



Providing Support to Scouts Who Are Bullied

Tips for Scouters and Parents

Bullying among youth is aggressive behavior that is persistent, intentional, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Scouts who are bullied need clear messages of support from adults. Although we want youth to be strong and assertive so they can stand up to kids who bully, adults must realize that many children aren't ready to do this. Adults play critical roles in helping Scouts who are bullied and in creating a healthy, safe climate in your unit and community. *Although these tips are directed at Scouting leaders, they also apply to other adults who interact with tweens (e.g., coaches, youth group leaders, ministers, and neighbors).*

How can you help a Scout or other child who is bullied?

Don't do further damage by lending too much support in public. Youth are concerned about what their peer groups see and know.

Spend time with the Scout. Learn about what's been going on. Listen. Get the facts (who, what, when, where, and how) and assess the Scout's feelings about the bullying. Is this the first time the Scout has been hurt by bullying, or is this something that's been going on for a while? Recognize that this discussion may be difficult for the Scout. Say that you are sorry about what happened. Assure the Scout that it's not their fault.

Praise the Scout for having the courage to discuss bullying incidents with you. Explain how helpful they are being by providing this important information, not only for themselves, but also for the rest of the Scouts in the troop.

Ask the Scout what he or she needs to feel safe. Those who are bullied may feel powerless, scared, and helpless. Give the Scout a voice. Follow through and grant their requests, when possible. Emphasize the confidential nature of your discussion and be clear about who will and will not be given this information. Get additional facts about the incident(s) from other adults or Scouts, so that the bullied Scout doesn't feel they could be easily identified as the sole reporter of the abuse. Protect this Scout in conversations with those who bully. Don't reveal the Scout's identity, if possible. Rather, explain that you've learned about the bullying from a number of sources, including other adults.

Communicate with the unit leader about the bullying incident. Other Scouters who have contact with the Scout who was bullied can also lend support and assistance. Ask them to continue their observations to be sure the bullying has stopped. Also encourage them to communicate progress or further incidents to all the leaders.

Don't force a meeting between the Scout who is bullied and the Scout who did the bullying. Such meetings can cause a lot more harm. Forced apologies don't help.

Provide as much information as you can about your "next steps." Information is helpful for the Scout who is bullied to regain a sense of safety and control. Urge the Scout to report any further incidents of bullying that involve the same or different Scouts.

Encourage and support the Scout who is bullied in making friends. One of the most important bullying prevention tools is helping each Scout in the unit to have a good friend to be with and talk to.

Explore how the Scout's parents may also be of support. Many children keep incidents of bullying to themselves and don't tell their parents. Explain that if their parents know, more support may be available. Talk with parents, if appropriate, about your concerns.

Make a report to the Scout executive. Bullying can be traumatic, just as other forms of abuse can be. Parents may want to have a professional assess how much support and assistance their Scout may need. Talk with a counselor about a counseling or mental health referral if the incident(s) are serious. Err on the side of offering more services—not fewer. Bullying is no longer viewed as a rite of passage that all kids just have to endure. It is a form of abuse that can cause psychological, physical, and academic problems for the youth who are bullied.

Make sure you follow up on a regular basis with a Scout who has been bullied. Do not assume the bullying has stopped. Let the Scout know you will be there as a resource and that you plan to "check in" with them in two or three days and beyond.

You can find the contact information for your local council Scout executive at www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection.

