

Spreading Rumors Is Bullying

Anita was the tallest girl in her class. One group of boys and girls said she must have flunked twice because she was so much taller than everyone else. They spread this rumor to others in the class. They called her a dummy, and they refused to let her take part in games at recess. After a few weeks of trying to deal with the bullying, Anita was so upset that she didn't want to go to school anymore.

Anita's experience is not unique; it's a good example of the type of social bullying that many children face at school. The *Steps to Respect* program defines *bullying* as follows: "Bullying is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose."

Bullying is more than just pushing, hitting, or fighting. Social bullying—as illustrated in Anita's story—also includes things like put-downs, rumors, verbal threats, gossip, hurtful graffiti, and being excluded from groups.

The *Steps to Respect* program teaches students to identify bullying. Students learn that bullying can happen both face-to-face and behind-the-back. Students also learn to respond safely to bullying using assertive behavior.

How can you help? Look for opportunities to help your child practice *Steps to Respect* skills. Start with the following ideas:

1. Increase your child's awareness by pointing out the use of put-downs, rumors, and gossip you notice in TV programs. Discuss how these things affect the characters in the story. Then talk about how people might feel if these behaviors occurred in real life, even between friends. What would happen to the friendships?
2. Help your child think of effective, respectful ways to block put-downs, rumors, and gossip. Talk about some things your child could say to a person repeating a rumor. For example:
 - "I don't like rumors."
 - "That sounds like a put-down to me."
 - "You don't know if that's true."
 - "That sounds like something you should talk about with the person involved."
3. Have your child practice responding assertively to this kind of bullying. Effective behaviors include remaining cool and calm, standing or sitting tall, looking directly at the person, and speaking in a respectful, strong, clear voice.

Thank you for helping us build your child's skills in recognizing and responding to bullying. Together we can create a bullying-free school environment.