



REDIRECTING BEHAVIOR WITH WORDS



Understanding the Bullying Cycle

by Gary Klugiewicz

Bullying is a complex event. It is important for us all to understand that if we have a bullying problem in our school, social group, or workplace, we have a bigger problem than just one person, the bully, acting badly. A bully doesn't operate in a vacuum. The problem encompasses the entire group whether that is a school, a social group, or a workplace.

The Bullying Cycle is made up of:

1. the person who bullies,
2. the victim who gets bullied, and
3. the larger group that allows the bullying to continue. This larger group is made up of both peer group members and persons in authority who allow bullying to occur and continue.

A key point is that bullying continues in any setting only when the group permits it through a sick sort of co-dependency.

In order to disrupt the Bullying Cycle all three of the following components need to be addressed and mobilized:

- The bullied person needs to be empowered to stand up to the bully and to solicit support from both his/her peer group and appropriate authority figures.
- The peer group needs to be empowered to stand up to the bully, resist him/her with their peer group pressure, and solicit support from person in authority figures. The authority figures who witness or are notified of bullying activities must then take appropriate action to keep

everyone safe.

- Even the bully is part of the equation – s/he needs to be reached out to in order to try to stop that behavior. The bully must be placed on notice that the behavior needs to cease or appropriate action will be taken.

Bullying occurs because we (the bully, the bullied, the peer group and persons in authority) allow it. We need to practice the same type of Ethical Intervention that Dr. George Thompson of the Verbal Judo Institute (www.VerbalJudo.com) trains police officers to use when a member of their group acts badly.

Who is responsible for keeping members of our school, group, or workplace safe from bullying? We all are. We need to establish a “Caring Watch” of each other to keep us all safe from inappropriate, intimidating, and possibly physically threatening behavior.

- Persons who act like bullies need to be taught that they don’t need to bully, that they can change, and that their bullying will not be tolerated.
- The person being bullied needs to learn that bullying is not okay and that they have the right not to be bullied. This victim should be taught ways to interrupt the bullying cycle and how to seek out support from his/her peer group and authority figures. Bullying targets must feel that they are able to reach out to their peer group and authority figures for support. This person should expect that their peer group will support them and, if needed, that authority figures will protect them.
- Peer group members need to be trained to understand how to appropriately intervene or, if necessary, notify authority figures to help them manage the bullying. Finally, authority figures need to be trained to recognize bullying behaviors and how to respond appropriately to manage the bullying and that ignoring the problem is harmful to persons under their supervision and harmful to themselves due to liability concerns that rise out of a “failure to protect” someone in their “care and custody.”

Remember, bullying doesn’t occur in a vacuum. It occurs within a system and therefore a systematic approach is needed to manage the

problem. We all need to do our part to keep everyone safe from this kind of misbehavior. Most people who become abusers were themselves abused. Let's stop the Bullying Cycle now by managing bullying one incident at a time.

-- Gary Klugiewicz is a well-known law enforcement speaker and Director of Research and Development for the Verbal Judo Institute. This article was originally published by the [Better Kids Institute](#).
