



Bullying Prevention:

A Guide for Grandparents

By Kim Storey, EdD, Senior Scientist, Education Development Center, Inc., 2013

Bullying prevention expert *Kim Storey, EdD*, tells grandparents what they need to know about bullying to help keep their grandchildren safe.

Grandparents can play an important role in bullying prevention. How can you help your grandchild prevent and stop bullying?

In today's world, bullying is an all-too-common problem that can happen to any child at any time, anywhere. When grandparents learn about bullying and how to prevent it, they can be prepared to offer the help and support their grandchildren may need.

Does your grandchild sometimes confide in you about a bad day at school or trouble with a friend? Grandparents and grandchildren often have a special bond that is unique from other relationships children have with adults. Children who feel embarrassed or ashamed to tell a parent or a teacher about a problem may instead turn to a grandparent for support and advice.



Many children who are bullied are reluctant to tell someone because they believe that nothing can be done about it or that telling someone will make the situation worse. But children who regularly turn to their grandparents for sympathy and support may confide in their grandparents about a bullying situation.

Showing your grandchild love, concern, and reassurance is important. But children involved in a bullying situation also need specific help and guidance.

This guide is designed to help grandparents gain a clear understanding of what bullying is and how to address it, so they can help keep their grandchildren safe.

EYE OPENER

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 Survey, 7 million grandparents live with their grandchildren, and 2.7 million are responsible for the basic needs of one or more grandchildren.¹

EYE OPENER

A recent AARP report noted that more than half the grandparents surveyed reported talking with their grandchildren about bullying.²

Many parents welcome the help and support of grandparents for raising their children and addressing problems. Children can benefit when grandparents, along with parents and teachers, teach them effective ways to prevent and respond to bullying.

What Grandparents Need to Know About Bullying

Grandparents will be best prepared to help their grandchildren if they have a solid understanding of the behaviors that constitute bullying.

Bullying is a serious problem that requires immediate attention and a well thought out response. We know much more about bullying now than when grandparents were children or even parents of young children. Bullying is not just “kids being kids,” and being bullied doesn’t make children stronger. We now know that bullying can have damaging short- and long-term **effects**. And, through research and best practices, we now have effective strategies for preventing and stopping bullying.

It’s important to understand what bullying is and how to recognize it.

Bullying is a form of emotional or physical abuse that has three defining characteristics:

1. **Deliberate:** A child who is bullied feels that he or she is intentionally being targeted
2. **Repeated:** A child who bullies chooses the same child to bully again and again (or a child being bullied perceives it’s repeated)
3. **Power imbalanced:** A child who bullies chooses children to bully that he or she perceives as vulnerable



Bullying is sometimes characterized as the stereotypical child who bullies by using physical force to steal lunch money or to physically harm a vulnerable child. You may not realize that when another child *intentionally* and *repeatedly* uses name-calling or taunting to hurt your grandchild or excludes him or her from a social group, this is also considered bullying.

ACTIVITY: Talk with your grandchild about the definition of bullying and the different forms bullying takes.

It’s important to know who’s involved in bullying. There are three players in a bullying situation: children who bully, children who are bullied, and children who observe the bullying. You may be concerned that your grandchild could be being bullied. However, you should also realize that your grandchild may be bullying others. And even if your grandchild isn’t being bullied or bullying others, he

or she may be a bystander who sees the bullying happen. Over the past two decades, we've learned more about the **important role** that bystanders play in bullying, and it is rarely neutral. Bystanders can actively contribute to the bullying by laughing or joining in, they can passively contribute by watching the bullying happen without intervening, or they can help stop the bullying by supporting the child being bullied and getting help.

It's important to recognize the warning signs. How will you know if your grandchild is involved in bullying? Any of the following can be a sign that a child is being bullied:

- Lost items
- Bruises and scratches
- Changes in friends; loss of friends
- Reluctance to join in activities
- Feelings of sadness or anxiousness
- Problems with eating and sleeping
- Headaches or stomachaches
- A decline in school achievement
- Depression or thoughts of suicide
- Asking for help with relationships

Although anyone can be a target of bullying, some children are more at risk because their peers see them as small, weak, insecure, sensitive, or "different" in some way.

