

Introduction

"He always teased me about my not being able to do something. Even though I knew what he said wasn't true, it killed me inside."

—4th-grade boy

"I didn't mean to hit him that hard. I just wanted him to stop saying stuff about me. He tried to hit me, but I ducked and kicked his shin. I was trying to tell him to stop, but he hit my arm. I didn't want to fight but I had no choice."

—6th-grade girl

"People call me names all the time. They call me fatty and fat boy and apple tree and cherry cheeks. I would like to know how to stop it."

—3rd-grade boy

"I try to ignore conflicts, but if I can't, I just hurt."

—5th-grade girl

"I've been through a lot. These kids don't like the way I look. They call me pimple face and the other day after school they kicked me in the ribs. I am so sick of being picked on."

—4th-grade boy

"Anger and bullying are among the major issues I see as a teacher."

—4th-grade teacher

"Things seem to start small and quickly grow bigger."

—5th-grade teacher

"How do you end the name-calling? This is a BIG problem. I have tried many things, and I have not found a way that really works. I am not seeing success this year."

—3rd-grade teacher

The quotes you just read are from students and teachers who were surveyed or interviewed for this book. Before I wrote the book, my publisher and I conducted a survey of 2,171 kids and 59 teachers in the United States and Canada to find out how bullying, peer cruelty, and conflicts impact their lives. Survey responses confirmed what media reports continue to tell us—that bullying is one of the greatest challenges

our kids face today. Educators consistently reported that they were troubled by the bullying, name-calling, and meanness that take place among their students. Students expressed the same concerns: Seventy-three percent of the kids we surveyed said other kids are somewhat to very mean to each other. Forty-four percent said bullying happens often, every day, or all the time, and over 40 percent said they

see conflicts happening often or every day. Students also expressed, sometimes longingly and often poignantly, that they don't want to be hurt by bullying. Sixty-three percent of the children said that they wanted to learn how to stay out of physical fights. Eighty percent said that they wanted to learn ways to stop the bullying, avoid fighting, get along better with peers, and work out conflicts.

The problem of bullying persists despite the awareness and attention that many schools, teachers, and parents have put toward diminishing it. The purpose of *No Kidding About Bullying* is to help teachers and kids by getting to the root of the problem. While the book's goal is to prevent bullying, its approach to doing so is broad. Some of our most important work as educators is teaching kids how to navigate through an increasingly complex and violent world: helping them interact with all kinds of people and showing them how to work out differences, respect others, and be compassionate human beings who disavow cruelty in all its forms. Navigating the world successfully requires understanding that being respectful will get you a lot further in life than being mean-spirited. It requires remembering that inside every human being is a heart that beats and a mind that feels pain when unkind words are spoken. It requires choosing to be a person of conscience who does the right thing even when no one is looking. These are the concepts and behaviors kids need to absorb in order to eliminate bullying *and* to lead rewarding lives.

In my work as an educator focused on peacemaking, I have seen firsthand the transformation that can occur as kids begin to see the power of their own compassion and recognize the personal well-being that comes with following their own conscience. I have witnessed the empowerment students feel when they learn to stop and think before acting and to use deep breathing, self-calming, respectful listening, and peaceful conflict resolution to help them through challenging situations. By instilling these attitudes and practices in your students, you can establish a peaceful classroom environment while teaching kids skills that will enable them to have positive, peaceful relationships throughout their lives.

Facts About Bullying and Conflict in Children's Lives

Research on the Impact of Bullying

What's actually happening among our children? According to recent studies:

- The intensity of aggression involving children and teens has escalated dramatically.¹
- Children are becoming involved in aggression at ever-younger ages.²
- In the United States, youth violence is the second leading cause of death for young people ages ten and up.³
- Kids who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed and far more likely to be suicidal.⁴
- 50% of students in the United States are bullied.⁵

Not only do bullying and cruelty create an undercurrent of fear and mistrust among kids, they also affect learning and development, and can even impact a child's future mental health. According to the Center for Social and Emotional Education, "When children are bullied in an intermittent but ongoing manner it derails healthy development and a student's capacity to learn. In fact, more and more evidence suggests that this type of harassment leads to significant adolescent and adult psychiatric problems."⁶

Bullying expert Dr. Susan Limber, in proceedings before the American Medical Association, noted, "Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, anxious; have low self-esteem; feel unwell; and think about suicide."⁷

Data regarding school shootings is even more alarming. According to "The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative" conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, even though the majority of attackers in thirty-seven school shootings came from two-parent families, had good grades, were involved in school activities, and had never been in trouble before, they shared the following characteristic:

"Almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident. In several cases, individual attackers had

*experienced bullying and harassment that was long-standing and severe. In some of these cases the experience of being bullied seemed to have a significant impact on the attacker and appeared to have been a factor in his decision to mount an attack at the school. In one case, most of the attacker's schoolmates described the attacker as 'the kid everyone teased.'"*⁸

The negative impact of bullying goes beyond students who are bullied, affecting those who see it take place as well. According to the American Psychological Association, research suggests that "Students who watch as their peers endure the verbal or physical abuses of another student could become as psychologically distressed, if not more so, by the events than the victims themselves. . . . Bullies and bystanders may also be more likely to take drugs and drink alcohol."⁹

Kids who bully also are adversely affected. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Children labeled by their peers as aggressors or bullies at age eight are more likely to end up incarcerated and are less likely to be steadily employed and in stable long-term romantic relationships by the time they reach age thirty. Consequently, bullying prevention programs have a long-term benefit for both bullies and victims."¹⁰

Research on What Impacts Kids Positively

Anyone who teaches knows how "contagious" emotions and behaviors are. If you've ever spent a year with a conflict-ridden class where bullying is prevalent, you probably know the feeling of throwing your hands up in frustration as bickering and meanness infected the entire atmosphere in your room.

