

Mean Child or Bully? Why it Matters

In the last few years, Americans have given attention to the issue of bullying like never before; millions of school children have been given a voice, 49 states in the U.S. have passed anti-bullying legislation, and thousands of adults have been trained in strategies to keep kids safe and dignified in schools and communities. These are significant achievements.

But Signe Whitson, nationally recognized bullying expert, warns that too many gratuitous references to bullying are self-defeating, creating a “little boy who cried wolf” phenomena among professionals and students alike. When rudeness and mean behavior are incorrectly labeled as “bullying,” this actual life-and-death issue among young people loses its urgency. To keep this very real safety issue on the front burner, she advises parents, educators, youth workers and other adults to understand the difference between behavior that is rude, behavior that is mean, and behavior that is characteristic of bullying.

Rude: Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else.

From kids, rudeness might look like burping in someone's face, jumping ahead in line, or bragging about achieving the highest grade. On their own, any of these behaviors could appear as elements of bullying, but when looked at in context, incidents of rudeness are usually spontaneous, unplanned inconsideration, based on thoughtlessness, poor manners, or narcissism, but not meant to actually hurt someone. Kids will often self-correct this behavior, or adults might gently admonish them to mind their manners.

Mean: Purposefully saying or doing something

to hurt someone once (or maybe twice).

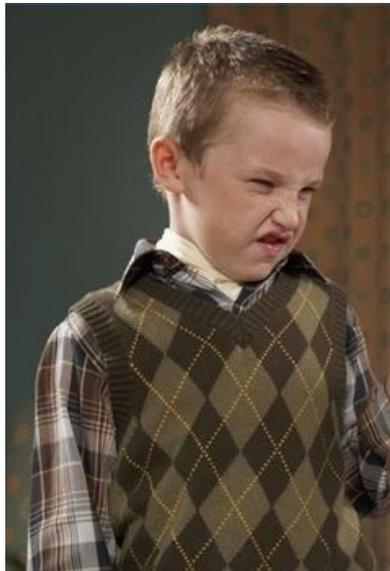
The main distinction between “rude” and “mean” behavior has to do with intention; while rudeness is often unintentional, mean behavior very much aims to hurt or depreciate someone. Kids are mean to each other when they criticize clothing, appearance, intelligence, coolness, or just about anything else they can find to denigrate. Mean behavior is common between peers.

Make no mistake; mean behaviors can wound deeply and adults can make a huge difference in the lives of young people when they hold kids accountable for being mean. Yet, meanness is different from bullying when it comes to intervention.

Bullying: Intentionally aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power.

Experts agree that bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance, and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behavior. Kids who bully say or do something intentionally hurtful to others and they keep doing it, with no sense of regret or remorse—even when targets of bullying show or express their hurt or tell the aggressors to stop. Bullying may be physical, verbal, relational, or carried out via technology. It is typically perpetrated against someone smaller or weaker than the bully in some way either real or perceived.

It is important to distinguish between rude, mean, and bullying behaviors so that teachers, school administrators, police, youth workers, parents, and kids all know what to pay attention to and when and how to intervene. In the case of rude or mean behavior, adults can offer appropriate correction or consequences. In the case of bullying, a child's life may depend on the ability of adults to identify it and their capacity to address it immediately and effectively with both victim and bully.



PROGRAM NEWS

353 pregnant or parenting mothers and guests have participated to date in a safety baby shower sponsored by the Children's Trust Fund. Safety baby showers use a fun, shower-themed atmosphere to provide safety information, materials and products that can help parents provide a safe environment and reduce accidental injury for young children.

The Children's Trust Fund provided many of the basic materials for the showers using a one-time grant from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas. Participating programs also worked with their local partners to obtain refreshments, decorations, door prizes and additional materials for participants. Many of these partners were also eager to assist with planning and staffing the showers.

Participant feedback about the shower program was also positive, with mothers reporting increased confidence in making decisions about their baby's health. Almost all attendees stated that they would recommend attending a safety baby shower to their friends and others.

