

Close to Home Study Guide

Dealing with Bullying

1. Opening (2 minutes)*

Read Psalm 13 together, a Psalm which expresses the feelings and thoughts of those being bullied or harassed. Point out that the phrase, “How long . . . ?” is repeated four times, giving special force to the feelings of helplessness and despair.

2. Story-telling (8 minutes)

Summarize Tyler’s story on pages 2-3, and the situation between Diane and Jane from the blue box on page 7. In each case, what led to the bullying, how did it express itself, and what was helpful in dealing with and ending the bullying behavior?

Alternatively, ask the group to share in pairs about an incident of bullying they experienced or observed. What feelings did they have? How did they respond? What was most helpful in dealing with the situation?

3. Review of pamphlet (10 minutes)

- Discuss the definitions of bullying given on page 4-5. Highlight the use of power, contempt, and manipulation, as well as the definition by Barbara Coloroso. Is there anything the group would add or change in these definitions?
- Why might a “good kid” use bullying behaviors?
- How does our society support or discourage bullying behavior? Which political, sports or cultural leaders model respectful behaviors? bullying behaviors? What is modeled in the church, especially by those given the most authority and status?
- Point to the factors listed in the “Bullying starts at home” box. Why might a lack of warmth and involvement from parents lead to bullying?
- How might permissive parenting and harsh parenting lead to bullying? While these seem like opposites, both parenting styles can result in children not developing self-discipline or their own internal controls on behavior. In the first case, no restraints are given and in the second, children learn to rely on external limits.
- Underline the long-term effects of bullying, such as those mentioned toward the bottom of page 4, as well as those which Jane experienced. What might the group change or add?

4. Reading of Scripture text (12 minutes)

- Review the story about Saul and how God intervened to change his mind. What gave Ananias the courage to go to Saul and pray for him? What assurances or safe-guards are needed before we can accept a former bully as a friend?
- Invite the group to share stories about the way God does “. . . surprising things with people.” How have they experienced this?
- Discuss the section, “Resist, but not with violence” which emphasizes that Jesus did not instruct us to be passive in the face of evil, but to resist wrongdoing with creativity and love. Does the group agree? Why or why not? Encourage everyone to read Walter Wink’s *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way or The Powers That Be*.

*The suggested time frames are for a 45-minute session. With more discussion and storytelling, you will need to adjust upward, and possibly extend to a second session.

- If someone is willing to share a current situation of bullying, brainstorm some creative, nonviolent options.
- Discuss the last paragraph on page 7 which states that bullying is based in fear. What is the bully afraid of? the bystanders? the victim? How does our faith address these fears?

5. Steps toward healing (12 minutes)

- Discuss the action steps given on pages 8, 9, and 11. Do you agree that both victims and bullies need to learn new behaviors? Are there any actions you would add or change?
- Looking at step #6, what stories from the Bible would you tell? How has God helped you overcome fear and do the right thing? Make a list of these stories, and for each person, so they can refer to it when they need encouragement or inspiration.
- Review the steps in the side-bar on page 8. Point out that with children especially, it is good to practice many of these suggestions and act them out in different scenarios. They see lots of examples in movies or on TV of people using force to get their way, so it's important for them to have time and space in which to imagine and try out respectful, nonviolent behaviors that are also strong and confident.
- List some ways the congregation can be helpful (e.g., parenting classes, conflict transformation classes, modeling from leaders, assertiveness training, Sunday school classes on creative nonviolence). Which new idea would the group like to work on first?
- Provide information on local resources, such as school or community programs which address bullying, as well as programs which teach conflict transformation.
- Encourage the church library to purchase the books listed on page 10. Also, print out some of the handouts from the websites which might be helpful to your group, such as:
 - <http://kidsareworthit.com/handouts.aspx>
 - <http://www.respectu.com/programs/school/faq.htm>
 - http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/ra_faq.htm
 - <http://www.lfcc.on.ca/bully.htm>
- Pray for all those experiencing bullying, as well as those who bully others. Pray that all may have wisdom and courage to respond in helpful ways to stop bullying behaviors. Pray also that we might envision a world in which all can be friends.

6. Closing (1 minute)

Strong and loving God, you have promised: "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:10) When we are afraid, when we encounter anyone who threatens us, help us to hold your hand. Help us to believe. Help us to be strong. Help us to love. Amen.



This study guide is written by Linda Gehman Peachey, Director for Women's Advocacy in the Peace and Justice Ministries section of Mennonite Central Committee US. It is one of a series of free downloadable study guides for the Close to Home pamphlets, which can be ordered from the Mennonite Publishing Network of the Mennonite Church (see www.mpn.net/closetohome) or the Mennonite Brethren Kindred Productions (www.kindredproductions.com/closetohome).