

## Faith-Community Responses to Bullying Among Children and Youth

[To be used in bulletin inserts/newsletters of faith-based organizations]

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- **An Imbalance of Power:** Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

### Bullying Among Children

Bullying among children increasingly is viewed as a serious problem. Although many people view bullying behavior as a normal part of growing up, researchers are learning that bullying can cause emotional, health, and academic problems for children

who are bullied and can also negatively affect children who are bystanders to bullying. Bullying others can be an early sign of serious antisocial or violent behavior among children and youth.

### How Faith Communities Can Help

As children grow in faith, they often develop an understanding of how best to relate to others. They may learn acceptance, tolerance, mutual respect, and love from those around them. Children's participation in spiritual communities of faith often has a profound influence on how they react when confronted with bullying and other forms of aggression or violence. Several ways in which faith-communities can address bullying include the following:

#### ***Messages from the Spiritual Leader (not all religions offer guidance from a pulpit)***

For children and youth who bully, who are bullied, or who are bystanders to bullying, many meaningful messages can be told. Stories from sacred readings can be used to illustrate the favor granted to those who love others and seek ways of peace. To console and help those children who have been bullied, stories from sacred readings

can be used to show that historically many good and righteous people have been persecuted. Also, many scriptures address the role of bystanders, imploring those who see bullying to take on roles similar to that of the “Good Samaritan.”

### ***Creating a Safe Haven***

Churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship often provide safe havens and a comforting atmosphere for children. Other places connected to places of worship (child care centers or schools) can be made safer for children by including supervisors who are trained to recognize and deal appropriately with bullying behavior.

### ***Helping Families Deal with Bullying***

Faith-communities often provide a place for families of children involved in bullying to discuss how best to address this issue. Resources can be made available and formal or informal discussion groups might be brought together to dialogue how bullying behavior can be prevented and what to do should bullying occur.

### ***Youth Programs***

Those involved with youth programs frequently are in positions to know which children are most likely to be troubled by bullying behavior. Organizers can reinforce messages of appropriate conduct to children and alert parents of children who are at risk for bullying behavior. Most important, leaders of youth programs can create caring and learning environments where children feel safe and know that bullying behavior is not allowed.

### ***Supporting Community Efforts***

Faith-communities also can help by supporting other community efforts aimed at reducing bullying. Many schools, youth groups, non profit organizations, law enforcement agencies, and other youth-serving social institutions, are addressing bullying through different approaches. Where appropriate, faith-communities can join in awareness-raising campaigns, the implementation of bullying prevention programs, and the development of bullying prevention policies.