

Helping Sikh Children Deal With Bullying

SALDEF
**Sikh American Legal Defense and
Education Fund**

- ❑ *Lately, Gurjeet has been coming home from school in tears. He complains that his classmates touch his patka and call him names.*

- ❑ *Surinder suddenly states that she doesn't want to go to school anymore. She tells you that a group of girls have been teasing her because she doesn't cut her hair.*

Introduction

Bullying is when a child or a group of children hurt or reject another child. Many of our Sikh children may be victims of bullying because they look different.

Bullying is a very serious problem that has the potential to damage the self-confidence of our children, interfere with our children's success in school, and damage the Sikh community as our children may feel they must conform to be a part of mainstream society.

Bullying can make a child feel lonely, unhappy, frightened, unsafe and think that there must be something wrong with them.

Signs that may indicate your child is being bullied include reluctance to go to school, drop in grades, and loss of confidence. Your child may withdraw from family, friends, and community. You may see signs of irritability and moodiness. Your child may try to change their personality and/or appearance to gain acceptance from others.

Ways that children bully include:

- ❑ Teasing
- ❑ Saying or writing nasty comments
- ❑ Leaving your child out of activities or not talking to them.
- ❑ Threatening your child, or making them feel uncomfortable or scared
- ❑ Stealing or damaging their property
- ❑ Hitting or kicking your child
- ❑ Making the bullied child do things they don't want to do.

In the following sections you will find practical tips and advice for Sikh parents and children to address bullying. A list of web sites and books are also provided in the resources section at the end of this article for further research and reading.

Tips For Parents

Here are a few ways in which you can provide support to your child and help your child deal with bullying.

- **If your child is being bullied, listen to what she or he is saying and be supportive.** Ask your child how she or he has been dealing with the bullying, talk about what else can be done and what action both of you can take to solve the problem. Communicate often and openly with your child. Help your child understand that the bullying that they are experiencing is not their fault. Intervene if you hear your child put himself or herself down. Encourage your child to share information about school and school-related activities
- **Refrain from telling your child to “Just ignore the bully.”** The only time that this might work is when the bully teases a child for the first time. By the time a child is consistently being bullied, it is usually too late for this ignoring tactic to be effective.
- **If anything is more important than talking to your child--it is listening to your child.** Resist getting angry or cutting your child off if the teasing results in your child-suggesting behavior that is contrary to Sikhism. Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and experiences of being a Sikh. Allow your child to express him or herself openly. Listen to your child and consider your child's point of view. Do not lecture your child and reserve judgment when your child is expressing him or herself. Keep an open mind when you listen. Don't put your child off when they are asking questions or sharing their feelings, otherwise, you may find that they will stop sharing and looking for explanations.
- **Help your child develop their own problem solving skills--do not jump in to rescue your child.** Help your child make the connection between what she or he wants and what she or he is doing. With these decision-making skills, your child will learn to deal with the world and all of its problems. It is best to allow a child to work out a conflict without adult interference so that she or he may learn how and when to stand up for him or herself. This will help them feel an increasing sense of personal control over life's challenges and problems as they grow up.
- **Discuss ways that your child could react to a particular situation, and let the child role play or practice responses.** A very common and hurtful form of bullying is name-calling. If your daughter hits someone who is calling her names, there is a good chance that she will be the one who ends up being punished by their teachers. Do not tell a bullied child to hit back. You should discuss other ways in which she or he could stand up for himself or herself. Teach your children to never defend themselves from bullies with a gun or other weapon. Help your

child feel empowered by encouraging them to handle the situation in a positive way. Create scenarios for you and your child to practice and model ways to effectively handle bullying. Teach your children to be assertive rather than aggressive or violent when confronted by a bully.

- **Encourage your child to use the adults in the school to assist them in handling a student who continues to bully them.** It is important that your child feel safe at school. Teachers, Counselors and Administrators can help only when they know a problem exists. Encourage your child to always tell an adult they can trust. Explain to them that this isn't tattle-taling. They have a right to be safe. Instruct them to walk away and get help from any available school staff member in more dangerous situations.
- **Discuss bullying with other Sikh parents and community members who may be able to suggest ways to help your child handle bullying.** Remember that your child is not alone in experiencing the pain of being bullied. Ask an older brother, sister, or another older Sikh child to meet with your child to offer support, guidance, and strategies on dealing with bullying. Sometimes, it is easier for children to talk to other children or young adults than it is to talk to their parents and other adults. Suggest that the Gurdwara create opportunities for children to meet and discuss bullying and other challenges that they are facing as young Sikh children.
- **Help your child be proud of being Sikh.** Encourage your child to talk about their feelings and experiences in being a Sikh. Show your child that he or she is special from an early age. Share and develop family and Sikh pride by visiting Gurdwara on a regular basis, and engaging in Sikh community activities such as Sunday School, cultural programs, camps, and social events. Give your child a regular opportunity to develop friendships with other Sikh children. Create family traditions for Sikh religious events e.g. *Vaisakhi, Guru Nanak Dev ji's gurpurab, etc.*
- **Help your child understand their unique Sikh identity and appearance so that they can confidently explain it to others.** Learn as much as you can about Sikhism, that you can best answer your child's questions. *Be prepared to offer practical explanations of Sikhism using real-life examples to which your child can relate.* Make sure that your explanations are appropriate to the maturity and age-level of your child. Do not be embarrassed to tell your child that you don't know an answer. Talk to others who may be able to guide you on answering your child's questions.
- **Encourage confidence in your child by encouraging their interest and abilities and talents through involvement in clubs, sports youth groups, and community**

activities. Highlighting their strengths creates confidence in children and provides them with opportunities to make other friends. Bullies hardly ever pick on people if they're with others in a group. A confident child is less likely to be bullied and will also be better able to deal with any bullying which may occur.

