

NO SUCH THING AS A BULLY

Shred the Label, Save a Child



**Bullyproofing Protection for
Parents and Children**

By Kelly Karius, BSW and Dr. Ron Graham, DrE

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Note to parents:

This is a lifetime book. You can start using it as soon as you get it, but the most important thing you must understand is that there is no ending point for the use of the material. It is lifetime material.

In the best interests of your children, you will need to review this book from time to time. YOU, after all, are the major influence on your children, and when you learn and use these skills, and gain an understanding of the problem of bullying, you can then teach your children.

Guidance happens daily. This material, while introduced lesson by lesson, will show up in everyday situations. YOU are the only one who can teach your child through every day situations. YOU are the one who will see the teachable moments. And if you don't know the material well - and live it - then you're not going to be able to teach it as well. A little effort on your part will go a long way toward bully-proofing your children, and raising adults who will make a difference in the world. Bully-proofing doesn't just mean protecting your children from having bully actions used against them. It also means preventing your children from using bully actions, and raising children who are strong enough to stop bully actions when they see them.

As you discuss these issues with your child, watch your own reactions. If you react with strong emotions to what your

child says, your child may shut down. Be sure to simply accept what your child is saying, then together you can plan strategies for managing any problems that come out. Use the modules to build your relationship, to understand your child’s life. It will be time well spent.

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Introduction

The day you have your baby, you have more emotions than you ever thought you could have. You lovingly wrap, feed and change your precious bundle. As your child grows, you spend time wondering, worrying and childproofing. You protect. You'd give up your life to protect that precious child.

You don't want your child to be hurt by his own actions, any more than you want him to be hurt by someone else.

One day your precious little man, no longer quite so little, seems "off". You can't quite put your finger on it, but he's not quite his usual happy self. You ask what's wrong. "Nothing, I'm okay," he says. You stay a bit concerned.

Time moves on.

Another day, you see a bad bruise on his leg and hip. "We were playing dodgeball," he explains. "Boys", you might say, and ruffle his hair.

Time moves on.

Your son suddenly has a stomach ache that has lasted for two days. The trouble is unclear. You tell him that sometimes when people are upset, they actually get physical pain, and you ask him if anything is bothering him. He starts to cry.

It turns out that relationships have been created in the school that your son doesn't know how to handle. Bigger boys have been picking on him. He's trying to be a sport about it, laugh along or just avoid it, but they scare him. He's been pushed down, called names and had his homework taken from him. Lately he has felt afraid to go to school, but also afraid to tell anyone how he's feeling. Even his parents. He begs you not to go to the school.

Now what?

This familiar scene is played out in households across our nations. It involves boys and girls of all ages. It leaves parents and children scared and confused. School organizations feel helpless. Sometimes the bullying spreads to the internet and a child cannot avoid their tormentors even in their own home.

Each time this happens, another scene plays out in another home. A parent gets a call about a child who is using bully actions against another child - or hears a story about an argument and doesn't know how to handle it. Maybe a parent knows exactly where the bullying behavior is coming from, but doesn't have the resources or knowledge to put a stop to it.

This book is for both sets of parents. Sometimes you are angered by each other. You have different perspectives and you think you have different goals. But you don't. You aren't on different teams. Your children all need the same life skills to move them forward and teach them different and more positive ways of interacting with others.

You must have the tools to examine your own thinking and behavior and transfer those skills to your children. This version of “No Such Thing as a Bully” will teach you how to work with your child to overcome bully actions.

Rationale and Goals

This book will not use the more common terms “bully” and “victim”, replacing the terms instead with bully actions and victim responses. We believe every person has the capacity to use both types of behaviors in certain situations or with certain individuals. We believe that telling a child that he is a victim or a bully increases the chance the behavior will continue. It puts the child into a box. Once we see a child by a label, we may miss everything else that child can be. Talking about bullies and victims also minimizes the role of the bystander. Every child, in any one of those roles, needs the same skill set to move out of it.

We believe it is important for adult role models to check in with their own behavior and be aware of the responses they are role modeling for the children around them. Habits can be changed, and childhood provides an abundance of teaching opportunities to help children make positive choices about how they will communicate, build their self concept and build their relationships with the people around them. We believe you can change an action but you can’t change a person. Children who can overcome bullying are well-positioned to navigate conflict in their adult lives. It is our responsibility to teach them how.

Goals:

- To move parents from seeing their child as a bully or a victim to understanding that these are patterns of behavior that can be changed.
- To provide tools that assist with prevention and intervention in bullying situations.
- To teach parents tools that can change thinking patterns and increase self-confidence and how to transfer that knowledge to their children.
- To help parents understand the dynamics and outcomes of bullying.
- To provide parents with ideas and tools to approach bullying situations.

