



Helping a mentee navigate the ups and downs of school life is a complex task. Seedling mentors strive to carry out with thoughtful consideration each week. Providing a listening ear and words of encouragement when needed, however, may not always be enough if you fear your mentee is in harm's way. As a caring adult, it is natural to want to intervene swiftly on your mentee's behalf. Concern that your mentee is the target of bullying is one of those instances, and understandably so. By witnessing the extreme effects of bullying in today's media headlines, we have become highly sensitive to this issue. How do we know when to step in and intervene?

The first step is to identify what is really happening. Is the situation your mentee describing really bullying, or is it normal, developmentally appropriate conflict?

[Click here to learn what normal conflict is during ages 6-9](#)

[Click here to learn what normal conflict is during ages 10-14](#)

[Click here to learn what normal conflict is during ages 15-18](#)

Conflict is a part of our everyday life. Although uncomfortable, learning to communicate, problem-solve, and manage conflict builds resilience. As mentors, we can best support our mentees through their conflicts with peers by listening, asking open-ended questions and helping them clarify their feelings.

Beyond normal conflict, bully behavior can have a damaging effect on its target. The impact of bullying can cause immediate distress and trauma, damaging a target's self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Additionally, bullying can lead to high rates of absence in school, physical illness, anxiety, and in more extreme cases, long-term mental health issues.

It is bully behavior when:

- There is an imbalance of power - if two people hold an equal amount of power, one cannot bully the other. An imbalance of power can come from different sources, including age, size, strength and social status.
- It is intentional - people can hurt other people by accident. When the hurt is intentional and meant to cause harm, it is bullying.
- It is repetitive - in most cases, bullying happens repeatedly.
- It is hurtful - either physically or emotionally, or both, and occurs when a person or a group of people hurt, scare, and/or are mean to someone else (or a group) on purpose, usually more than once.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is one way our schools are being proactive in teaching our students how to stand up to bullying. SEL encourages students to communicate their feelings and recognize bully behavior by integrating social and emotional skills into classroom learning. Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making promote a culture of respect and reduce bully behavior.

Seedling Mentors can stand up to bullying by:

- Assuring your mentee that speaking up and sharing the information with you was the right thing to do. Encourage him/her to also share it with the parent or caregiver and the school.
- Empowering your mentee to report the behavior.
Together with your mentee, alert the school that the bully behavior is occurring. The Seedling School Contact or mentee's counselor is your first line of defense.
- Continue to follow up and check in with your mentee. Keeping an open line of communication with your mentee about the bullying is important to ensure it does not continue.

Visit these websites for extensive resources on bullying:

<http://www.austinisd.org/respectforall>

<http://www.parentfurther.com/high-risk-behaviors/bullying/normal-behavior-vs-bullying-behavior#69>

http://static.squarespace.com/static/513f79f9e4b05ce7b70e9673/t/5367958ee4b0dbc1364dbb7b/1399297422536/3_SEL_and_Bullying_Prevention_2009.pdf