For a long time, Jacob Dawson never told anyone when kids in his school made fun of him.

Jacob has muscular dystrophy. Because of that, he walks a little slower than other kids and sometimes uses a wheelchair.

“The kids sometimes called me names and told me I was too slow. It made me feel sad,” says Jacob, 8, a Cub Scout with Pack 1, Bonaire, Ga.

Jacob said he did not tell anyone, including his parents, because he was embarrassed. Sometimes he did not want to go to school because he was afraid the kids would pick on him.

Jacob is not alone. Most kids who are bullied don’t tell anyone for the same reason Jacob didn’t. But there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. If you are being bullied, it’s not your fault.

**WHAT IS BULLYING?**

Bullying is when someone tries to hurt someone else through words, pictures or actions. Examples of bullying include making fun of people; saying mean things to them; shoving or hitting them; spreading lies about them; sending them nasty e-mails, pictures or notes; and not letting them play with you and your friends or sit with you at lunch.

Bullying is different from fighting because bullying is one-sided. Someone is mean to another person for no reason at all. Also, bullying usually happens over and over again and makes the victim feel scared, hurt and sad.

**WHY DO BULLIES BULLY?**

There are many reasons bullies act the way they do, says expert Michael Dorn, a former police chief.

Sometimes kids bully each other because
they are afraid of being bullied themselves. They think that if they are mean first, others will be afraid of them and won’t hurt them.

Some do it because they think it will help them get in with the “cool” crowd. Others do it because they think it will make them feel smarter, stronger or better than the person they are bullying.

And some kids bully because they live in a home where the adults are hurtful and the children might think that is how people are supposed to act.

**THE IMPACT OF BULLYING**

Like Jacob, Mr. Dorn knows how it feels to be bullied. When he was in elementary school, kids made fun of him because of how he talked. He was born in New York, but his parents later moved to the South. The kids teased him, and some even hit or pushed him.

“I thought I was worthless, hopeless and useless,” he says. “There were many days I didn’t want to go to school and sometimes I didn’t go.”

As many as one in four students has been bullied, and kids who are bullied a lot feel bad about themselves and are more likely to skip school. Kids who bully are more likely to drop out of school, smoke, drink alcohol, get into fights and commit crimes.

**SO WHAT DO YOU DO?**

Whether you are the victim of a bully or you see someone bullying someone else, the most important thing you can do is tell a trusted adult. It could be your parents, a favorite aunt or uncle, your Cub Scout leader, pastor, teacher or school guidance counselor. Make sure that adult understands the bullying is something that keeps happening and you can’t stop it on your own. Ask for help.

“And if you have told a grown-up before and they have not done anything about it, tell someone else,” says Dr. Marlene Snyder, who helps teachers stop bullying in schools. “Most adults really care about bullying and will do everything they can to help.”

If you are the one being bullied, stay with the group and try not to be alone. It’s harder for a bully to attack you if you are with other people. Being a part of programs like Cub Scouting helps keep you around a lot of friends.

Stay calm. Sometimes bullies are looking for a reaction, and if you don’t give them one, they might leave you alone.

If it feels safe, stand up to the bully, or ask a friend to stand up to the bully with you. Sometimes, simply telling the bully—not loud enough for others to hear—that his behavior isn’t cool or fair is enough for him to get the message and stop. Then walk away.

**ARE YOU A BULLY?**

✓ You tease people relentlessly in a mean way, call them names or make fun of how they look, talk, dress or act.

✓ You have spread a nasty rumor about someone in conversation, in a note, through e-mail or instant messaging or on a Web site.

✓ You have physically pushed someone around just because you felt like it or you wanted to make them look foolish.

✓ You’ve been a part of a group that did any of these things.

So what do you do the next time you’re tempted to bully someone? “Put yourself in their shoes, think about how it will make them feel and what those behaviors will do to your reputation and just don’t do it, as there are always negative consequences,” Snyder says. Also, talk to an adult you trust about why you are acting this way. He or she may be able to help you change your behavior.

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Visit [www.boyslife.org](http://www.boyslife.org) for more info. Watch the cool Webisodes to get ideas for dealing with bullying situations.

Read more about it in “Just Kidding” by Tracy Ludwig (Tricycle Press, $15.95) and “Stop Picking on Me” by Pat Thomas (Barron’s, $6.95).
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