

# Inside TSA

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## Bullying 101: What Children, Parents and Teachers Need to Know

**S**choolyard bullies have always existed and adults have often diminished their cruelty saying, “boys will be boys” or “bullies back down when you stand up to them.” But children with Tourette Syndrome are often targeted by their peers for an especially cruel dose of bullying and there are constructive things that parents, teachers and children can do. *Inside TSA* has tapped two experts Megan Moiser, M.A., Olweus Bully Prevention Trainer, who has TS and Kathy Giordano, TSA Education Specialist, for insights and strategies that work.

### Defining Bullying: Sticks and Stones

Bullying shouldn't be confused with friendly teasing or fighting. Megan offers a clear definition of bullying, explaining that three criteria need to be present for a behavior to be bullying: 1: the behavior is done with the intent to harm (physically, emotionally or socially); 2: the behavior is done in a relationship where an imbalance of power exists (power can be a physical difference in size, age or social status); and 3: bullying behavior is repeated over time.



Bullying takes many forms from physical (punching, hitting, spitting, kicking); verbal (name calling, teasing); and emotional, also called “relational aggression” (non-verbal gestures, social isolation, manipulation of friendships, cyber-bullying). Verbal bullying is the most common form for both boys and girls.

Megan recalled her own experience with bullying. “When I was in high school there was a group of boys who would stand in the hallway by our lockers and mimic my tics as I walked by them. They would call me names

like ‘twitcher.’ This is a classic example of bullying behavior, as it was verbal in nature and done in a low supervision environment. No one ever intervened.”

Adults may not be able to distinguish friendly teasing from bullying because the differences are in the relationships between the children. Friends tease in a give and take between equals. All of the participants laugh and smile. Megan advises adults to look at faces. If one child looks scared, uncomfortable or sad, it's a clue that the verbal teasing has crossed a line into bullying.

Fighting, another typical playground behavior, is a completely different phenomenon and the distinction is clear. A fight is a one-time conflict, while bullying is repeated. Determining the difference between joshing friends and verbal bullying is subtle. Some children are simply more accustomed to sarcastic comments, competitive prods, edgy jokes and name-calling. What might be clearly over-the-line for one child is evidence of friendship and affection to another. Adults should be aware of a child's responses and use that as a guide.

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