What Grandparents Can Do to Help a Grandchild Respond to Bullying

If a grandchild comes to you with a problem about bullying, here are some things that you can do:

1. Let your grandchild know that you take bullying seriously. Sympathize, show concern, and ask for more information. Reassure your grandchild that the situation is not his or her fault.
2. Determine if the problem is really bullying—has someone *intentionally* and *repeatedly* used words, actions, or relationships to hurt your grandchild, and does the situation involve a *power imbalance*?
3. Ask your grandchild if he or she has told another adult about the situation. If not, you can encourage your grandchild to tell his or her parent(s).
4. If warranted, you or your grandchild's parent(s) can discuss the situation with the child's teacher. Teachers may be able to help solve the problem through working with the school's bullying prevention protocols.
5. Make sure that an adult follows up to confirm that the bullying stops and continues to monitor the situation.
6. Offer effective ways for how your grandchild should respond to bullying (see pp. 4–5 for some specific suggestions), or make sure that a parent or teacher talks with your grandchild about what to do.



The best way to stop bullying is to prevent it before it starts. Many grandparents love to tell stories about when they were young. Hearing a story about your own bullying experiences may move your grandchild to reveal his or her experiences. Take a look at the definition of bullying and determine if you experienced bullying when you were a child. Then use your stories to help your grandchild understand that bullying is never acceptable and that there are ways to stop it.

ACTIVITY: Share a story with your grandchild about a time when you experienced bullying. Then encourage your grandchild to share his or her own bullying story. Use the stories to talk with your grandchild about bullying before it becomes a problem.

What Do Children Need to Learn About Bullying?

ALL CHILDREN need to learn that bullying will not be tolerated and there are ways to stop it.

- Tell your grandchild that it's important to report bullying: Telling is not tattling.
- Explain that bullying does not have to happen. Working together with adults and peers, there are specific things we can do to prevent and stop bullying.

CHILDREN WHO ARE BEING BULLIED need to learn to stand up for themselves and ask for help.

- Encourage your grandchild to respond assertively to a bullying situation by saying "No," "Please go away," "That's not funny," or "That's not okay."
- Suggest that sometimes walking away and ignoring the bullying is the best response.
- Explain that responding submissively by crying or cowering may encourage the bullying to continue.
- Emphasize that aggressive and violent responses won't make the bullying stop and may make things worse.
- Make sure that your grandchild knows that if the bullying doesn't stop, or if your grandchild doesn't feel safe, it's important to ask a friend or adult for help.

ACTIVITY: Use role-playing to help your grandchild practice using body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and words to respond assertively to bullying. Find out more about practicing assertive responses in the *Standing Up* activity. [*Eyes on Bullying Toolkit*, pp. 17–19]

CHILDREN WHO ARE BYSTANDERS to bullying need to know they have the power to stop it.

- Encourage your grandchild to stand up for the person being bullied when he or she feels safe to do so. If your grandchild feels safe, he or she should tell the person who's bullying to stop by using phrases such as "Stop teasing!", "Don't hurt him!", "Leave him alone!", and "It's not funny!"
- Tell your grandchild not to laugh at the child being bullied and not to join in the taunting, harassing, or fighting.

- Explain that your grandchild can help by inviting the child being bullied to leave with him or her. Children who are being bullied may be too afraid to leave on their own but will do so with the help of a friend.
- Encourage your grandchild to get help from other bystanders or a trusted adult.

ACTIVITY: Ask your grandchild if she or he thinks that kids who try to stop the bullying often make things worse, or better. Have your grandchild take the *Eyes on Bullying Bystander Quiz* to learn about the power of bystanders to stop bullying. [*Eyes on Bullying Toolkit*, p. 23]

CHILDREN WHO BULLY need to know that bullying hurts and that bullying is never allowed.

- If your grandchild is bullying others, tell him or her to stop immediately.
- Explain that bullying hurts and that every child deserves to be treated with respect.
- Ask how your grandchild would feel if he or she were the one being bullied.
- Explain to your grandchild that bullying might cause him or her to lose friends.
- Offer to help, or find help, if your grandchild feels angry or upset, has trouble solving social problems, or doesn't know how to stop bullying.

ACTIVITY: Ask your grandchild if she or he thinks some kids deserve to be called names, or if she or he thinks it's fun to boss other kids around. Use the *Bullying Beliefs Questionnaire* to talk to your grandchild about how our thoughts and feelings about bullying can make a difference in how we behave. [*Eyes on Bullying Toolkit*, p. 14]

What Grandparents Need to Know About Cyberbullying

You may be unaware of a new environment where bullying occurs that didn't exist when you were younger: *cyberbullying*.

