



A Catholic response to bullying

GIVE THOSE YOU **TEACH THE FAITH TOOLS AND LIFE SKILLS THEY NEED** ▶ Henry Fiore Jr.

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DEALING WITH BULLYING RANKS HIGH ON THE PRIORITY LIST FOR ALL WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN.

In these times, it is imperative that we incorporate the skills and faith training into our lessons to help children deal with bullying at all ages. How do we instill in our children the heart of Jesus' laws of love and mercy—to forgive "seventy times seven times" and "turn the other cheek"—while also keeping them out of harm's way?

Start early and be clear

First, we must clearly define bullying of all types: physical, verbal, emotional, and cyber bullying. Children need to know that intimidation in any form is clearly wrong and needs to be addressed. The

bully also needs to be taught that non-physical bullying such as name-calling, spreading rumors, sending threatening emails, or posting nasty comments on the Internet can be as threatening and damaging as physical bullying.

As a discipline tool, I have found that giving children simple gospel passages (such as Luke 6:31: "Do unto others as you would have them do to you") to read and think about can be effective. Also ask the student to think about how a better choice—one that followed Jesus' laws of love—could have been made. This works for students of all ages: verbally for the younger ones, and in written form for the older children.

What about bystanders?

We must also give children the necessary tools to follow Jesus' teachings as a bystander or witness to the bullying. Ignorance and apathy are not options. As Christians we are not to watch passively when witnessing bullying. The perfect biblical example is the story of the Good Samaritan. While the self-righteous chose to ignore the beaten

It is right to challenge bullying

man, the Good Samaritan, the only passerby to do the right thing, was also the least likely. Discuss how the story of the Good Samaritan is the correct model of our faith.

A matter of social justice

We need to explain to students of all ages the importance of social justice in our faith. It is right to challenge bullying and to tell an adult about a bully. Help children understand that by ignoring bullying, we are increasing the chances of recurrence. The bully never learns that it is wrong unless someone steps in.

Tell the children that we don't want to further enrage the bully in the heat of anger, especially if the bullying is physical. Present the skills children need to bring bullying to the attention of parents and educators. Children must feel safe, secure, and comfortable with these "go-to" people. ▽

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*activity

Using a social story format

This activity may be used for an entire class, a small group, or an individual student. The goal is to teach children appropriate responses to bullying situations.

In this activity the children learn:

- What kind of people try to bully others (bullies come in all ages and genders; they tend to make jokes at others' expenses; they may be people with low self-esteem; trying to build themselves up by putting others down; etc.)
- How to respond to bullying (stay calm; do not be impulsive; think about WWJD; if it is safe, tell the bully to stop; report the bullying incident to an adult; be kind to the kid who's being bullied)

Discuss the example of bullying depicted on the handout. Have the children write appropriate responses in the speaking clouds. Then have them share their responses with the group. Next, have the class brainstorm about what the best choice of words would be in the situation based upon the Scripture teachings of the gospels. Follow with an age-appropriate discussion about the Christian responsibility of the bystander. Remind children to report bullying to an adult.

➤ To download the bullying handouts visit rtjcreativecatechist.com and click **Resources**.

