If You Think You Might be a Bully

So you think you might be bullying others? The first step is admitting that you are doing it. We know this sounds a little cheesy, but how can you fix something if you don't know what is wrong with it?

The first question you should be asking yourself is: **What is wrong?**

There are a lot of reasons why people bully others but usually they are dealing with something in their personal life.

* Family problems
* Being bullied themselves
* Feeling lonely
* Feeling jealous of someone
* Feeling the need to portray a certain image to their friends
* Bullying because of pressure from a group
* Feeling bad about themselves so they want others to feel bad too
* Feeling like they are not being heard or treated right so they try to intimidate others to get attention

Think about what is happening when you bully someone. Ask yourself:

* What am I feeling?
* What am I thinking about?
* Why am I doing this?

The answers to these questions can help you pinpoint why you are treating others this way.

Once you have figured out why, you can then decide what to do next. Here are some things to think about:

1. Think about the victim: Most people have bullied someone at some point in their lives, but they usually feel sorry about it afterwards and try to not do it again.
   1. Think about how you would feel if you were the victim.
   2. Go back and read through the effects of bullying.
   3. Remember that when you bully others, you are hurting yourself too.
2. Learn to control your anger and aggression
   1. Choose to be assertive rather than aggressive.
   2. Be aware of when you feel like you might bully someone. Create an Action Plan for what you will do next time you feel this way.
   3. Use breathing techniques to calm yourself down.
   4. Always think about the consequences of your actions.
3. Find a more productive way to deal with what you are going through
   1. Talk to friends.
   2. Play a sport.
   3. Join a club.
   4. Write! Keep a diary, blog, or notebook.
   5. Exercise - Running is a great way to let off steam and it is personal time to think about things.
4. Apologize to your former victims if possible
   1. Do this privately.
   2. Don't be upset if they do not forgive you right away. In time they will.
   3. Show the victim as much as possible the "new you."
5. Ask teachers or counselors if you can help other bullies or victims
   1. Ask to be a peer mentor to other bullies or victims.
   2. Give a talk in your class about how you have changed.
   3. When you see someone being bullied, stand up, step in, and help stop the bullying.
6. Set goals for how to stop bullying. They can be small goals or large goals, but say them out loud or write them down.
   1. *“I will not start gossip today.”*
   2. *“I will not put Carrie down today.”*
   3. *“I will say something nice.“*
   4. *“I will stand up for a victim.”*
7. Make new friends. You may be hanging out with people who influence and encourage your bullying habits.

You may find that the actions you are taking at first do not seem natural or that you are pretending to be someone else. You may even find yourself slipping back into your old ways. This is okay - **nobody can change overnight.**

Eventually though, if you **keep at it, you will begin to find that you like the change.** People will respond to you in a much more positive way and you will find that your friendships are based on people liking you rather than being afraid of you.

**What if nothing I am doing is working?**

If you discovered that the reason you are bullying others is something that you cannot fix, such as problems at home, you are upset over a break-up, or you feel angry on a regular basis, you need to talk to an adult. There are many people who can help you:

* Anyone who helps victims can also help you, such as teachers, school counselors, and coaches.
* You may be afraid you will get in trouble for admitting you bullied someone, but this is not the case. You will be surprised at how much people want to help you stop bullying.
* The guidelines for telling an adult that you have been bullying others are the same as those for telling an adult when you have been bullied:
  + Tell the adult what you want from them: advice, actions, or just someone to talk to.
  + You can write a letter, an email, or ask a friend to go with you.
  + Remember that adults can help you problem solve and talking with them can help relieve some of the stress you are feeling which may be a perfect starting point for change.

**If you do not feel comfortable talking to an adult you can use any of the following websites and phone lines**

* BRAVE: Building Respect, Acceptance, and Voice through Education
  + Offers 24/7 connection to professionals who can provide supportive listening and intervention
  + 212-709-3222

* Bully Hotline
  + Offers 24/7 connection to professionals who can talk to you about problems you are having with being bullied or bullying someone else
  + 215-400-SAFE

* National Hotlines
  + 1-800-4CHILD
  + 1-800-273-TALK

* Your Life, Your Voice
  + A website for kids and teens to go to when they are feeling frustrated, depressed or just need someone to talk to
  + [www.yourlifeyourvoice.org](http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org)
  + The site offers
    - Bulletin boards
    - Live chats with a counselor Monday - Thursday 7:30 p.m. -12:00 a.m.
  + 24/7 phone line 1-800-448-3000

* STOMP Out Bullying
  + 24/7 help chat online
  + 1-877-602-8559