

**Prepared for:**

**Burke Road High School  
Isabelle Bach, Principal**



# **Help Your Student Deal With Bullies and Bullying**

**One of a series of Parent Guides from**



**Secondary Version**

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## Why do some students become bullies?

Although the common wisdom is that students who bully suffer from low self-esteem, research indicates just the opposite: Bullies tend to have average or above average self-esteem. The one thing many bullies do seem to have in common is their home environment.



Most students who bully learn the behavior at home. Researchers have found that students who engage in the most bullying behavior have received the most forceful and physical discipline from their parents. These students often receive little attention and affection from their parents and they are frequently lacking in supervision. As a rule, they have fewer positive adult role models.

Temperament also appears to be a factor. Students who bully seem to have a need to feel powerful and in control. They seem to enjoy tormenting other students and often justify their actions by claiming that they were provoked.

## Which students are more likely to be bullied?

Generally, it is the students who are smaller, shyer or less aggressive than their peers who are singled out by bullies. Students with special needs—especially those who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or who are classified as learning disabled—also are more likely to be victimized.

Bullies may target students who cry easily under stress, who seem easy to manipulate and are quick to obey what other children tell them to do. But almost anything, regardless of how minor, can attract the attention of a bully. The victim may be taller, shorter, fatter or thinner. He might wear glasses or dress differently than most of the kids in school. Or, he might be the new kid on the block.

The one common denominator among habitual victims of bullying, however, is low self-esteem. These are the students who don't retaliate—or at least don't try to make the situation better—because they think they somehow deserve to be picked on. These are the kids who may need extra help learning to feel good about themselves.



## Why students don't talk

Parents often are the last to know that their student is being bullied. Most children just don't talk about it, for a number of reasons:

- **They are ashamed.** Bullies tend to make their victims feel unworthy of respect, unpopular and isolated. Boys, especially, are unlikely to tell a parent because our culture tells them that they are supposed to be able to “take it” or “be strong.” Girls often don't talk about it because the kind of bullying they are subjected to is often so subtle that they may not fully understand what is happening to them.
- **They are afraid of retaliation.** Most bullies threaten their victims with even worse treatment if they tell an adult what happened.
- **They don't think anyone can or will help them.** The longer the bullying continues, the more isolated and helpless they feel.



If your student is reluctant to talk about what is happening, ask indirect questions. For example, ask her how she is spending her lunch hour or what it's like riding the bus home from school. Keep the conversation general. For example, “Are there any kids at school who are mean?” “Are there any kids who get picked on?” Once she's begun talking about the subject in general terms it may be easier to get her to talk about herself.

*“Many children in our nation's schools are robbed of their opportunity to learn because they are bullied and victimized daily. Bullying exacts a terrible toll on children, and the scars can last a lifetime.”*

—National Education Association