Some children take advantage of time with their grandparents to use the computer or other digital devices. Although you may feel intimidated by unfamiliar technology, you don't need to keep up with the latest tech gadgets to help keep your grandchild safe. Rather, pay attention to changes in your grandchild's moods when using these technologies. If your grandchild becomes upset after spending time on the computer or cell phone, he or she may be involved in online bullying, known as *cyberbullying*.



What is cyberbullying? Some young people post hurtful comments or send malicious text or images via the Internet, cellphones, or other digital devices. Online harassment becomes cyberbullying when it's intentional, repeated, and an abuse of power—the three defining characteristics of bullying. Cyberbullying has the potential to spread quickly to the entire school community and beyond. It can happen both in and out of school, it's in your face 24/7, and it's difficult to escape. It can spread rumors, damage friendships, and make children feel hurt and alone.

How can you help stop cyberbullying? It's important to supervise your grandchild's use of computers and other digital devices, explain your concerns about cyberbullying, and be prepared to **offer advice**. Ask if your grandchild has ever been a target of or a bystander to online bullying. Also ask if he or she has ever participated in online bullying.

Here are some things to tell your grandchild about cyberbullying:

- Don't say something online that you wouldn't say to someone in person.
- Don't make cyberbullying worse by joining in or by forwarding hurtful messages or postings.
- If you see cyberbullying happen, intervene by showing support for the child being bullied or by telling the person doing the cyberbullying to stop.
- If the cyberbullying continues or escalates, get help from an adult.

If your grandchild is experiencing cyberbullying and you are concerned for his or her safety, make sure to inform the parents, the school, the local police, the social media site, and/or the **service provider**.

Working Together to Prevent Bullying

Children can benefit from learning about bullying prevention from the many caregivers involved in their lives—including their grandparents. Since bullying prevention is most effective when children receive consistent messages about bullying, grandparents should communicate openly and regularly with parents about issues of bullying. Grandparents have the opportunity to use their special relationship to help their grandchildren understand that bullying will not be tolerated and to teach them effective ways to prevent and respond to bullying. With knowledge and preparation, grandparents can help their grandchildren overcome bullying if and when it does occur.



Resources

Eyes on Bullying Toolkit

Storey, K., Slaby, R. G., Adler, M., Minotti, J., & Katz, R. (2008, 2013). Waltham, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

An engaging and clearly written toolkit with strategies for dealing with bullying, ideas for talking about bullying with children, and activities to help children learn and practice bullying prevention skills. The toolkit is especially designed for caregivers, parents, grandparents, and teachers who work with preschool and school-age children and youth.

Available at www.eyesonbullying.org/pdfs/toolkit.pdf

Bullying Prevention: When Your Child Is the Victim, the Bully, or the Bystander

Slaby, R. G., & Bernstein, J. Y. (2012). Waltham, MA: Massachusetts Medical Society.

A brochure of tips on how to address bullying with children who are bullied, children who bully others, and children who are bystanders to bullying.

Available at www.massmed.org/violence

Stopbullying.gov

Provides prevention and response strategies for parents, educators, community leaders, children, and youth about bullying and cyberbullying. Includes fact sheets, tips, videos, blogs, and a resource inventory. Information for adults is presented in English and Spanish. A federal government website managed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Available at: www.stopbullying.gov

15+ Make Time to Listen

Provides printable game cards that encourage parents and caregivers to spend 15 minutes a day listening and talking to their children about bullying, sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Available at: <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/15-Make-Time-To-Listen-Take-Time-To-Talk-About-Bullying/SMA08-4321>

For activities that you can use with your grandchild, get the ***Stop Bullying Now! Activities Guide*** and the ***Stop Bullying Now! DVD Video Toolkit*** by calling 1-888-ASK-HRSA.

For more information about preventing bullying in children's lives, visit *Eyes on Bullying* at www.eyesonbullying.org

Endnotes

- ¹ United States Census Bureau. (2012, July 31). *Facts for Features: Grandparents Day 2012: Sept. 9*. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff17.html
- ² Lampkin, C. L. (2012). *Insights and Spending Habits of Modern Grandparents*. Washington, DC: AARP. Retrieved from http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/general/2012/Insights-and-Spending-Habits-of-Modern-Grandparents-AARP.pdf



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