

**DON'T  
PICK  
ON**



**HOW TO HANDLE BULLYING**

**ROSEMARY STONES**

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# Contents

<b>Who Is this Book For?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PART ONE – WHAT IS BULLYING?</b>	<b>3</b>
What is Bullying?	3
Types of Bullying	5
Physical Bullying	6
Verbal Bullying	7
– Name-calling	10
– Racist Name-calling and Bullying	11
– Sexual Name-calling and Bullying	11
– Homophobic Name-calling and Bullying	12
Psychological Bullying	13
Cyber-bullying	15
Social Bullying	16
Bullying Yourself	18
How Do Bullies Get Away With It?	20

How Much Bullying Is There?	21
Where Does Bullying Take Place?	23
Bullying at School	23
Bullying at Boarding School	24
Bullying at Home	25
Who Are the People Who Are Bullied?	25
You're Not the Only One	29
Who Are the Bullies?	30
Adult Bullies	33
Group Bullying	34
Why Do Bullies Do It?	34
The Impact of Bullying	36
Why It's Not Good to Be a Bully	39
An Atmosphere of Fear	40
What Can Be Done?	42
<b>PART TWO – STICKING UP FOR YOURSELF</b>	<b>43</b>
Changing How You Feel About Yourself	43
Sticking Up for Yourself	44
Relying on Yourself	47
Learning to Feel Secure and Confident Inside	48
Understanding Your Feelings	49
– What Are Feelings For?	50
– Are Some Feelings Bad?	50
– Anger	51
– Your Feelings Belong to You	55

– Mixed Feelings	56
Talking About Feelings	57
– Good Ways to Talk About Feelings	58
Being Responsible for Your Feelings	59
When Your Feelings Get You Down	60
Being Responsible for Your Behaviour	62
– Misusing the Idea of Being Responsible	65
Developing and Using Your Inner Power	68
Role Power	69
Good Ways to Help Yourself Gain Inner Power	72
– Letting Things Go	72
– Allow Yourself to Be You!	75
– Don't Lose Your Inner Power!	77
– Inner Power Forever	82
<b>PART THREE – HELPING YOURSELF TO FEEL GOOD</b>	<b>84</b>
Happiness Workouts	84
Happiness Workout No.1: When You Feel Lonely or Sad	84
Happiness Workout No.2: Nice Things About You	85
Happiness Workout No.3: Look After Yourself	87
Happiness Workout No.4: The Letting Go Technique	88
Happiness Workout No.5: The Praise Box	90
Happiness Workout No.6: The Difference Game	90
Happiness Workout No.7: Writing Affirmations	90

<b>PART FOUR – PROTECTING YOURSELF</b>	<b>92</b>
General Advice for People Being Bullied	93
Teasing	96
Trying to Avoid a Fight	98
Should You Learn to Fight?	101
Homophobic Bullying	102
Blackmail	103
Text and Online Bullying	103
Group Bullying	108
Who Started It?	111
Turning to Adults for Help	112
Telling About Bullying	114
– Good Ways to Tell	115
Adults Who Allow Bullying	117
How Adults Should Deal with Bullying	118
A School Anti-bullying Policy	119
If You've Been Bullied	124
Stopping Being a Bully: Sensible Strategies	125
What to Do If You Witness Bullying	128
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Questions and Answers</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Where to Get Help and Advice</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>147</b>

# Who Is This Book For?

This book is for people who are being bullied and for people who are bullies.

