

*How to Deal With Bullies in the Classroom*

*Mr. Samir Al Baghdadi*

In a perfect world, a classroom is a peaceful place where students go to learn and begin to live up to their potential. Although kids do learn in a classroom, for some the setting may be far from peaceful. For the most part, children stay focused on their studies and begin to build lifelong friendships. Some on the other hand, choose to take out their frustrations on others. Bullies come in every shape and size. In some cases, they may not even be a student.

Bullies who choose to act out in the classroom often do not realize the extent of the harm they can cause. Others take out their anger and frustration on students and teachers because they have no other outlet for their aggression. Whatever the reason bullying is wrong and situations concerning them must be addressed in a timely fashion. Once an incidence of bullying is reported, what can be done to prevent it from happening again?

Dealing with a bully can be difficult. In some cases, they refuse to cooperate or allow individuals to help them address their problems with anger and steps must be taken to remove them from the classroom setting. While this is often a last resort, it does occur much to the frustrations of educators and parents alike.

Many teachers and educators believe that every student can be reached. Cases of bullying are often an attempt to get attention. Some teachers feel that bullies who try to force their will on other students do so because they have little control of other areas of their lives. While their bullying acts are not acceptable, they can be dealt with in positive ways that teach both the bully and the victim about conflict resolution. Bullies who are willing to work out their differences and wish to focus their attention on their studies are allowed to re-enter the classroom as long as they refrain from activities intended to harm others.

Much of what is considered bullying involves one student enlisting several other students by using peer pressure. When several students gather together, the peer pressure they can

generate can be rather intense. It is easy to target a victim when there are several people in the group. In this situation, teachers must be extremely diligent in handling the bullies. They no longer can focus on one person, but have to watch the actions of many. For schools who have a "zero tolerance" policy for bullying, the situation can be handled rather quickly by punishing the entire group for the acts of one student. If the students know and understand they will be held responsible for the actions of their friends, many are less likely to participate in the bullying activities.

Activities that are designed to even the playing field between the bullies and their victims also seems to work extremely well. Depending on the types of behavior exhibited by the bully, students attempt to help them learn more about the students they are targeting. In many situations, experiences in the bully's past have caused emotions that were never fully dealt with. Showing each student that both have equal frustrations, caused from different sources often allows both to come to a mutual understanding. In some cases, solid friendships evolve out of what was previously considered a rivalry.

With the increase in intensity associated with many sporting activities, a new type of bully has emerged. In this pretext, the bully is not the student, but the coach or teacher. Coaches have immense amounts of pressure placed on them by not only the faculty of the school, but the parents as well. Coaches take that frustration and use it as a way of motivating their students, many times making comments that are untrue or meant to shame the student into performing better. School boards across the country have noticed this trend and have established several different levels of disciplinary action to deal with teachers and coaches who turn into bullies.

Each instance of bullying must be handled on its own merit. The point is slowly getting across that bullies will not be tolerated either in the schools or on the playing field.