorrect advice about how to handle bullying and teasing. Refer back to your list of responses as we look at the next two handouts. Would or have you made some mistakes in dealing with bullying and teasing?

Give participants the handout "Signs of Bullying/Common Mistakes Parents Make About Bullying" (D-1-b) and "If Your Child is the Bully/Preventing Bullying" (D-1-c). Discuss the information.

6. Bullying and teasing are tough problems that parents must deal with.

Sometimes we just don’t know the right thing to advise our children to do. And sometimes we might advise them to do things that actually could worsen the situation.
Let's take a look at this handout, titled "Helping Children Deal with Bullying."

Give participants the handout "Helping Children Deal with Bullying, (D-1-d). Discuss the information on the handout.

● The first step is to "Listen and ask questions."

Read information from the handout.

When talking to your child about bullying, here are some things you need to say:

1. Dealing with bullies can be hard. But remember, you are not the problem; the bully is.
2. You have the right to feel safe and secure
3. If you are different in some way, be proud of it! Remember that "God" or your "Higher Power" -- made you, and He does not make "junk."
4. Spend time with your friends. Bullies hardly ever pick on people if they are with others in a group.
5. Try to ignore the bully, tell them to stop, and walk away whenever the bullying starts.
6. Even if you think you've solved the problem on your own, tell an adult anyway, in case it happens again.

● The second step is to "Teach your child ways to deal with a bully."

Read information from the handout.

● Practice the "ways to deal with a bully" with your child.

Read information from the handout.
Here is another handout with helpful hints. It is called "Suggestions for Handling Teasing and Put-Downs." This handout has some of the things we have already gone over, plus it also has other ideas that can also be effective in dealing with bullying or teasing.

Give participants copies of "Suggestions for Handling Teasing and Put-Downs," (D-1-e). Review the contents.

By teaching kids effective ways to respond to verbal abuse, we can reduce their chances of being victims as well as help them learn how to cope more successfully with future adversities.

Of course, no child should ever have to deal with ongoing teasing, meanness and harassment. It s up to adults and kids alike to take an active stand against bullying, and stress that cruelty is always unacceptable.

**Final Thoughts**

In closing, I'd like each of you to state one thing you have learned today and one thing you plan to do as a result of this session.

Ask each participant to share in turn.
Notes...
The Facts About Bullying

Bullying among our youth is a significant problem -- and it is steadily increasing. Many experts fear bullying has become so widespread and common that adults are blinded to how harmful it really is. Here are the facts:

● About 160,000 children miss school every day because they are afraid they might be attacked or intimidated by other students. (Source: National Education Association)

● A survey conducted by the American Association of University Women reported that 85% of girls and 76% of boys have been sexually harassed in some form and only 18% of those incidents were caused by an adults. Young bullies carry a 1-in-4 chance of having a criminal record by age 30. (Source: Study by Leonard Eron and Rowell Huesman)

● American schools have about 2.1 million bullies and 2.7 million of their victims. (Source: National School Safety Center)

● 1 out of 7 students is either a bully or a victim of a bully.

● 56% of students have personally seen some type of bullying at school.

● 15% of all school absenteeism is directly related to fears of being bullied at school.

● 71% of students report that bullying is a problem at their school.

● 1 out of 20 students has seen a student with a gun at school.

● Mean behavior among kids is a universal problem. In a poll of 232 kids in kindergarten through 8th grade at a Connecticut elementary school, every child claimed to have been the victim of at least one schoolmate’s or sibling’s meanness in the previous month.
Signs of Bullying

- Torn clothing
- Physical injury such as bruising
- Loss of money
- Truancy
- Unwilling to attend school
- Bed wetting
- Withdrawn behavior
- Over- or under-eating
- Moody outbursts
- Damaged property
- Refusing to participate in extra-curricular activities

Common Mistakes Parents Make About Bullying

1. Not taking children's bullying complaints seriously ... your child could be hurt. If there's ever the possibility of injury, do step in.

2. Telling the child: "Just tell him/her to stop." Bullies rarely just go away; kids need to learn ways to deal with them to stop their abuse.