If you are being bullied I'm sure you would like the bullying to stop, like Chelsea:

*Chelsea is convinced that she isn't likeable as no one will talk to her at breaktime. She is afraid she will never be able to make friends.*

If you are a bully, you may not want to stop bullying people. What could be in it for you? But you are curious enough to have picked up this book so perhaps you are aware that something must be wrong if you need to hurt or frighten other people to get what you want or to cope with difficult feelings. So, this book is for bullies too, like Alan:

*Alan's mum is a single parent who has to work long hours and he doesn't see much of her. He goes home from school to an empty house. Alan bullies Ivan whose mum picks him up at home time in the family car. Because Alan feels Ivan is getting the attention he would like, he picks on Ivan relentlessly, jeering at him for being 'soft' and a 'mummy's boy'.*

Perhaps you are bullied in some situations and a bully in others. This may seem strange, but it happens quite often. It did to Colm:

*Colm is bullied at home by his big brother. Not being able to stand up for himself against his brother makes Colm feel weak. He tries to make himself feel powerful again by bullying smaller children at school.*

Perhaps you are neither bullied nor a bully, but you find it difficult and confusing to see other people bullying or being bullied. What should you do? It happened to Tara:

*Tara's friend Rebecca is being picked on at school by a gang of spiteful girls who hit her and spoil her things. Tara is torn in two. She wants to help Rebecca, but if she does will the gang turn on her too?*

## PART ONE

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# What is Bullying?

### **WHAT IS BULLYING?**

Bullying is about using aggression intentionally to hurt someone. Being aggressive means behaving in a hostile manner towards someone. It is a way of being cruel to another person. It might involve:

- pushing someone or hitting them;
- stealing or breaking someone's things;
- calling someone names;
- sending someone threatening messages by text or email;
- making fun of someone in a nasty way;
- frightening someone into doing things they don't want to do;

- leaving someone out of group activities;
- deliberately ignoring someone;
- using chat rooms to spread rumours or lies about someone.

These are just some examples. Unfortunately, bullies know lots more horrible ways to bully apart from these.

Sometimes it will be very obvious to you that you are being bullied, as it was to Sophie:

*As Sophie walked out of the school gates, Robert and Matthew grabbed her school bag, emptied her things out onto the pavement and then stamped on them and kicked them around. 'We'll do this again tomorrow unless you give us your lunch money,' said Matthew, 'and if you tell anyone, you'll be very sorry.'*

But sometimes the person doing the bullying is someone who cares about you. This kind of bullying can be confusing and hard to recognise. This is what happened to Mala:

*Mala's family has just moved to a smart new neighbourhood and Mala is missing her friends. 'What*

*are you moping about?’ her dad asks her. ‘You look like a wet weekend.’*

*‘I miss Laura and Margaret,’ Mala tells him.*

*‘You’re such an ungrateful girl,’ fumes her dad. ‘I spend all this money so that you can move to this beautiful house and all you do is droop about looking miserable because you can’t see those two no-hopers.’*

Perhaps Mala does feel pleased and excited to be in a beautiful house, but she also feels sad that she can no longer see her friends. Her dad cannot cope with Mala’s sad feelings so he is impatient and unkind – a bit of a bully. The next time Mala feels sad about something that is important to her, she may try to hide it from her dad. It’s bad enough feeling sad about something without also being told off for it!

### **TYPES OF BULLYING**

Broadly speaking there are four kinds of bullying and the aggression used in each kind can involve physical violence, verbal bullying, psychological intimidation and/or social rejection.

## Physical Bullying

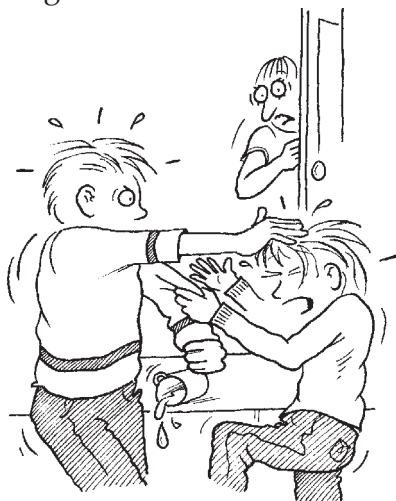
Physical means to do with the body, so physical bullying means that a bully attacks someone's body by, say, pulling their hair or punching them or tripping them up.