But the good news is, positive emotions and behaviors also are contagious. Dr. Nicholas A. Christakis, a researcher at Harvard Medical School, explains, "Emotions have a collective existence—they are not just an individual phenomenon." He goes on to say that how you feel depends "not just on your choices and actions, but also on the choices and actions of people . . . who are one, two, and three degrees removed from you."¹¹

People one, two, and three degrees removed . . . as in a class. And when positive emotions and behaviors are sparked in a class, they spread. Christakis and his research partner, James Fowler, hypothesize that "behaviors spread partly through the subconscious social signals that we pick up from those around us,

which serve as cues to what is considered normal behavior." Another likely cause of social contagions is mirror neurons in our brains, which cause us to mimic what we see in others.¹²

These findings reaffirm the importance of making concerted efforts to build empathy, social skills, and conscience in children. The results can be both immediate and long-lasting.

Harnessing positive contagious emotions can have a powerful effect in the classroom. Search Institute in Minneapolis did a comprehensive review of studies on the impact of a caring educational environment on kids. The research reveals that safe, supportive schools foster the following in students:

- higher grades
- higher engagement, attendance, expectations, and aspirations
- a sense of scholastic competence
- fewer school suspensions
- on-time progression through grades
- less anxiety, depression, and loneliness
- higher self-esteem and self-concept¹³

These findings reaffirm the importance of making concerted efforts to build empathy, social skills, and conscience in children. The results can be immediate and long-lasting:

- 57 percent of the time, bullying stops in less than ten seconds when peers intervene on behalf of the child who is being bullied.¹⁴
- When schools make a comprehensive commitment to changing their climate, and the entire school community is involved in preventing bullying, bullying can be reduced by 50 percent.¹⁵

The New York University Child Study Center offers an important reminder to educators: "Aggressive behavior is often first recognized as bullying behavior. Schools must be vigilant about spotting problems when they arise and direct in addressing them."¹⁶

By assiduously fostering empathy, conscience, and kindness along with teaching kids how to work out conflicts, deal with anger, and be "upstanders" for

those who are bullied, I believe we can start reversing the trend of youth cruelty. At the same time, we can create a more peaceful atmosphere in our schools, ultimately setting the foundation for a healthier future for all of our children. Think of it as creating a contagion of kindness, compassion, and respect that spreads through your entire class and lasts all year—a contagion that dramatically reduces bullying and conflict.

About This Book

At the core of this book are 125 easy-to-use sessions that have been carefully designed to help you create a bully-free atmosphere where kids learn and thrive. These twenty-minute activities are easy to use and require very little preparation. The intent is to make bully prevention, conflict resolution, and social-emotional skill building realistic and realizable within the context of your already busy school day.

How the Book Is Organized

“Background for Conducting the Sessions and Working with Students” (pages 5–15) provides background information to help you use the book and instill its concepts and skills effectively. It includes information on how to help kids mediate conflicts, top keys for preventing bullying and conflict, and techniques for implementing the book’s lessons into the daily routine.

Following that, the book is divided into two main parts:

Part One: Building Bully-Free Skills and Attitudes. The fifteen Core Sessions in Part 1 are the cornerstone of *No Kidding About Bullying*. They

introduce the concepts and skills that are the basis for all the other sessions in the book. See page 7 for more information about the Core Sessions.

Part Two: Getting Along and Staying Bully Free.

Here you will find 110 sessions arranged in seven topic areas:

- Fostering Kindness and Compassion
- Managing Anger
- Preventing Conflict
- Responding to Conflict
- Addressing Name-Calling and Teasing
- Dealing with Bullying
- Accepting Differences

The structure for each session begins with a list of the key character traits and skills the session reinforces, a quick activity summary, and “Students will,” which highlights specific things students will learn. Each session also includes:

Materials. The materials you will need to conduct the session, including reproducible handouts, are listed here. Other materials are easily obtained, such as chart paper or drawing materials.

Preparation. This is included as needed.

The session. Each session begins with an introduction followed by discussion, the main activity, and wrap-up. The activities vary and may include role plays, large- or small-group tasks, writing, drawing and other creative arts, and learning new information.

Follow-Up. Most sessions include a follow-up activity or suggestion to reinforce and, at times, help you monitor how students are doing incorporating the skills and concepts.

Extensions. Many sessions include optional extensions. These are often activities that require more time and allow students to do creative projects, practice skills, or share what they are learning with their families or other students.

Reproducible forms. Most activities include handouts. These are noted in the materials list and can be found at the end of each session; they are also included on the accompanying CD-ROM. Unless otherwise noted, you will need to print or copy a handout for each student prior to the session.

At the back of the book you will find several additional resources:

Use as many or as few sessions as you like. Use them as a full curriculum from start to finish or as a shorter unit.

The activities can be easily integrated with the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Responsive Classroom, Second Step, or another social-emotional learning model. If you’re not using any particular curriculum to build social skills, this book will be an important tool for introducing them.

Pre- and Post-Test. This brief assessment, also on the CD-ROM, lets you measure students' attitudes and use of skills before and after taking part in *No Kidding About Bullying* sessions.

Survey About Conflicts form. A blank form is provided so you can conduct your own survey with students in your class or school; the survey also is included on the CD-ROM.

References and Resources. This is both a bibliography of resources used in developing the book and a selection of recommended books, websites, and other resources you may find helpful.

Index. With the index, you can look up a particular topic (such as calming strategies, gossiping, or physical bullying) or character trait (such as respect, collaboration, or self-control) and find sessions with that focus.

CD-ROM. The CD-ROM includes all of the reproducible forms from the book, additional resources for leading the sessions, and forms for sharing information with parents. The parent forms provide background about the concepts children are learning and suggestions for ways parents can support this at home.

Using the Book in Your Setting

Yours may be one of the many classrooms using the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Responsive Classroom, Second Step, or another social and emotional learning model. The activities in *No Kidding About Bullying* can be easily integrated with programs like these. If you're not using any particular curriculum to build social skills, this book will be an important tool for introducing them.

