

Intervention with bullies

Remember that bullies often come from homes where there is little warmth and parental attention, and where parents discipline inconsistently using physical punishment and emotional outbursts. They often have little empathy or trust and little ability to delay gratification.

Formal, structured counseling and education that stresses acknowledging actions, empathy development, and restitution may be effective if paired with consequences.

Informal counseling: serious talks, requests to apologize, asking why, pleading, and expressions of frustration- are unlikely to help and may make things worse

Useful questions to ask bullies:

- What did you do?
- Why was that a bad thing to do?
- Who did you hurt?
- What were you trying to accomplish?
- Next time you have that goal, how will you meet it without hurting anybody?
- How will you help the person you hurt?

Bullies need to learn to:

- Acknowledge their own actions

- Acknowledge the results of their behavior on themselves
- Develop shame ("I broke a rule and got in trouble. I don't want to go through that again!")
- Change their actions to stay out of trouble
- Find other ways to get their needs met
- Acknowledge the results of their behavior on others
- Develop guilt ("I hurt someone")
- Learn to trust and delay gratification
- Form relationships with helping adults

You will find that most young people showing antisocial behavior will get stuck part-way through this sequence. Where they get stuck is where you need to focus with them to help them move on. Think of this sequence as being like a developmental sequence in learning to read. When children learn to sound out letters we know they are on the path to reading and we solidify those skills with them before moving on. We also appreciate their progress. Seeing signs of progress in the behavior of antisocial children is what keeps us going. More important than that, seeing signs of progress is what keeps us liking them. And they will only work with and for us if they know we like them.