*Michael isn't good at football. He's small for his age and he finds it hard to control the ball. He always gets picked last for the team. The other boys make fun of him, banging into him 'accidentally' and tripping him up when the games teacher isn't looking. Michael's mum wonders why he's always covered with bruises, but Michael won't say.*

If you watch small children playing together you will notice that they tend to grab things off each other or push each other if they have disagreements. As they get older, most children learn to settle arguments by discussion rather than by pushing or hurting the person they are having an argument with. Learning to use words rather than fists is part of growing up.

Unfortunately, some people go on using physical aggression – punching, hitting, slapping, hair-pulling, fighting – as a means of trying to sort out arguments or get their own way. Such bullies almost always pick on or beat up people who are smaller or weaker than they

are, or less good at fighting. Because these bullies use physical violence a lot to get their own way, they are often very good fighters.



LEARNING TO USE WORDS RATHER THAN FISTS  
IS PART OF GROWING UP

### **Verbal Bullying**

Verbal means using words. Verbal bullying is when a bully hurts or frightens someone by, say, calling them names or making them look silly.

*Jane's classmates think that wearing the 'right' label clothing is very important, from trainers to T-shirts. Jane's mum knows how important it is to Jane to have*

*the 'right' label so that she can be dressed like everyone else, but they are just too expensive. Jane's classmates start to make fun of her: 'What a fleabag! Where did you get that coat? The Oxfam shop?'*

*Jane wishes she didn't have to go to school; she is beginning to dread each new day.*

Some adults think that verbal bullying isn't serious because they can't *see* any damage. If a bully hit you and made your nose bleed, people would find that hurt easy to understand. But if you tell them that a bully called you a fleabag, they might just laugh and tell you not to be so sensitive or 'such a baby'.

Of course, words are used a lot when people are teased and it's important not to be oversensitive about teasing (see section on teasing opposite), but verbal bullying is not the same as teasing. Verbal bullying is both cruel and one-sided and it can make you feel small, stupid, unattractive, weak or uncool. If your confidence is knocked in this horrible way, you might even begin to imagine that there must be something wrong with you if this is how you are treated. But no one deserves to be treated cruelly.

There is an old saying:

*Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
but names can never hurt me.*

This is not true.

Name-calling and other kinds of verbal bullying can hurt very much indeed and adults should take them seriously. One girl who was bullied physically and verbally pointed out that, 'Physical hurts heal much more quickly than being called names'.

If you have been bullied in this way, you may find that people say, 'Oh, it's just a bit of teasing. You should be able to take that. Perhaps you've got no sense of humour!'

In fact, there are important differences between verbal bullying and teasing that you should be clear about.

When you are being teased:

- someone is making fun of you in a good-humoured way, and you feel free to make fun back. ('You must have swallowed a calculator to be that good at maths!')
- often the person doing the teasing is someone who knows you well and cares about you, like your mum or your granddad.
- it is not something to be taken seriously – usually you'll find it funny too.
- if you want it to stop, you can ask and the teaser will stop.
- if you do feel upset by teasing, it's a mild feeling that soon goes away.

- it's a two-way thing – someone who teases will also get teased and someone who is teased will also tease a person back.

When teasing becomes cruel and causes someone distress, it has slipped over the dividing line between teasing and bullying and become verbal bullying. When teasing becomes one-sided and the same person is always at the receiving end, then teasing has become verbal bullying. Often of course, bullies use a mixture of physical and verbal aggression.

### *Name-calling*

Verbal bullying is often done by name-calling. This is usually about people's appearance and might include names such as 'fatty', 'spotty' and 'four-eyes'. References to the way people are perceived might include names such as 'swot', 'thicko' and 'snob'. And while assigning nicknames is sometimes something that can be humorous, playful or affectionate (as in 'Becks' for David Beckham), the experience can be an upsetting one when it teeters over the edge of harmless banter and becomes a way of mocking someone's appearance or personality. Your very identity can feel under attack.