Depending on your needs, you may use as many or as few sessions as you like. Use them as a full curriculum from start to finish or as a shorter unit. In the latter case, conduct the Core Sessions first and follow up by focusing on a particular section (such as Managing Anger) or by conducting several activities from each section. You can also turn to specific sessions when you have an incident of bullying, unkindness, or conflict you want to address.

Using the sessions first thing in the morning is ideal. If you're already doing morning meetings, you can weave these sessions in after the greeting. If another time of the day works better for you, that's fine, too. The whole idea is to make them work for

you and your setting. Three times a week will give you maximum results. Even doing a session a week will make a big difference. The more you do, the better.

Although designed with a classroom in mind, this book can easily be used in other settings, including youth groups, faith-based programs, before- or after-school settings, counseling groups, scouting, camps, or any other environment where children are served. You will find the book useful if you are a classroom teacher, resource teacher, school counselor, youth group director, community program leader, camp counselor, religious educator, or parent.

Each session can be conducted in twenty minutes. You can spend more time if you wish, and reinforce concepts as time permits by using the follow-ups and extensions. Several sessions in each section address similar topics in different ways, allowing you to reinforce important skills and practices. There are also review sessions, including "10-Minute Time Crunchers."

Background for Conducting the Sessions and Working with Students

Before You Begin

Seven things will enhance the experience you and your students have with the *No Kidding About Bullying* sessions:

Circle. The sessions in this book will be most effective if done in a circle. This helps with listening, focus, and empathy. One of the most basic ways people connect is by simply looking at each other's faces when speaking. So many children spend hours each day behind a computer screen or video game; they're often more connected to a screen than to each other. As a result some kids may have become oblivious to each other's feelings and may find face-to-face interactions awkward. By seating your students in a circle, you can get them used to the practice of looking at the person who is speaking. Coach them to look around the circle when it's their turn to speak, and to wait until everyone is looking back at them.

Cueing kids to look at each other and tune in to what's being said can drastically improve communication skills and develop a greater sense of

connectedness. The good listening and respectful attitudes fostered in the circle can also spill over into the rest of the day and make it easier to teach.

Globe. For many sessions, I strongly recommend having a globe handy. If you can, pick up the soft kind that's a cross between a ball and a pillow. You can order these through AAA, Amazon, or many other places on the Web. Here are three ways to use your globe as you conduct the sessions:

1. Let it serve as a visual reminder that we are part of the larger world. Hold up the globe periodically to remind kids that our actions make a difference and everything we do affects the people around us. They can make the world a better place starting right in their own classroom. Peace begins with each person.
2. Use it as a "talking object" to pass in the circle when you do the activities in this book. The person holding the globe is the only one to speak. When he or she is finished, the globe is passed to the next person.

Working in pairs enables kids to immediately put into practice the many cooperative behaviors they are learning.

3. If you have a soft globe, you can use it as a ball to throw during review activities (for more on review activities, see the CD-ROM), allowing you to review concepts easily and quickly.

Working in pairs. Many sessions in this book have children working in dyads and, in some cases, small groups. These interactions enable kids to immediately put into practice many cooperative behaviors they are learning: listening, compassion, kindness, openness to another's ideas. Studies have shown that using dyads and cooperative learning in teaching situations makes a significant difference in students' ability to learn new concepts.¹⁷

My favorite way to get students into pairs is to prime them by saying, "In a moment we're going to partner up. Your most important job is to make sure no one is left out. Look around and make sure everyone is included." I always follow this up with immediate acknowledgment of kids who make sure no one is left out, especially if they forgo sitting with a friend

to be a partner to someone who doesn't have one. If I see students start rushing to be with friends instead of looking around to see if someone needs a partner, I stop the whole process and give a gentle reminder.

Assuming you have your kids in a circle, another way to get them to partner up is to randomly ask one child to raise his or her hand. After that, every second child raises a hand, alternating so half the students have hands raised. Kids with raised hands turn to the person on their right; this person becomes their partner. If there's an odd number, have one group triple up, or have the extra child be your partner.

Once students are in pairs, whether in chairs or seated on the floor, have them sit "knee to knee"—directly facing one another with their knees facing but not touching. This enables good eye contact and less distraction.

Charts. Many activities include creating a chart for or with students. Among these, there are seven that I recommend laminating and keeping up all year long as a visual reminder of the most important bullying prevention concepts in this book:

- **Our Agreements for a Get-Along Classroom:** Keep this chart somewhere in the front of the room for easy reference, high enough for everyone to see, but not so high you can't reach the agreements with a pointer. (This chart is introduced in Session 1.)
- **Respectful Listening:** This chart can be used all day long for every subject you teach. Display it where kids can't miss seeing it. (Introduced in Session 2.)
- **Peace Pledge:** You'll probably be using this every morning, so keep it in easy access for kids to view. You might want to have a different child lead the class in the pledge each day, so post it in a spot a student can stand next to. (Introduced in Session 6.)
- **Win/Win Guidelines for Working Out Conflicts and Rules for Using the Win/Win Guidelines:** Place these near your Peace Table or Peace Place (see page 8). Post them so they're readily accessible when two students sit down together to work out a conflict. (Introduced in Session 8.)
- **Stop, Breathe, Chill:** This is another good chart for your Peace Table area, although if space is limited, any place in the room will do. (Introduced in Session 9.)
- **No More Hurtful Words:** This is a pledge for students to live by and for you to refer to whenever they need a reminder to be kind. (Introduced in Session 22.)

- **Ways to Chill:** This chart can go in any spot where it's easily seen, even up high at the top of a wall. It will serve as a constant reminder of all the things students can do to calm down when angry. (Introduced in Session 40.)

Other charts recommended in sessions throughout the book can be left up as long as you need them, whether that's a day or two after you've completed the session or longer as a reinforcement. If possible, save any charts you take down. They can serve as helpful reminders of concepts you might want or need to review as the year goes on.

Student journals. Journals are used throughout the sessions in a variety of ways: for responding to a topic, airing personal experiences, brainstorming ideas, and more.

