

## Article 5:

Kowalski, Kathiann. "How to Handle a Bully." *Current Health* 2. Feb. 1999. Google 15 Aug. 2004. <<http://bgeagles.tripod.com/webquest/handle.htm>>

### How to Handle a Bully

#### GETTING ALONG

- ¶1 Meanness comes in many forms, and you can stop them all.
- ¶2 'I don't want to talk about it!' Ted snapped. His face was scratched up when he got home from school. It seems another boy bragged he could make a 'ninja' sword by folding paper. Then he demonstrated the weapon - by lashing out at Ted.
- ¶3 Bullying can start at an early age and grow more intense in the teen years.
- ¶4 Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior or, quite simply, unprovoked meanness. It's a form of intimidation, which is behavior designed to threaten, frighten, or coerce someone.
- ¶5 'Bullying doesn't stop when you get out of the third grade,' says Jean O'Neil of the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). Later, it may be called power-tripping, harassing, or disrespecting. Sexual harassment - unwanted and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature-is also a form of bullying.
- ¶6 When teens intimidate each other, they may attack with bats, knives, guns, or other weapons. The psychological stakes are high too. Physical assaults, vicious taunts, and exclusion from groups can - and have - led to depression and even suicide.
- ¶7 Intimidation peaks in junior high. It continues through high school and even into the workplace. Intimidation is not just 'boys being boys.' Studies show that girls intimidate other students at least as much as boys. Boys use more physical force. Girls rely more on teasing, taunting, or excluding others from groups.
- ¶8 Intimidation occurs for different reasons. Hate, prejudice, immaturity, a distorted self-image, or lack of respect can underlie harassing behavior. Some teens pick on others simply to increase their own sense of power.
- ¶9 In any case, bullying is caused by bullies, not their victims. No one deserves to be intimidated. Everyone has a responsibility to stop intimidation.
- ¶10 How you handle intimidation depends on the situation and your personal style. Don't feel you have to suffer in silence. And don't be afraid to get help when necessary.
- ¶11 'I'm a big fan of immediately dealing with the situation,' says Lisa Lybbert at the NCPC. But dealing with the situation doesn't mean aggravating it, says Lybbert. 'Escalating the situation too often leads to violence.'

¶12 'There are alternatives to violence,' says 16-year-old Jovon Hill of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 'Really think for yourself, because there are ways to get out of situations.'

¶13 Here's how some teens would handle these bullying situations. How would you respond?

¶14 Suppose a teen keeps tripping you at school. 'First, I would ask the student to stop,' says Jovon. 'Then if he or she continues, I would take it to one of the proper authorities at school.'

¶15 Frances McNamara of Ventura, California, wouldn't argue with the other person. The 17-year-old says, 'I would probably go to my counselor or my principal about it.'

¶16 'I would refer it to mediation,' says 17-year-old Gekeita Hill of Violet, Louisiana. Gekeita is a peer mediator at St. Bernard High School. She likes how the program provides a forum to talk maturely about feelings and resolve problems.

¶17 Suppose someone badmouths you or spreads rumors. 'The way I handle it is [to] ignore it,' says Frances. Brushing it off, laughing, or briefly telling taunters to get a life are all ways of refusing to take the bait. They keep you from feeling cowed and deprive the **bully** of any power rush.

¶18 Controlled confrontation is another strategy. 'I would go to the student personally,' says Jovon, 'and ask if there is a problem with me or something.' 'If you are saying these things about me, I would like to know why,' agrees Gekeita, 'because I don't have a problem with you, and I don't like to make enemies.'

¶19 Suppose someone demands that you hand over your jacket. If you're threatened with a weapon, hand it over. Then tell someone later. The jacket is not worth your life.

¶20 Otherwise, use good judgment. Frances and Gekeita said they'd probably object verbally and would definitely report the incident to school authorities. 'I wouldn't wear an expensive jacket to school anyway,' adds Gekeita.

¶21 Jovon said he'd offer to contact social services if the other person really needed a jacket. Staying calm helps him in tough situations.

¶22 Suppose a group of kids makes offensive sexual comments about your body. 'I'm just going to let them know that's not on my mind at this moment,' says Jovon, 'and that I would really appreciate it if they would stop.'

¶23 Frances might ignore minor comments. But she'd report it 'if it was really offensive and really hurtful.'

¶24 'I would probably go to the disciplinarian,' says Gekeita. Sexual harassment violates civil rights laws, and schools have an obligation to stop it. She might also pursue peer mediation. 'If they know how you feel about it and how much it's hurting you,' Gekeita says, 'they'd probably stop it.'

¶25 Even if you're not the immediate target of a **bully**, intimidation cheapens the quality of life in your school and community. Don't let harassers have their way.

¶26 'Cut it out.' 'Leave them alone.' A few words from you might make intimidators back down.

¶27 If you're uncomfortable speaking out directly, tell school authorities confidentially about a problem. That's what someone did after Ted was attacked with the paper knife. That got the problem resolved without revenge or reprisals.

¶28 On a broader level, get some students together to develop or revise your school's code of conduct. 'Work with the administration, and set up some standards,' recommends NCPC's O'Neil. One example of an important standard is: 'We treat each other with respect at all times.'

¶29 When students help develop school codes of conduct, everyone knows what's expected. It empowers bullied victims to stand up for themselves. And it tells bullies that intimidation won't be tolerated.