Kelly's Story

Throughout my life, I have learned that I can make conscious changes to my own behavior. I have seen that the way I act and react affects the responses of those around me in every situation. I believe as a result that, person by person, bullying act by bullying act, bullying can be controlled.

The pendulum swung for me as I learned how to communicate properly and how to make things happen. I

moved from experiencing bullying to being a bully, to fighting bullying.

In my home, “tough” was a value. I was a gentle soul and had trouble acclimating to that. My dad used to tell my mom he had trouble disciplining me because I cried too quickly. I definitely remember the phrase “Stop crying, or I’ll give you something to cry about!” being thrown around. I remember a lot of horseplay between my two brothers, but I was treated differently. Well, except for that one time when I was a baby and they tried to put me in the dryer. The most traumatic physical things that I experienced were being spanked occasionally - mostly a quick backhand on my butt from my mom as I was going by - and being tickled until I almost peed. I wasn’t competitive, either. I had trouble understanding why they only used one puck for hockey when there was a whole pail of pucks in the scorekeeper’s box. Why were they all fighting about one silly puck when there was enough for everyone?

I was always the big kid in elementary school. I recall thinking that I was fat, but when I look back at pictures it’s clear that I wasn’t. Still, I was definitely taller and broader than all the other girls in the class. That’s OK when you’re a boy; not so much when you’re a girl. I remember being weighed in class, and all our weights being written on the chalkboard. I was the first one to get past a hundred pounds in grade 5, making the sting of my hated nickname - Kelly jelly smelly belly - even worse. I remember social isolation from girls who, now, as women, probably feel

terrible about some of their actions. I recall two of my friends and myself all wearing white on the same day in school. We were called clouds, and the others stopped talking to us for a few days. How very random is that? The three of us continue to be friends. But I've also reconnected with some of those other girls. Some who may even read this, and recognize themselves and be sad about their actions. I don't write this to make anyone sad. We were unregulated, bullying wasn't talked about - yet it still existed, with all the same symptoms we see now. The girls and boys who I felt bullied me are now women and men. I continue to know most of them, and I like them. They are not the same people they were, nor am I.

Looking back to Junior High makes me understand that through all of this, my self-concept was completely out-of-whack. I wasn't sure who I was, and the parts of me that I was sure about were negative to me. I was looking for my self concept in the comments of others.

In Junior High I started to buy into the idea of "tough" as a value. Tough made people scared of me. No one called me Kelly jelly smelly belly anymore. A new Kelly emerged: who always wore a jean jacket, smoked in the school bathroom and beat up a boy in the boy's bathroom when he was going to tell.

This Kelly played Juice Newton's Playing with the Queen of Hearts from her locker while O Canada! was on the school speakers, and lipped off to teachers. Junior High Kelly spent a bit of time in the Principal's office. My heart was still good. I wanted to help people. I knew there were

things I was doing that were wrong, but I was the tough class clown and I wasn't willing to sacrifice that for Kelly jelly smelly belly. My new nickname was Orv - there were a few of us in the school that were honored with our opposite parent's name as a nickname. It meant you were accepted to some extent. I apologize to those I hurt in junior high school. You know who you are. And there may be some people that I've hurt without even knowing. I apologize for that too.

In high school, I found an even keel, becoming the girl that most people liked and hardly anyone teased. There was no longer need for the misplaced, ill-fitting, tough persona that I had carried. I learned the freedom of helping others, the social connection of listening and being a good friend. I am honored to have many lifetime friendships with people from all parts of my school years.

For me, there was an innate sense of right and wrong, of empathy for others that kept me from heading too far into the bullying path. Underneath my journey to the path, and my sense of victimization in school was an inaccurate belief that I wasn't good enough. That somehow, you had to be a certain weight, and have a certain look in order to have value. That if you can't achieve those things naturally, then you act in ways that you perceive to give you value.

Training as a Social Worker, and later exposure to families and children who were struggling with bullying issues on an ongoing basis, solidified my desire to not only find that even keel, but to advocate for change. Big change.

The world needs to learn to work with its children, not just before school but through childhood and beyond, to remind them that we are who we are, and that we have value just because we are. Children must be told they are beautiful, inside and out. Differences must be noted, celebrated without becoming a focus. Social media myths must be addressed. Children must understand that they don't have to look like a supermodel or an avatar. We are who we are and we are blessed and valued. They must understand that over and over. We don't create their journey, but we do contribute. As an adult, you must understand these things about yourself as well - then you must transfer them to your children.