Provide students with notebooks to use as their journals. Have students decorate and personalize the cover. Keep a journal yourself and do the same exercises your students do. This will broaden your own understanding of the concepts in this book and expand your ability to empathize with what your kids are going through. If you choose to share any of your journal entries with your kids, it may help them open up even more.

Automatic writing. Some of the sessions employ automatic writing, a technique that can spark spontaneous thought and release ideas. In automatic writing, students should let their words flow out freely and land on the paper like coins spilling out of a bag. Neatness, grammar, and spelling don't count. After stating the given prompt, direct students to "write, write, write" for about three straight minutes without lifting pencil from paper until you say "Stop."

Automatic writing is about the unfolding of what's inside. Let students know that sometimes they may be surprised at what comes out. Whether they keep what they write confidential or share it with you and others is always up to them.

Students who have difficulty writing can draw their response, speak their words into a recorder, or dictate them to you, a classroom aide, or another student if this is comfortable for them.

Role plays. Role playing is a key learning strategy in *No Kidding About Bullying*. Role playing allows students to practice the bullying prevention and conflict resolution skills they are learning, making it easier to apply them in real-life situations.

Often the role plays provided are based on the Survey About Conflicts and interviews with students. Your students' own experiences will also make good sources for role plays, so invite these wherever you feel it is appropriate.

Journals are used throughout the sessions in a variety of ways: for responding to a topic, airing personal experiences, brainstorming ideas, doing automatic writing, and more. Students who have difficulty writing can draw or dictate their responses.

Ask for volunteers to play the parts. If enough students don't volunteer, take a part yourself. If the actual situation being role-played resulted in a physical fight, allow only pantomimed movements.

Teach students these ground rules for role plays:

- Students who participate should never reveal personal information they're not comfortable sharing.
- No physical contact or swearing is allowed.
- Actors should not use real names.

If student actors get off track or start to act silly, stop the role play and remind them of its purpose and the ground rules.

Key Practices and Skills: The Core Sessions

The Core Sessions that comprise Part 1 introduce the most critical skills and attitudes for creating a bully-free environment. Some of the strategies in Part 1 will be reintroduced in Part 2 sessions, but are included early on so you can start the year with them. The Core Sessions were designed to help you do the following:

- create agreements for a peaceful, "get-along" classroom
- foster empathy, kindness, and acceptance
- teach respectful listening
- build trust and collaboration
- introduce the Win/Win Guidelines for Working Out Conflicts
- introduce the anger management strategy Stop, Breathe, Chill
- foster responsibility for one's actions

These initial sessions also include some important practices that will help you maintain an atmosphere of respect and kindness throughout the year: breathing for calmness, the process of visualization, a Peace Pledge to be recited each day, a ritual for setting aside upset feelings when entering the classroom, and the class Peace Table or Peace Place.

Deep Breathing

I recommend starting the activities in this book by leading students in a few rounds of deep breathing. Most kids like this practice. Taking a few deep breaths together is a ritual they learn to look forward to. Doing so helps them focus and sets a tone of calmness. Research shows that six deep abdominal breaths can literally lower the blood pressure.¹⁸

It's important that you get the feel of deep abdominal breathing before you teach it. See Session 4 (pages 28–29) for a thorough introduction to deep breathing. Practice so you're comfortable with the process.

Once you've taught it to your kids, you can use deep breathing throughout the day as a transition between lessons or as a way of lowering anxiety, tension, or nervous energy in your room. You can add visualization (see below) to the breathing, especially as a way of calming before tests.

The Process of Visualization

A number of the sessions incorporate visualization. This is a highly effective tool to help kids mentally rehearse situations where they need to calm themselves, manage anger, talk out a conflict, resist bullying, or use other strategies taught in this book. According to psychology professor and researcher Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, "Visualization has been shown to activate the same brain areas as actually carrying out those same visualized actions. That's why visualization has been such a powerful tool for winning athletes. Mental practice can perhaps be just as effective as physical practice."¹⁹

Students are introduced to visualization in Session 9. Session 37, pages 94–96, provides a more structured introduction along with a visualization script.

Leave It at the Door

We've all seen it happen. A child comes to school filled with anger, fear, or stress, then spends the day acting out. Leave It at the Door (Session 7) gives

you a method you can use all year long to alleviate this. Many kids are under enormous stress. We don't always know which children might be sitting in our classroom with heavy burdens weighing on their hearts. The "Leave It at the Door" box is a place where kids can write down and discharge intense or difficult feelings the minute they walk into your classroom.

The purpose of this exercise is not to minimize feelings, but to help students transition to the school day so they can get along with classmates and learn. If students choose to let you read what they wrote (which is always optional), you then have an added window into their lives. If a child reveals something that requires follow-up or additional intervention, you can get the student the needed help. Should a student reveal serious family issues, any kind of abuse, feelings of depression, or thoughts of harming oneself, talk to your school counselor, nurse, or principal.

Having a tool for processing and communicating what's going on can be the lifeline that pulls a child out of hidden hurt or sadness. By letting out what's troubling them, kids are often more able to learn, and more apt to get along with peers rather than bully them.

Note: Make sure the box is sealed and has a narrow slit at the top so no one but you can take out what anyone else has written. Stress to students that everything they place in the "Leave It at the Door" box is confidential, and no one but the teacher is ever allowed to remove anything from it. Place the box on a shelf in your clear view. If you have concerns that anyone in the class might try to take out something another child has written, keep the box on your desk instead of by the door.

Peace Table

A Peace Table gives students a place in the room where they can retrieve their grounding when angry or upset. It's also a place to talk out conflicts. Set up a Peace Table in a corner of your room. On and near it have objects kids can use to calm themselves and restore composure: a Koosh ball, headsets with soothing music, books, stuffed animals, writing paper, markers, pencils, clay, and more. Near the Peace Table hang posters and drawings that nurture calmness. Post the Win/Win Guidelines for Working Out Conflicts and Rules for Using the Win/Win Guidelines (see page 36). Some teachers make flip

cards with the Win/Win Guidelines for kids to hold when they're working out a conflict. Get students in the habit of going to the Peace Table to calm down and to talk things out when conflicts arise.

