




stand up,  
speak out!

It's not uncommon to get tangled in some real-life mean-girl drama, but you should never keep quiet about it. By Jazmin Kelly Six



**C**ontrary to the old adage, sticks and stones can break your bones, and words can definitely harm you. In a recent survey conducted by the Coalition Against Bullying for Children & Youths (CABCY), one in eight students aged between seven and 16 reported being bullied on a regular basis. But bullying is not just an experience of the moment — it can leave a permanent mark. Many bully victims fail to thrive in adulthood — they are fearful, experience isolation, have difficulties standing up for themselves and distrust relationships. It is important to identify potentially harmful situations (and people) and beat the bully.

### Are you a victim?

If you face any of the scenarios below, it's time to speak up.

#### • Verbal Abuse

The most prevalent form of victimisation, verbal bullying is the use of words to hurt or shame victims. It can include making threats or insults, name-calling, spreading rumours, extortion, intimidation, racial teasing and the use of vulgarities.

#### • Physical Abuse

Physical bullying is the easiest to detect and perhaps the most pressing as it can result in serious injuries. It is deliberate aggression against a person, such as hitting, pushing, slapping, kicking and intentional damage to the victim's property.

#### • Relational Abuse

Extremely common among girls, relationship bullies harm their peers through purposeful manipulation. They often resort to social exclusion, withdrawal of friendship or sabotaging the victim's relationships by using their friendship as a weapon or a condition.

#### • Cyber Abuse

A fast-rising form of bullying, cyber aggression involves bullying others with the use of technology. It includes sending threatening or hurtful text messages via SMS or the Internet (ie in e-mails, blogs, social networking websites like Friendster or Facebook, instant chat messages and online forums).

### A victim voices out

#### "I was made to feel like an outcast"

"Born in Laos, I moved to New Zealand when I was 14 to attend high school, hoping to brush up on my command of the English language as well as gain independence at the same time. However, it didn't take long before the excitement died down and turned into a harsh nightmare. ➡

### How does bullying affect the victim?

Psychiatrist Dr Ng Koon Hock reveals that bullying may cause emotional damage, such as:

- Stress or hypersensitivity
- Depression or a sense of helplessness
- Poor self-esteem
- Inability to trust others
- Insecurity
- Preoccupation with hurt and injustice
- Anger and impulsiveness
- Performance impairment
- Desire to become a bully to rebuild a sense of empowerment

### Protect yourself!

- Never go to deserted places,
- Talk to someone. Get help from adults.
- Bullies enjoy the reactions of victims. Try not to show fear.
- Do not give away personal details or write personal feelings on your blog. Bullies can use them against you.
- Walk away. Do not stay in their presence long enough for them to do anything.

I was often mocked by the local girls for not being able to speak well. They would humiliate me by exclaiming they couldn't understand me, or insult me and then laugh loudly with their friends. My confidence was eroded, and I became very embarrassed to speak English.

To make matters worse, I was made a prefect, and nobody liked a member of a minority bestowed with some sort of "power". They made it very clear that I was unwelcome.

I felt strongly prejudiced against, and I couldn't understand why. I paid so much to be away from my loved ones, only to suffer mindless bigotry and loneliness. I pressurised myself to fit in. I tried to be cool in front of the locals, speak in their accent, even behave the way they did, but I was still ostracised.

Later, I found solace in a group of international students who became my friends. It was with them that I finally felt at home. The racism never did stop, but having a support group made things easier.

The important thing is to be adaptable and stay away from people who are hurtful. If things get out of hand, seek help. Taking matters into your own hands may backfire." — **Stacey, 21**

### Why bullies bully

There are many reasons why bullies do what they do. According to psychiatrist Dr Pavarthi Pathy, they may not understand they are hurting people due to a lack of empathy. Others may have witnessed bullying and in turn copy the behaviour.

Bullies usually lack social and interpersonal skills. They may feel a sense of rejection and see bullying as a way of interaction that gives a sense of "self-control". They get their thrills from hurting others as bullying gives them a sense of empowerment.



### Unmask the menace

Look out for these telltale signs of a bully in the making. Is she:

- popular with many friends?
- less prone to anxiety?
- more aggressive?
- less empathetic?
- disrespectful towards others?
- unable to manage anger?

### Real-Life Taunting

**1** Thirteen-year-old American Megan Meier hanged herself in October 2006 after her cyber friendship with a cute teenage boy named "Josh Evans" ended abruptly. For several weeks, they had flirted via e-mail, and just before the relationship was cut off, "Josh" called Megan a "liar and slut" and told her "the world would be a better place without her". Little did she know that "Josh" was actually Lori Drew, the mother of her schoolmate, who wanted to seek revenge against Megan for spreading gossip about her daughter.

**2** Three Hong Kong girls aged 16, 15 and 12 were charged in court in July 2004 for torturing their 16-year-old friend after accusing her of spreading rumours. The confrontation took place at the staircase landing of a building, where the victim was kicked and punched. Her hair was cut short, her T-shirt was cut to expose her breasts, and she was burnt with a cigarette. The bullies also threw urine at her and forced her to strip while they photographed her nude.

**3** Eighteen-year-old Nur Rizan Mohd Sazali was jailed for 26 months in September 2008, after being convicted of torturing her Indonesian housekeeper, Ms Badingah, by forcibly extracting her teeth, pouring boiling wax on her head and caning her. Ms Badingah, who was accused of stealing, had serious and extensive injuries when she jumped out of the kitchen window of the second-storey flat and ran for her life.

### Don't Suffer in Silence

A bully only has power if the victim gives it. Get help immediately if you find yourself trapped in a compromising situation.

**Singapore Children's Society Youth Service Centre** tel: 6253-1124  
**Students Care Service** tel: 6286-9905

**Coalition Against Bullying for Children & Youths**

Seek advice online at **eCounselling Centre** ([www.ec2.org.sg](http://www.ec2.org.sg)), a professional online counselling facility run by Project 180 (Youth Services).