



# What Should You Do if Your Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child is Bullied?

## 10 GUIDEPOSTS TO HELP STOP BULLYING

A child who is deaf or hard of hearing faces unique challenges in keeping pace with his or her classmates. Add bullying to the mix and you have a problem that can be overwhelming for the student, the parent and the school staff. The solutions are as varied as the classmates, schools and communities where the bullying occurs. Here are 10 guideposts to help stop bullying.

### A. PREVENTION

#### 1. Recognize that bullying happens to kids who are deaf or hard of hearing

Many people cannot conceive of the idea that a child with special needs would be the victim of bullying. Unfortunately, children perceived as being different in some way are usually the *first* individuals to be targeted by bullies. This aggression can take the form of:

- Teasing imitation of the use of sign language.
- Mimicking the deaf child's distinctive vocal quality.
- Encouraging classmates not to associate with the "different" kid.

#### 2. Be alert that bullying might be happening to your kid

Since children who are deaf or hard of hearing can occupy a lower social standing among their peers, they might lack a support system — which the bully recognizes. Bullying can go unreported because children with special needs sometimes struggle with self esteem issues. They may fail to report the abuse due to their feelings of intimidation, humiliation, or embarrassment. It's important to speak with your child about bullying. Tell your child in no uncertain terms that bullying should never be tolerated and there is no shame attached to reporting it.

## A. PREVENTION

### 3. Help create a communication friendly environment in your child's school

Since bullies tend to victimize loners without a support network, encourage your child to engage with other kids and adult staff. Establish a rapport with your child's teacher and principal. Educate them to the nature of your child's hearing loss and to your child's strengths and vulnerabilities. For example, one deaf student had gotten the reputation of being rude because she didn't return the greetings of classmates who passed her in the hall. When the group was reminded that they needed to be in the child's line of sight in order for their greetings to be recognized, the misunderstanding ceased.

### 4. Teach your child to be a self advocate

Teach your child that she has a lot to offer both classmates and school. Encourage your child to speak out when something seems wrong. If she is perceived as having a strong character, that is often enough to discourage a bully from targeting her. If necessary, consider social skills training or getting to know a deaf or hard of hearing adult mentor for assistance.

### 5. Beware of cyberbullying

The cyberbully uses the Internet and social media tools to harass his victims. Matthew Kaplowitz, co-author of *How to Talk to Your Kids About Bullying and School Violence* and producer of digital media for students with disabilities, recommends that you oversee your child's computer activities. "Consider installing Internet security filters. They will help you regulate your child's online experience. Teach your child the nuances of communicating online, and that messages, sent privately, can easily be shared with others. Check text messages to make sure that offensive messages aren't being sent to your child. Teach your child *never* to reveal personal information online."



From CN's bullying prevention public service spot, *Stop Bullying: Speak Up - Dude, What Would Happen?*, in which (L-R) C. J. Manigo, Jackson Rogow, and Ali Sepasyar play the respective roles of the bullied, the bully and the bystander.

## **B. INTERVENTION**

### **6. Be supportive**

If you discover that your child is being bullied, don't wait. Speak to her about it immediately. Listen to your child's feelings. Be understanding and supportive. Explain that they are not responsible for being bullied nor is there any shame in being bullied—bullying must never be tolerated. Share a story about how you or someone you know was bullied. You are also likely to have strong feelings in the matter, but try to generate an impression of calmness. This is your child's experience—and it's a very personal experience.

### **7. Gather information**

Find out everything you can about the incident(s). Who was involved? What led up to the altercation? How long has the bullying been going on? Learn about the school's anti-bullying policy. Get all your facts organized so you can approach the situation efficiently and effectively.

### **8. Communicate your concerns calmly with the school**

Positive communication is usually the key to getting results. Approach your child's teacher and the parents of the bully in a calm, objective manner. Let your demeanor show that you are just there to find a prac-

tical solution to an unfortunate problem. The other parties involved might respond defensively if they feel you are angry or judging them. You are all going to have to work together on a solution, so eliminate resistance before it begins by communicating calmly.

### **9. Be persistent**

Bullying is not to be tolerated after it has been discovered and reported. If the bullying continues and your child's teacher doesn't rectify the problem in a prompt fashion, do not hesitate to take the matter to a higher authority. Alert the school's guidance counselor or principal. If this fails to bring satisfaction, notify the district supervisor. Keep a written record of all the communications and conversations you've had with teachers and school staff or school administration.

### **10. Utilize your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

If the bullying of your child is based on his hearing loss and the harassment is interfering with your child's learning, the school is legally obligated to stop the persecution and provide support. If your child has an IEP, set a meeting with the IEP team to collaboratively figure out an anti-bullying action plan.

## Final Word: There is no quick fix to the problem of bullying

It is a serious situation that requires the ongoing involvement of family, school staff, and community members. Once you have come to a resolution, share your experiences with the special needs community. We're all in this together and the more information that is available, the easier it is for everyone.

### ➡ What is Bullying?

**Bullying is when someone repeatedly hurts or threatens another person on purpose.**

**Bullying comes in many forms. It can happen in person, in writing, online, on cell phones, in school, on the bus, at home — anywhere. Wherever it happens, it's NOT acceptable.**

This article was prepared in collaboration with **Hands & Voices**, [www.handsandvoices.org](http://www.handsandvoices.org), the **National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI)**, [www.spedex.com/napvi](http://www.spedex.com/napvi), and **Bridge Multimedia**, [www.bridgemultimedia.com](http://www.bridgemultimedia.com).



### ➡ Related links:

**Stop Bullying: Speak Up:** A website, produced by the Cartoon Network, that educates kids about the problem of bullying and encourages them to spread the word about bullying awareness and prevention.

[www.cartoonnetwork.com/promos/stopbullying/index.html](http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/promos/stopbullying/index.html)

**National Bullying Prevention Center:** A website created by PACER, a parent training and information center for families of children with disabilities, to address bullying through educational, creative, and interactive resources.

[www.pacer.org/bullying/](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/)

**StopBullying.gov:** A website that provides information from various government agencies about how students, parents, educators, and community members can prevent or stop bullying.

[www.StopBullying.gov](http://www.StopBullying.gov)

**Bullying and the Child with Special Needs:**

A website that offers a comprehensive report and online resources regarding bullying and children with disabilities.

<http://www.abilitypath.org/areas-of-development/learning--schools/bullying/>