If space is an issue, create a Peace Place. Some teachers use a bean bag chair for this purpose. Put it in a corner and hang the Win/Win guidelines and rules nearby. Put together a Peace Box containing calming objects and place it next to the bean bag chair. A movable study carrel or screen is also a good idea if kids want privacy. "Quiet headphones" can block out noise for kids who tend to get overstimulated.

Moving away physically from the source can help kids "move" mentally and emotionally when they're angry or upset. Unhooking from the energy of anger, sadness, or frustration by squeezing a soft ball, listening to music, or writing in a journal helps kids learn that they have the ability to release and transform negative feelings in a healthy way. Giving kids the place and tools to do this helps make self-soothing and problem-solving intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. When we put the locus of control inside the child, we give the student a tool to use throughout life.

Using the Win/Win Guidelines for Working Out Conflicts

Kids who know how to work out conflicts are less likely to bully. That's one of the many reasons why teaching conflict resolution is so important. The ultimate goal is that kids will be able to use the Win/Win Guidelines independently when they have a conflict. However, it takes time to develop that comfort level. Many sessions in the Preventing Conflict and the Responding to Conflict sections of this book (pages 119–188) are devoted to role-playing conflicts real kids reported in the Survey About Conflicts and in interviews with students in schools. The more role plays they do, the more natural it will feel for your students to use the Win/Win Guidelines to resolve their own conflicts, rather than fighting, name-calling, or tattling.

You can help mediate students' conflicts using the Win/Win Guidelines. One caveat: be sure to teach the guidelines before using them as a mediation tool. The guidelines, described in the next column, are introduced individually in Sessions 8–14, and reviewed as a process in Session 15. See pages 36 and 47.

Note: The Win/Win Guidelines should not be used with bullying situations. Putting a child who is bullied face-to-face with the child who bullied him or her can be overwhelming and can cause a sense of intimidation and fear. See pages 10–12 and the Dealing with Bullying sessions (pages 217–260) for ways to address bullying.

Mediating Kids' Conflicts with the Win/Win Guidelines

It is best to mediate with no more than two students at a time. If a conflict involves more than two people, try to determine the two who are at the heart of the conflict. Then help them begin to resolve it, following the six guidelines:

- 1. Cool off.** Separately, have each child take time out, get a drink of water, or do something physical to let off steam. Make sure both kids have cooled off completely before going to the next step. When it comes to conflicts, the number one mistake adults make is trying to get kids to talk out the problem while they're still mad. When tempers are calmer and tears are dried, sit down with them and go on to Guideline 2.
- 2. Talk it over starting from "I," not "you."** Tell students they're both going to have a chance to say what's bothering them, but they're going to need to listen respectfully to each other without interrupting. Then ask each child to state what's on his or her mind, starting from "I," not "you." Example: "I'm mad 'cause you grabbed my pencil without asking" is a lot less inflammatory than "You're so mean. Give it back!"
- 3. Listen and say back what you heard.** Guide kids to do this for each other: "Justin, can you repeat back the main idea of what Marcus just said?" Let them know that "saying back" doesn't indicate agreement, but shows respect, builds understanding, and makes it easier to work out the problem.
- 4. Take responsibility for your role in the conflict.** In the majority of all conflicts both people have some degree of responsibility. Ask each student, "How were you even a little bit responsible for what happened?" Stay neutral here. This part needs to come from them. If a student is unwilling to take any responsibility at all, try gently coaxing by saying, "Is there something really small that you might have done, too?" If this step starts to stymie the whole process, move on to the next step.

- 5. Come up with a solution that's fair to each of you.** Ask, "How can the two of you work out this conflict?" Or, "What can you do so this doesn't happen again?" Then wait. Don't give them solutions. It's important that they come up with their own.

If the conflict is a recurring or ongoing one, have them write down the solution and sign it.

- 6. Affirm, forgive, thank, or apologize.** Ask, "Is there anything you'd like to say to each other?" Or, "Would you like to shake hands?"

If an apology is in order, ask, "Do you feel in your heart that you can give an apology?" If not, ask students to consider offering an apology at another time. Forcing apologies makes for inauthentic gestures and doesn't support the goal of getting along better.

At the beginning of conflict resolution and throughout the process as needed, remind students of the Rules for Using the Win/Win Guidelines:

1. Treat each other with respect. No blaming or put-downs.
2. Attack the problem, not the person.
3. No negative body language or facial expressions.
4. Be willing to compromise
5. Be honest.

Incorporating and Reviewing "Get-Along" Classroom Agreements

In Session 1, Introducing the Concept of a "Get-Along" Classroom, you and your students will create a chart called "Our Agreements for a Get-Along Classroom." These agreements are a contract that everyone signs and promises to follow. They form a scaffold for the entire year and are a working document that you and your class should revisit every few weeks. Here are five ways you can review the agreements and keep them alive:

"How are we doing?" check-in. Direct students' attention to items you think they need to work on. For example, you might ask them, "How do you think you're doing on listening when someone speaks?" Encourage students to be honest. When there are areas of challenges, lead a brief discussion on ways to deal with them. Then hold students accountable.

Check back in a few days to see if suggested improvements have been followed through on.

"Pat on the back" check-in. Ask students where they have shown improvement individually or as a group. Acknowledge them for improvements made and for positive steps along the way. Have kids acknowledge each other, too.

Goal setting. Have students choose items on the "get-along" classroom agreements they want to improve on. Have them write the items in their journals. Talk about action steps they can take to reach their goal. Goals can be for individuals or for the entire class. Encourage kids to be "support partners" for each other. For example, if Joey's attention drifts a lot and his goal is to be a better listener, Amy may agree to be his support partner, sitting next to him during lessons and giving him an agreed-upon silent signal when he loses focus. Support partners can also encourage and affirm when progress is made.