- **Be a role model for your child.** Be aware of your own prejudices, attitude, and language towards individuals and groups that are different from you. Talk to your child directly about your values, standards, and expectations. Become the person that you want your child to become. Teach your child to appreciate and respect cultures and religions different than your own.
- **Become involved in your child's school activities and volunteer opportunities at school.** Take time to go on field trips, volunteer in the classroom, and attend activities that your child is involved in. This will give you an opportunity to understand your child's environment and will help your child's peers understand more about them. It will also reinforce to your child your interest and enthusiasm in their life.
- **Meet with your child's teachers, counselor and/or principal at the beginning of the year to explain your child's unique Sikh appearance and your expectations that any form of bullying will be addressed immediately.** Ask about the school policy and procedure on addressing bullying. Show the classroom teacher how to tie the *patka* on your son if it comes off during the school day. Explain that nobody is ever allowed to touch your child's *patka*. Request to speak to your child's class or have another person speak to the class about why their classmate wears a *patka* and has uncut, long hair. Get involved in cultural, historical, ethnic or Asian heritage events and programs at the school.

When You Have To Intervene

It is best to allow your child to work out conflict by him or herself, but sometimes-parental involvement may be necessary. Always discuss things with your child before you take action. If you don't do this you might damage your relationship with your child.

- **Reassure your child that you will consult them before taking any action.**
- **Work with your child's teachers to find a solution to the bullying.** If you are not happy with a teacher's response to a bullying issue, do not give up. Speak to a counselor or principal or a different teacher. Raise the issue with your child's school and ask them what they will do to stop the bullying - suggest that the school contact the bully's parents.

- **Monitor and record all bullying incidents.** If your child is a victim of bullying at school, keep your own written records of the names, dates, times, and circumstances of bullying incidents. Submit a copy of this report to the school principal.

Tips For Children

Share these tips with your children and make them prepared in case they are bullied:

- **Believe in yourself.** Don't accept that bullying is right and don't believe what the bully says.
- **Walk away or stay in a group.** You are less likely to be bullied when there are other people around.
- It's very hard, but **try not to show you are angry or upset.** If you don't care, the bully can't get to you.
- **Don't fight back.** You could get blamed.
- **Tell someone you trust if you are being bullied.** You will feel better and together you can think of ways to stop the bullying.
- **Practice saying "no" or "leave me alone" at home.** If someone says, "you are ugly," say "thank you". Always **walk with confidence.**

Resources

Call one of the help lines like Safe Schools 1-800-1-8-NO-BULLIES or 1-866-285-5437

A. Web Sites

Stop Bullying Now

<http://www.cary-memorial.lib.me.us/bullyweb/>

Kidscape

<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/>

Contains info about "Help If You Are Being Bullied", "Help If Your Child Is Being Bullied", "Info for Schools", etc.

Bully B'ware

<http://www.bullybeware.com/>

Site offers good books on bullying.

How to Help Your Child Avoid Violent Conflicts

<http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/conflict/docs/avoid.htm>

Preparing Teachers for Conflict Resolution in the Schools

<http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/conflict/docs/ed387456.htm>

Bullies: A Serious Problem for Kids

<http://www.ncpc.org/10adu3.htm>

Child bullying and school bullying

<http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/bullycide/index.htm>

Bullying: What is it?

Types of bullying, bullying tactics, how targets are selected, and the difference between bullying and harassment. An answer to the question "Why me?"

<http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/bully/bully.htm>

The Bullying Project

<http://www.cary-memorial.lib.me.us/bullyweb/bully.htm>

BBC Education: Bullying--A Survival Guide

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/archive/bully/fact.shtml>

Virtual Library on Bullying in Schools

<http://ericcass.uncg.edu/virtuallib/bullying/bullyingbook.html>

Bullying in School: Virtual Library of Resources

<http://www.uncg.edu/edu/ericcass/bullying/DOCS/tableoc.htm>

How to tackle bullying at school

<http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/bullycide/tackle.htm>

B. Books

Bully-Proofing Your Child: A Parent's Guide (\$12.95)

With this great resource, parents can circumvent the bully-victim dynamic and reduce the chances their children will be the targets of bullying. This step-by-step guide shows parents how to work with their children to develop an effective personalized strategy.

<http://www.sopriswest.com:80/swstore/product.asp?sku=573>

Bully-Proofing Your Child: First Aid for Hurt Feelings (\$15.00)
<http://www.sopriswest.com:80/swstore/product.asp?sku=572>

Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do (Understanding Children's Worlds) by Dan Olweus \$22.95
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0631192417/o/qid%3D942027244/sr%3D8-1/107-6008999-3989311>

Bully-Proofing Your Elementary School (Second Edition)
A Comprehensive Approach for Elementary Schools (\$35.00)
<http://www.sopriswest.com:80/swstore/product.asp?sku=13>

Bully-Proofing Your School
A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools (\$35.00)
<http://www.sopriswest.com:80/swstore/product.asp?sku=454>

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About SALDEF:

Founded in 1996 as the Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART), SALDEF is a Washington DC-based national non-profit civil rights and education organization. SALDEF seeks to empower Sikh Americans to participate in all facets of American life and to educate society about the Sikh faith and culture by engaging in legal assistance, educational outreach, media relations, and legislative advocacy.

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