

# 8 Ways You May be Raising Your Child to Be a Bully



We want our kids to grow up happy and successful, but putting happiness and success before caring is raising a generation of bullies.

Admit it. You've watched and wondered: is my kid a bully?

Not all the time. Not most of the time. But some of the time. The rough-handed grab, pushy attitude, resentful looks. Is it a bad

day, a phase, or something more? Maybe no one has told you to your face you're raising a bully, but sometimes you can't help but wonder if other parents are talking about it behind your back.

*Bullying starts and ends with an imbalance of power. Too much or too little, the results are often the same: bullying behavior is simply a means to gain more power.*  
So how do you make sure you're raising a kind child, and not a bully?

You've heard all the usual talk about what causes bullying – overly permissive parenting, violent video games, abuse. What might surprise you is how even the best-intentioned parents – parents just like you – are unknowingly sabotaging their efforts to raise kind, caring kids.

Here are eight ways you may be unknowingly encouraging bullying.

## 1. Gossiping

Want to raise a mean girl? Act like one. If you wouldn't include your child in a conversation, you shouldn't have it within earshot of them. Kids hear everything. The first time my daughter got hold of my phone to mimic me was truly eye-opening. My little cutie-pie morphed into a gossip girl. Eyes wide, hands waving, hips sashaying, screeching, "Wow! No! Hahaha!" She wasn't even two years old. It was sobering to see myself through her young eyes. Catty comments are no better than outright bullying. It's indirect bullying, and many of us do it all the time. At some point in your life, someone probably decided you weren't "cool", and you didn't get a say in the matter. Didn't feel so good, did it? Remember that feeling. Then do your best to shut off your inner gossip, especially in front of your kids.

## 2. Being too busy to show you care

You love your family. But relationships have their ups and downs, with the direction often being down after children enter the picture. When was the last time you told your partner or family members that you loved them? In front of your kids? Not, "I love you, but..." but just, "I love you." Positive displays of intimacy in the home are the basis for our kids' relationships. You're busy, but a simple hug and kiss for each family member on the way out the door in the morning is a great start towards teaching healthy intimacy. Show them you care, so they can show others they care.

## 3. The "I hate my..."

You hate your job. Those last few pounds you struggle to lose, or dealing with that messy house, or frizzy hair – your attitude reflects how you view the world. And when we act like we can't change the outcome, we act helpless. How you feel about life has a long-lasting impact on your kids. They hear their hero (you) act helpless and that will

make them feel powerless too. If your kids feel powerless, they may act to reclaim that lost power through bullying behaviour. Save the negative talk for after the kids go to bed (or better yet, channel your frustration into a hobby you love). Let your kids be kids.

#### **4. Mini-me syndrome**

Kids today are ever more mature at an ever younger age. Current culture encourages us to treat our kids like mini-adults. But we forget that we are adults (trying to be, anyway), and most of us took decades to be able to even partially manage all this stress. Fully disclosing financial burdens, family illnesses, and work issues all the time just adds additional layers to our kids' stress. And an outlet for stress? Bullying.

#### **5. Over-scheduling your kids' activities**

We are scared our kids will be at a disadvantage if they don't participate in everything. So we rush to register them for ballet, karate, soccer, and so much more. But the only thing they miss out on if they have a slower schedule is anxiety and depression. If your child has a passion, by all means allow them the opportunity to explore it in more depth. But kids need unstructured free time. Play time, creative time, quiet time. The damaging effects of full schedules are well documented. Over-scheduling quickly leads to stressed kids. Stress leads to anxiety, anger, and aggression, which paves the way for bullying behaviour.

#### **6. Inconsistent rule enforcement**

The last thing I want to do after a long day of pickups, drop-offs, work, and errands is deal with rule breakers, time-outs, and temper tantrums. So we choose to enforce as few rules as possible. But we enforce those few rules all the time. Inside those boundaries lies freedom. Lay the ground rules, enforce them, and give your kids permission to be themselves within those boundaries. They'll feel a healthy sense of power and independence, and they won't feel the need to bully in an effort to regain lost power.

#### **7. The triple-play: wincing, waiting, watching**

Bullying happens at every age. Every time you watch someone or something happen that you could help prevent with word or action, you are a peer to bullying. You are allowing it to continue through inaction. I understand the appeal of the squirrel-launching rocket videos on YouTube. Really, I do. But the more you watch, the less you care. Turn it off. The long-term effects of desensitisation are very real. Watch and laugh if you must, but remember your child is learning how to react to life through your actions. Make what you do count.

#### **8. Forcing your kids to share**

Sharing is a learnt skill that takes time, maturity, and encouragement to develop fully. Ripping a toy out of your kid's hand to give it to another kid? Bad idea. Talk about sharing, encourage sharing, but most importantly, teach sharing. Offer to loan your child something he's been wanting to explore. Offer a bite of your dessert. Offer to help with a difficult chore. Forced sharing only results in a feeling of powerlessness. (Taking turns is something different. Don't confuse the two.) Don't make your child search for ways to regain their power. Because who's the most powerful kid in class? The bully. As parents, we want our kids to grow up happy and successful. But putting happiness and success before caring is raising a generation of bullies. A recent Harvard study discovered that our kids are on to us. The majority of 10,000 kids surveyed believed that achievement and success were their parents' main priorities, rather than caring for others. We need to change that. You know your child's true personality. Deep down, you know if they're a bully or testing boundaries. Be the person your kid wants you to be, so your kid can be the person you want them to be.