New student review. When a new child joins your class, have your students lead a complete review of your "get-along" classroom agreements, answering questions from the new student and talking about how the class is living the words of the agreements.

Share with family adults. As suggested in Session 1, copy the agreements from your wall chart and send them home with a cover letter. At your back-to-school open house, introduce your "Agreements for a Get-Along Classroom" and let parents know how you're using them.

Four Critical Ways for Teachers to Prevent Bullying

1. Model, teach, and reinforce kindness and compassion. By taking the time to teach kindness and compassion, you lay the foundation for a bully-free classroom. Three sections of this book will help you do this:

- The Core Sessions (pages 19–47)
- Fostering Kindness and Compassion (pages 51–81)
- Accepting Differences (pages 261–275)

What you model is key. As Albert Schweitzer once said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing." When he wrote these words, he had little idea that inside the human brain are millions of mirror neurons that cause us to mirror each other's behaviors, emotions, and facial

expressions. Neuroscientists have recently discovered that this is why we tend to smile back when someone smiles at us, or frown when we see someone frowning. Mirror neurons are the reason kids' attitudes and behaviors are so contagious.²⁰

It's also the reason teachers have even more influence than they realize. Mirror neurons are functioning all day long. Plus, kids watch us for clues as to how to behave, even when we think they're not. There have been times I've heard kids say things like, "I know my teacher doesn't like Mr. So-and-So. I see the look on her face every time he walks by." This attests to the need to be mindful of our body language and facial expressions as well as our words.

For some kids, we may be the most influential role models they have, so we need to hold ourselves to a high standard. When we tell kids to treat others with respect and they see us doing this ourselves, we make a powerful impact for the good. Their mirror neurons are sparked to follow our lead.

2. Make kids part of the solution, and hold them accountable. When kids have a role in coming up with their own rules and agreements, they are far more motivated to abide by them. That's why it's important to start by having your students define the kind of atmosphere they want to have in the classroom, then come up with agreements for creating it (Session 1).

It's also critical to hold your students accountable. Kids can be good at parroting back the right answer when it comes to respect, kindness, and acceptance. They often "talk the talk," but don't "walk the walk." Getting kids to "walk the walk" requires frequent check-ins on how they're applying what they're learning. For example, after you teach an anger management or assertiveness strategy, tell students you're going to want to hear how they apply it in real life. Mark a date in your plan book, and make sure you take five to ten minutes to check in with kids when that date arrives. Reinforce skills and concepts by conducting additional role plays for a given session or for other sessions that have the same focus.

Be sure to tell family adults about the *No Kidding About Bullying* program you are introducing in your classroom. Share information early in the year, and let parents know you'll be contacting them from time to time to see how their kids are applying what they've learned. Then keep in touch via email, your class website, or by sending information home with students.

3. Teach kids concrete strategies they can use when they're angry and in conflict. A study in the Canadian journal *Child Development* revealed that "Students who bully their classmates also tend to have lots of conflicts with parents, friends, and others."²¹ Giving kids acceptable ways to deal with conflict and anger can cut back significantly on bullying.

Stop, Breathe, Chill (explained in Session 9) is the number one anger management strategy in this book. Many sessions that follow it show how to use this strategy when conflicts arise. Using Stop, Breathe, Chill yourself and sharing some personal examples with students can make the practice come alive for kids. The more they hear about your real-life applications the likelier they are to follow in your footsteps. Sharing how you handled challenges in angry situations can give your students the confidence to keep trying rather than give up when they meet challenges of their own. The road to managing anger and conflict is never easy. It requires us to be mindful of our old patterns and willing to change them. The role modeling you provide in this regard will be invaluable to your kids.

In terms of helping kids resolve conflicts, the key strategy is the Win/Win Guidelines, introduced in the Core Sessions. Following this, the Responding to Conflict section has twelve detailed sessions designed to help kids apply the Win/Win Guidelines in their lives. There are lots of actual conflicts described by students from our survey for your students to role-play, discuss, and brainstorm solutions to.

Be sure to tell parents about the *No Kidding About Bullying* program you are introducing in your classroom. Share information early in the year and keep in touch regularly.

4. Never look the other way when bullying takes place. Kids need to know that bullying and other acts of cruelty will not be tolerated. Sometimes adults pooh-pooh bullying, saying that it's always existed or that it's just part of life. But that doesn't make it acceptable. And, over time, bullying has changed. It is more insidious and pervasive, and is now part of what many experts see as an epidemic of cruelty among kids. In recent years the ubiquity of the Internet and cell phones has spurred widespread cyberbullying, which can start in elementary school.

Ignoring or minimizing the problem only allows it to grow. As educators, we must call kids on cruel behavior and hold them accountable. Not doing so actually reinforces it by sending a silent signal that cruelty and bullying are okay.

Most schools have some system of consequences for misbehavior as well as bullying response protocols. On the CD-ROM that accompanies this book you will find information regarding using these protocols. Also see the References and Resources on pages 282–284 for sources of schoolwide bullying prevention programs.

The Dealing with Bullying section (pages 217–260) contains nineteen sessions that give specific ways to help kids recognize different forms of bullying. It also teaches kids what to do if they or others are bullied and shows how to be an upstander, as opposed to a bystander, when bullying takes place. If bullying is going on in your classroom, don't rely solely on this section; the sessions on kindness, compassion, and acceptance are equally important, if not more so.

In fact, research reveals that kids who are bullied have certain social challenges in common. *The Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* reports that these students often have difficulty in at least one of the following three areas: reading nonverbal cues, understanding the meaning of social cues, and coming up with options for resolving conflicts.²² Sessions throughout *No Kidding About Bullying* are designed to help kids improve in all of these areas through role play, empathy building, and activities that require them to observe and respond to the reactions of others. Students with poor social skills can improve in these areas when provided with good role models, effective strategies, and opportunities to practice social interactions.

