



Tips to Tame Bullies and #CutTheBull

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During National Bullying Prevention Month in October, Shriners Hospitals for Children® and award-winning actor, model, philanthropist, former patient and Love to the rescue® ambassador R.J. Mitte are working together to raise awareness of bullying via the #CutTheBull campaign.

Born with cerebral palsy, Mitte was bullied as a child and knows firsthand the effects it can have. The physicians and staff at Shriners Hospitals for Children helped Mitte overcome many of the physical effects of cerebral palsy, and helped him gain the confidence needed to rise above other difficult issues, such as bullying. Now a successful actor and model, Mitte wants to help other kids with disabilities who may be experiencing similar situations. He wants to help others become anti-bullying advocates in their communities, and help them #SeeTheAbility in one another to create a more inclusive environment for all children.

“My disability made me a target for bullies,” said Mitte. “Now I have an opportunity to give a voice to people with disabilities. I want the public to see them for who they are and for what they can do.”

Bullying seems to be pervasive throughout our society; unfortunately, it doesn't end with the conclusion of our monthlong campaign.

Youth with special health needs are more likely than their peers to be bullied. This can be due to any number of factors – physical vulnerability, difference in physical appearance, social skill deficits, and/or emotional difficulties – which may increase the risk. Therefore, it is very important to be aware of what is going on in these children's lives and to be ready to provide support and intervention when needed. The annual #CutTheBull campaign supports efforts to raise awareness of the challenges facing children with disabilities and increase support of the programs Shriners Hospitals has in place to give patients the confidence they need to see the ability in themselves, and in others.



WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-age children. It involves a real or perceived power imbalance and the behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. It can take many different forms: teasing, taunting, name calling, glaring looks, cruel jokes, eye rolls, conspiring texts, hurtful gossip (either in person or on social media), the silent treatment, leaving someone out or physical attacks. People who bully are trying to take your power – the strong, smart, confident part of you. They are hurting your feelings over and over with actions or words that are meant to be hurtful.

WHY DO PEOPLE BULLY?

Most often, bullies do not feel good about themselves. But hurting others is not the way to feel better. In fact, being a bully usually makes a person feel worse, because someone who bullies others can't really be proud of the person he or she is. An individual may bully because he or she:

- Is lonely
- Is sad
- Is angry
- Was bullied at home
- Isn't very confident
- Has problems they don't know how to fix
- Is trying to fit in

HOW SHOULD YOU REACT WHEN BEING BULLIED?

There is no one right way to deal with bullying. What may feel right for one person may not for another. What is important is that you look at what is happening, what you have tried so far, and what options you may have. Then, figure out a plan and decide who can help you. Here are some examples of how to react when you are being bullied:

- **Shrug it off.** Look bored, avoid eye contact and think to yourself, "Whatever" or "I don't care."
- **Tell the bully to stop** in a calm and cool way: "Stop glaring at me," or "I want you to stop telling everyone I'm a cheater. It is not true."
- **Just walk away** without acknowledging the bully. If online or texting, type "gotta go" and log off. Don't respond to mean messages directed at you.
- **Tell someone if it keeps happening.** First, tell a parent, counselor or teacher to see if it can be addressed at that level and then tell the school administrator or other adult in charge if more intervention is needed. It is not tattling if you report this kind of behavior to an adult.
- **Stay strong.** Being bullied makes it difficult to concentrate in school and to have fun with your friends. Kids who bully are looking for an emotional reaction from you. Instead, follow these tips to look and feel strong:

- o Act confident by holding your head up high and looking people in the eye. Acting confident can actually help you to feel more confident.
- o Take a break when you need one. Get a drink of water or even splash water on your face when you are feeling upset.
- o Take a few long, deep breaths. Breathe in confidence and strength and breathe out your stress and worry.
- o Let it out. Think about an adult you can talk to when you are having a tough day. If no one is there at that moment, write your feelings down so you can talk about them later.

- **Do what you love.** Take part in activities, interests and hobbies that you like. You can volunteer, play sports, sing in a chorus, or join a youth group or school club. These activities give you a chance to have fun and to meet others with the same interests as yours. These activities can build confidence and friendships that will help to protect you from being bullied.
- **Get support.** Now is the time to take extra care of yourself and to get support from those closest to you. Spend time talking to your parents or your caregivers, your siblings, your friends, and even to a counselor or a psychologist if your feelings are interfering with your ability to get through the day. You do not need to go through this difficult experience alone.

WHAT SHOULD YOU NOT DO IN RESPONSE TO BULLYING?

- Don't engage with the bully.
- Try not to show the bully you are angry or upset.
- Don't stay home from school or avoid your normal everyday activities to avoid the bully.
- Don't keep the bullying a secret. Share what is happening with your parents or another trusted adult.
- Don't become a bully or try to get even. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Many schools also have bullying hotlines or prevention programs that can be contacted for support. In addition, each state has its own laws regarding bullying. Do some research to identify the relevant laws in your state.

Working together, we can help make bullying go away and #CutTheBull.



#CutTheBull