3. Advising kids to hit back. Aggression among kids can escalate quickly over very minor issues, and too many kids at every grade level are carrying weapons.

Bullying MUST be taken seriously. Too many children are being emotionally or physically injured due to meanness. The best way to help children not become victims of bullies is by teaching them what to do the first time they are bullied.

Sources: Education Week, August/September 1997; ERIC Digest, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998; Bureau of Justice Statistics; Time, May 18, 1998.
Helping Children Deal with Bullying

Bullying and teasing is a tough problem parents must deal with. Here are some things parents can do to help their children if they are being bullied or teased.

1. **Listen and ask questions.**
   The first step is often the hardest for parents: Listen to your child’s whole story without interrupting. Your goal is to try to figure out what happened, who was involved, where and when the bullying took place, and why your child was the target. If your child is in school, make an appointment to talk with his or her teacher about the situation. Ask for the teacher’s suggestion on how to handle the problem.

2. **Teach your child ways to deal with a bully.**
   What may work with one child may not with another, so it is best to discuss many options. Choose the one or two your child feels most comfortable with. Here are some successful ways to help kids defend themselves:

   - **Be assertive.** Teach your child to face the bully by standing tall and using a strong voice. Your child should name the bullying and tell the bully to stop: "That’s teasing. Stop it" or "Stop making fun of me. It’s mean."

   - **Have group support.** Tell your child to spend time with friends. Bullies hardly ever pick on people if they are with others in a group.

   - **Response.** Respond to an insult with a nondefensive question: "Why would you say that?" or "Why would you want to tell me I am dumb (or fat) and hurt my feelings?"

   - **Use "I want" messages.** Communications experts suggest that you teach your child to talk to the bully beginning with "I want" and saying firmly what he she wants changed: "I want you to leave me alone" or "I want you to stop teasing me."

   - **Ignore it.** Bullies love it when their teasing upsets their victims. Help your child find a way to not let the bully get to him or her. A group of fifth-graders suggested the following ways to ignore teasers: Pretend they’re invisible. Walk away without looking at them. Quickly look at something else and laugh. Or look completely uninterested.

   - **Have a comeback for the teasing.** Answer every tease with a reply, but do not tease back. Suppose the teaser says, “You’re stupid.” The child says a rehearsed comeback such as "Really?" or "So?" or "You don’t say" or "And your point is?" or "Thanks for telling me.” The teasing will often stop because the child lets the bully know the teasing will not get to him or her (even if it does).

3. **Practice ways to deal with bullies with your child.** Once you decide on a way to deal with the bully, practice with your child so he or she is comfortable trying it. The trick is for your child to seem confident with the bully ... and that takes practice. Explain to your child that although he or she has the right to feel angry, it is not okay to let anger get out of control. Besides, anger just makes the bully want to keep bullying.

These are just few suggestions on how to help your child deal with bullying and teasing, but there are certainly other approaches that can also be effective.
Suggestions for Handling Teasing and Put-Downs

1. If the child knows ahead of time that teasing might occur, he or she could use problem-solving skills to come up with a solution. Role-playing at home or at school can be an effective way of giving a child an opportunity to practice new behaviors.

2. If a behavior is offensive, the child could say, "Do not do that."

3. Teaching children exactly how to ignore someone is a very important skill. Give them opportunities to practice this skill.

4. Humor can be used effectively. For example, the boy who is called "shrimp" because of his size may smile and say, "I love shrimp."

5. Point out to your child that all people get teased at one time or another. Everyone has to learn to handle some degree of teasing.

6. Advise your child to consider the source. Some children bother everyone. Your child need not take the teasing personally.

7. Your child could disagree with the bullies' put-downs by saying something like "That is your opinion. I happen to think I am OK."

8. Advise your child to use positive self-talk. For example: "No matter what you say to me, I am still a worthwhile person. I am lovable and capable."

9. Children need to understand that put-downs come from people who have a low sense of self-esteem.

10. Remember that the two reactions that generally reinforce bullying are fear and anger. Advise your child to try to think of ways of responding that exclude these reactions.

Source: The National Clearing House on Family Violence, Ottawa, Ontario Canada