Acknowledging and Affirming Students

John Milton once wrote, "Good, the more communicated, more abundant grows." One of the most powerful tools we have for making good things grow in our students is catching kids in the act of doing things right and affirming them for their positive acts. When you see students being kind, respectful, caring, or accepting, acknowledge it. Kindness is the antithesis of bullying. The more kind acts we can catch kids in the act of performing, the more we extinguish the roots of bullying.

Be like a detective on the lookout for kind words and actions. When you see kids cooling off when angry, talking out conflicts, or expressing compassion, acknowledge them. For students who feel embarrassed by compliments, make it private. Whisper your acknowledgement or jot it on a note. And make it specific: "I noticed how you helped Joe pick up his books when he dropped them. You didn't laugh, even though other kids did. That was a very kind thing to do. How did that feel for you?" By asking this question, you further reinforce the positive act.

Start and end sessions on a tone of affirmation by sincerely acknowledging individuals or the class as a whole for positives you've observed. Be sure to spread your acknowledgments out, so each child gets a chance to hear something positive at some point. It can be harder to find things to compliment with some kids than with others, so take note of progress made, moves in the right direction, sincere attempts to improve—the small, subtle things that often go unnoticed.

One of my favorite examples of positive change sparked by acknowledgment was with an intense fifth grader I'll call Miko. Miko was in a group I ran for at-risk kids who bullied and got into fights. He started the year angry, reactive, and quick with his fists. Although Miko constantly mumbled put-downs and gave nasty looks to other kids in the group, he had a lot of positive qualities. One day I took him aside and told him how much I enjoyed having him in the group—which I sincerely did—and shared all the positive things I saw in him: his intelligence, his strength, his vast potential. I asked him if he could try to let go of his reactions when kids in the group said or did things that got on his nerves. I told him he had the power to react less, and I said, "I have faith in you." His face completely changed when he heard those words. He admitted to me that he didn't know how to control his temper, so I showed him how to use Stop, Breathe, Chill.

Initially it was hard for Miko to contain his reactions when someone got on his nerves, but he started trying. When something was said that would ordinarily push his buttons, I would notice him consciously looking away (as opposed to giving a look) and breathing deeply. Each time he did this I'd acknowledge him privately. "You're gaining more control over your reactions," I would tell him, or, "You're really making an effort, and it's working." Often, he'd nod in agreement and give me a little smile. Over time, with consistent support and acknowledgment, Miko

turned around. At the end of the year, he wrote these words:

"I love our program because it helped me so much with handling my problems. It really helped me calm myself down when someone or something bothered me. It taught me respect. I'm sure it would help others like me, too."

Continuously catching Miko in the act of doing things right—even sincere attempts and small steps—helped Miko see his better self. He eventually learned that he had the ability to control himself, and when he did, he felt good. For kids who get in trouble all the time, this can be life-changing.

Also teach kids to acknowledge each other. For every kind word your kids speak, one fewer mean word is spoken. Moment to moment, words and actions add up to the atmosphere that's created in our classrooms. If we're consistently affirming positive words and actions, our students often follow suit, noticing the positives in each other and affirming them.

You can prompt student-to-student affirmations fairly easily. "Is there something anyone would like to acknowledge someone for?" is a good question to ask when you complete activities in this book. Things you can prime your kids to notice are:

- kindness in any form
- respect in any form
- helpfulness
- patience
- improvement in any area
- listening attentively
- hearing out someone you disagree with
- calming down when angry
- being an upstander

There are so many things worth acknowledging if our minds are primed toward the positive. In the classroom, when we get in the habit of paying each other sincere compliments, something magical can take root. I've seen it happen over and over.

Anticipating Challenges

Confidentiality

Make sure students understand that they should not bring other people's personal information into group

discussions or role plays. Remind students not to use real names when describing bullying or conflict situations. Coach them to say, "Someone I know," "This kid," "A person in our school," "Someone in my home," or "A relative of mine." This applies for writing assignments as well. Journals, too, need to be confidential. The only time a journal entry should be shared is when the person who is writing in it chooses to share an entry with the teacher or the class during a session where optional sharing is designated.

Be like a detective on the lookout for kind words and actions. Also teach kids to acknowledge each other.

What to Do If a "Red-Flag" Issue Comes Up

The sessions in this book may bring up some red-flag issues for kids. Bullying in and of itself can be one. Kids who are bullied can suffer from depression and even harbor suicidal thoughts. They may also have thoughts of harming someone else. If this or any other issue of major concern arises, talk to your school counselor, nurse, or principal. Discuss how to reach out supportively to the child's family adults and how to get further assistance for the child if need be. Sometimes just being there for the child yourself may be enough. I've known teachers who eat lunch with certain kids at least once a week, or invite them to help in the classroom and chat after school. Whatever avenue you take, consider the red flag a gift—this child is revealing that support is needed. Providing it can make all the difference in the world.

Finally, follow your school's policy guidelines on mandatory reporting of physical or sexual abuse.

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

It's happened to all of us, and for some of us, it can happen every day: a student explodes, becomes defiant, or gets physical. What can we do? There's no silver bullet, but there are some things that can help.

Calm yourself first. Immediately take deep abdominal breaths and silently say a calming statement (examples: "I can handle this," "Cool and steady," "I'll stay calm"). Then lower your voice instead of raising it. These steps will help lower your own stress and provide a model of calmness for the child who's acting out as well as for the rest of the class.

Convey the attitude, “I am on your side.” Once students think we no longer support them, we lose the chance to connect and help correct their negative behavior. At-risk kids, especially those who regularly get in trouble, need to believe we still care about them and believe in them even when they’ve lost control. Consequences can be given, but in the spirit of care and concern.

Let the student save face. Never back a disruptive child into a corner. If we threaten a child who’s acting out, we can almost guarantee that he or she will choose a defensive or aggressive way out. (“You want me to go to the office. Try and make me!”) Instead, phrase your response in a nonconfrontational way that doesn’t further escalate the problem. Here’s an example. Tina has just thrown an eraser at a student who made fun of her. You whisper to her: “Tina, I see you’re upset right now. Why don’t you take a break and get a drink of water?” If a consequence is in order, give it later, once Tina’s volatility has subsided.