The Children's Trust Fund hopes to continue the shower program in the future, as it is a relatively simple and popular way for programs to engage others in providing healthy environments for children and their families.



Above: Door prizes assembled for shower participants



Right:
Shower table
centerpieces

Congratulations Graduates!

The Children's Trust Fund extends our congratulations to the program participants who recently completed their education, and wishes them the best of luck in their journeys forward.

PARENTING PAGE

Tips for Communicating with Children

Communication is a basic human need, allowing people to connect with others, make decisions that affect their lives, express feelings and feel part of the community they live in.

Many of the following tips were derived from contributions from parents of children and adults with special needs. For the complete listing of those tips, view the original article “23 Ways to Communicate with a Nonverbal Child” at [The Friendship Circle](#).

“Just because a person can’t speak doesn’t mean they have nothing to say.”

1. Level it up—Playing and talking are easier if you can see each other. Sit so you are at the same level.
2. Talk about it—Children learn from both listening and talking. Even preverbal and nonverbal children benefit from having you tell them what is happening around them.
3. Eye contact—Looking at someone’s face helps you feel more engaged. For children who have a hard time processing words and expressions simultaneously, focusing on a fixed point may help. Figure out what your child prefers.
4. Do you want X or Y?—Helping children decide between two specific choices (X or Y? 1 for yes, 2 for no) works well for both toddlers and kids who are nonverbal.
5. Find other means of expression—Give your children an opportunity to express themselves through action, touch, and noise. And join in with them!
6. Puppets and songs—Some children may find it easier to express themselves when they put words to music, or in the mouths of others.
7. Objects of reference—Use an object (or a labeled picture of an object) to symbolize the activity they are about to participate in e.g. a fork for dinner, towel for bath.
8. Make it match—Your facial expression and tone should echo your verbal message. When you say it makes you sad when your son hits his sister, emphasize the sentiment with a sad expression and a quiet tone.
9. Use your hands—language skills are acquired by listening, but gestures can help clarify or elaborate when used effectively.
10. Personal portfolio—Create a booklet about your child’s preferences, abilities, special needs, etc. This can be an enjoyable activity with a child, or a valuable tool to share with teachers and caregivers.

RESOURCES

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Conference for Home Visitation and Parenting Education

September 23—24, 2013

Hot Springs, AR

Brochures and registration information will be available in late summer.

Ongoing

The Arkansas Home Visiting Training Institute offers free professional development opportunities for home visitors in Arkansas. For more information, visit <http://parenting-ed.org/for-professionals/arkansas-home-visitor-training-institute/training-opportunities/>.

SUMMER SAFETY

Safe Kids Worldwide offers a variety of resources to help parents and caregivers prevent childhood injuries.

Information is organized from age, to risk area, to space and place an injury might occur. Even better, most of the tips are presented in a format that can easily be downloaded and shared.

Visit them at www.safekids.org for tip sheets on boating safety, swimming safety, hot weather safety and more to share with families and friends this summer.

CPR & FIRST AID TRAINING

Numerous organizations around Arkansas offer basic first aid and CPR training for lay persons.

The following are good sources of certified online and classroom training appropriate for non-medical personnel:

American Heart Association

www.heart.org

American Red Cross—Arkansas

www.redcross.org

Local hospitals and health clinics

Two-year colleges

In addition to courses, both the American Heart Association and the American Red Cross offer smart phone apps for first aid and CPR. Information about these tools is available on their respective web sites or through your mobile carrier.

IN TIME FOR FATHER'S DAY

The Children's Trust Fund web site has a resource section [Just for Dad](#) where we share links to some of our favorite sites by and for fathers.

You'll find insight into contemporary fatherhood, tips for engaging dads in your programs, and fun ideas for Father's Day and beyond.

One of our favorite posts, perfect for any new or soon-to-be dad, is [7 Goals for your First 3 Months as a Father](#).

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