

Tips from the Trenches – Manz Elementary School



Topic: *Bullying or Unkind Behavior?*

5 Ways to Know the Difference

We know that families are often searching for tips/ideas about how to handle things at home. We plan to send out some “tips” written by our very own

Manz staff members to provide families with some helpful information. *This tip is about establishing and recognizing the difference between bullying or unkind behaviors.* **Thank you to Mrs. David, Manz School Counselor, for sharing her tips with all of us!**

Si usted quiere ayuda en interpretar esta carta, por favor póngase en contacto con el asistente de educación bilingüe al 715-852-3962 y deje un mensaje con su nombre y número de teléfono.

Yog koj xav tau kev pab kom koj nkag siab tsab ntawv nov zoo, hais ua lus Hmoob. Thov hu xov tooj rau koj tus menyuam lub tsev kawm ntawv yog 715-852-3962. Hais lus tseg, hais koj lub npe thiab muab koj tus xov tooj tseg. Peb ib tug neeg txhais lus mam li hu qhia rau koj kom koj nkag siab zoo tshaj qhov nov ntxiv.

Hello Manz Families and Friends!

As educators, each of us are committed to the prevention and intervention of bullying in our schools. One of the first steps to prevention/intervention is being able to recognize what bullying is and what it isn't. As the School Counselor at Manz Elementary, I provide students learning experiences in their classroom to help them to recognize bullying behavior and strategies on how to intervene. I am learning that there are more pieces to this puzzle and that is where you come in as you are your child's most essential educator. We came across this article by Sherri Gordon that was written beautifully detailing the difference between bullying and unkind behavior. As always please reach out if you have any concerns or questions.

**Sara David
School Counselor
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Bullying or Unkind Behavior? 5 Ways to Know the Difference

By [Sherri Gordon](#)

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There is little doubt that bullies are not kind to others. They push, shove and call people names. They also might engage in cyberbullying, relational aggression and countless other types of bullying. But what many people do not realize is that not every unkind thing kids do constitutes bullying. Kids, especially young kids, are still learning how to get along with others. They need parents, teachers and other adults to model kindness, conflict resolution, inclusion and responsibility.

As a result, kids will occasionally do or say something that is hurtful. And while it is important to address the behavior, it is inappropriate to label them a bully. Instead, try to distinguish between hurtful or unkind behavior and bullying behavior.

For something to constitute bullying, it must contain three elements. These include an imbalance of power, a repetition of hurtful behaviors and an intention to inflict harm. In other words, kids who bully usually are bigger, older or have more social power than their targets. They also do or say more than one mean thing to the target. An example might include mocking, name-calling and insulting the target consistently. And finally, the goal of the bully is to harm the other person in some way so that they have even more control and power over the victim.

Unfortunately, though, many parents want to label every unkind thing kids do as bullying. When this happens, the message of what bullying truly is gets watered down and the word bullying loses its meaning. And no one wants that to happen. When we talk about bullying, we want people to take it seriously. But if suddenly every mean thing a child does gets labeled bullying, people stop paying attention. Here are some of the most common unkind behaviors that get labeled as bullying when it shouldn't.

Expressing Negative Thoughts and Feelings Is Not Bullying

Children are often open and honest with thoughts and feelings. Young children especially will speak the truth without thinking about the consequences. For example, a preschooler might ask: "Why is your mom so fat?" These types of unkind remarks are not bullying. They usually come from a place of innocence and an adult should give them ideas on how to ask questions or say things in a way that it isn't offensive.

It's also important that children on the receiving end of unkind remarks learn how to communicate their feelings with the offending adult or child. For instance, it is healthy to say: "I felt hurt when you laughed at my new braces," or "I don't like it when you call my mom fat." Giving kids tools to express their hurt empowers them to not only take ownership of their feelings, but to learn how to be assertive when someone is unkind.

Being Left Out Is Not Always Bullying

It is natural for kids to have a select group of close friends. Although children should be friendly and kind toward everyone, it's unrealistic to expect them to be close friends with every child they know.

It's also normal that your child will not get an invitation to every function or event. There will be times when they are left off the guest list for birthday parties, outings and playdates. This is not the same thing as ostracizing behavior, which is bullying. When your children feel left out, remind them that sometimes they too have to choose not to include everyone.

Being excluded is very different from being left out. When kids, particularly mean girls, exclude others, they are doing it with the intention of causing harm. They also may post photos of the event and talk about how much fun they had in front of your child. When this happens, this is exclusion which is bullying.

Experiencing Conflict Is Not Bullying

Kids bicker and fight, and learning to deal with conflict is a normal part of growing up. The key is for children to learn how to solve their problems peacefully and respectfully. A fight or a disagreement with a close friend does not represent bullying – even when kids make unkind remarks. Likewise, a spat or disagreement with a classmate here and there is not bullying.

Good-Natured Teasing Is Not Bullying

Most kids get teased by friends and siblings in a playful, friendly or mutual way. They both laugh and no one's feelings get hurt. Teasing is not bullying as long as both kids find it funny. But when teasing becomes cruel, unkind and repetitive, it crosses the line into bullying.

Joking and teasing become bullying when there is a conscious decision to hurt another person.

Teasing becomes bullying when kids:

- make demeaning comments
- engage in name-calling
- spread unsavory rumors
- make threats

Not Playing Fair Is Not Bullying

Wanting games to be played a certain way is not bullying. This desire typically comes from being assertive, a natural born leader or may even be selfishness. But when a child begins to consistently threaten other kids or physically hurt them when things don't go his way, then no playing fair transforms into bullying. Now, it is no longer about being selfish, it is about having the power and control in the relationship.

If your child has bossy friends, teach them how to respond to the bossy behavior. For example, your child could say: "Let's play your way, the first time. Then, let's try my way." Also, be sure you teach your kids how to develop healthy friendships. And talk to them about the dangers of fake friends. If a playmate never wants to do things anyway but their own, this could be a sign of a controlling friend.

When observing the unkind behaviors your child experiences, be sure you label them correctly. Doing so will help you keep things in perspective, not only for you but for your child as well. What's more, it will help you know how to handle the situation appropriately so that your child can learn and grow from it. And, when your child does experience bullying be sure you take the necessary steps not only to help your child cope with and heal from bullying, but also report it the principal and others so it doesn't happen again.