Make the child part of the solution. Ask, “What can *we* do to solve this problem?” Then come up with a plan together. Here’s an example: Jessie always acts out during math lessons. After talking to him you discover that he doesn’t get the math concepts you’ve been working on and his acting out is a mask for his feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Ask him what would help; then make some compromises and adaptations. Maybe Jessie can work with a partner, or maybe he can complete the few problems he understands and leave the rest till you can help him. Coming up with solutions together will put the locus of control back inside him, removing the sense of powerlessness that precipitated his acting out.

Use preventive maintenance. For some kids, calling out their name in front of the class is enough to set them off. Anticipate the anger triggers of kids who easily become disruptive, and do your best to avoid them. For example, if you know that embarrassment leads to outbursts, direct corrective comments to the child privately, or use a previously agreed upon signal. Here, too, involve the child in the solution. If Charlie is always interrupting lessons with inappropriate comments, speak to him privately, create a plan together, let him know you have faith in his ability to follow it, and affirm him when he does so.

Diffuse potentially explosive situations. Here are a few phrases you might use with a student who’s on the verge of a meltdown:

- “What do you need to do to take care of yourself right now?”
- “I can see you’re very upset. Is there someone you’d like to talk to?”
- “I’m depending on you to have a level head.”
- “Did that action help you or hurt you?”
- “How about taking a break.”

Put physical safety first. If a child gets physical and can’t be readily calmed down, follow your school’s policy for dealing with student violence and keeping all students safe.

“Gay” Name-Calling

It’s not uncommon for elementary-age kids to put each other down using homophobic terms. Many students who filled out our survey wrote about the heartache of having a homophobic label attached to them. This example came from an 11-year-old boy:

*“It started at lunch when everybody decided I was gay. So that’s what they started calling me, and I’m not. They also called me freak because I don’t buy lunch, and a nerd because I get straight A’s. It’s not solved. About a month ago this kid calls me a nerd and other names. So I go tell my mom. The next day his best friend hits me in the face because I told on his friend. Then I got mad and I wanted to hit him back, but I didn’t. Now it’s the end of the school year. It’s like every day without crying is an accomplishment. Even some of my friends have turned on me. It just makes me want to die.”**

As this story painfully illustrates, students can be devastated by pejorative comments of this nature. Kids may use the term gay to label a child as homosexual. They may also use it as a kind of generic insult: “That’s so gay!” But kids on the receiving end almost always take it as an embarrassing put-down.

Here are some facts:²³

- Anti-gay bullying is one of the most prevalent social problems in American schools.
- A study by the National Mental Health Association found that four out of five teens who are

* While the students’ surveys were anonymous, the teachers’ were not. When a student’s story indicated a critical need for help, every effort was made to alert the child’s teacher.

bullied for being perceived to be gay were actually heterosexual.

- Kids who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed and far more likely to be suicidal.

Never look the other way when homophobic comments are made. Kids need to know that doing so is never okay. Session 110 will help you address this issue.

Integrating the Understandings in This Book Throughout the Day

The lessons in this book will live in their application. For systemic change to happen, it's critical to integrate the concepts and strategies presented in the sessions throughout the entire day. Here's how:

- Keep referring back to charts, signs, and quotes from each session, particularly your "Agreements for a Get-Along Classroom." Use them as living documents, tying them in to real-life situations in the classroom. For example, if one of your get-along agreements is "Treat others with respect," and something disrespectful happens, gesture toward the line in the chart about respect. Ask, "Was that respectful or not?" Remind students that every word and action counts. Before long, many kids will get in the habit of referring back to the charts themselves, keeping each other on track.
- Once again, affirm your kids for positive acts you witness. Continuously encourage students to affirm each other, too.
- Ask students to be aware of acts of respect, kindness, integrity, acceptance, and conscience performed by story characters or people they encounter in other content areas. Highlight acts of goodness, and ask students to comment on them.
- When students go to lunch, recess, classes in other rooms, or other special activities, remind them to keep abiding by their get-along classroom agreements. When they return, take a few minutes to hear how the activity went. Acknowledge positives, remediate negatives.
- At dismissal, remind your students to continue living what they're learning with their families, friends, and anyone else whose paths they cross. Follow up by checking in with them often about this.

- Invite guest speakers who reflect the values you are teaching. Teens who have overcome bullying or have been upstanders for others make good guests. So do people who've learned how to manage anger and deal with conflict. Kids enjoy and respond to real-life anecdotes and experiences.
- Refer to current events and ask students to speculate on how the values of respect, kindness, and compassion—or their opposites—might have made an impact on specific events of the day.
- Have students be on the lookout for examples of respect, kindness, compassion, acceptance, or conscience in the news, in movies, and on TV. Ask them to share examples they've come across. Have them go to MyHero.com for examples of everyday people doing extraordinary things.
- Look at conflicts in the news and have students talk about how those conflicts could be worked out using the strategies and concepts you are teaching.

Just about every session of *No Kidding About Bullying* zeros in on skills that not only help prevent bullying and conflict, but also help kids succeed in school. According to a survey of 8,000 teachers and parents by Dr. Stephen Elliott of Vanderbilt University, the following are among the top skills that help kids succeed in school:

- listening to others
- taking turns when talking
- getting along with others
- staying calm with others
- being responsible for one's own behavior²⁴

In the pages ahead, you will find a wealth of activities that foster all of these skills. As you use them, be sure to share what's working for you in your classroom with your colleagues. Ask what's working for them. Find out what parents are doing at home to encourage their kids to show respect and kindness, manage anger, and resolve conflicts.

I also invite you to share your successes, challenges, and ideas with me. Please contact me in care of my publisher: help4kids@freespirit.com. I would love to hear from you.

In peace,
Naomi Drew

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