



Keep Kids Kind

Tips & Techniques

with

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The Role of a Teacher

The Primary Role of a Teacher is to Teach. Most humans will revert to negative behaviors unless they are taught to behave differently. Positive behaviors need to be taught to children the same way we teach them other basic skills, like tying their shoes.

Teaching good *Middos*, appropriate social behaviors, conflict management, core values, social skills, respect, manners, etc. are the **most important skills** a teacher or Rebbe has the opportunity to impart. Every stage of a child's growth requires an additional skill set that must be taught. Teach your students to be kind.

"They will figure it out on their own" is NOT an acceptable policy.

Bullying vs. Maladaptive Social Behavior

Bullying is defined as the intentional abuse of power with the intent to harm others. (Eg. A child who pushes another child off a swing just for the sake of hurting him.)

Maladaptive Social Behavior is defined as inappropriate behaviors that make it difficult to get along with others. (Eg. A child who pushes another child off a swing because he wants the swing.)

The Alpha Personality vs. The Mean Kid

Let's face it, some kids are just mean, while some kids are Type A, Alpha personality types, or natural leaders who have a strong need to excel. Behaviors that come across as mean, like excluding a weak player, may stem from this need to win rather than spite.

The Victim vs. The Loner

A child who wants to join a class game and is being excluded is a victim. A child who doesn't enjoy sports and genuinely prefers to unwind alone, is not. As long as a child is content and prefers alternative recess activities, it is perfectly fine not to force them to join the group.

Types of Bullying

Overt Bullying- Open physical or verbal attacks, more likely to be committed by boys.

Covert Bullying- Subtle and harder to detect forms of aggression that are easier for the perpetrator to deny like exclusion or emotional intimidation. More likely to be committed by girls.

The Teacher/Rebbe's Toolbox

Inquiry Based Practice vs. Problem Solving Practice. This may be counter-intuitive as we tend to look for solutions, discipline and move on. When a teacher has to play **judge or jury** to resolve a confrontation between students, getting to the real story is important. Calmly **ask** questions, **listen** with genuine interest. You may be surprised at what you learn.

Creating vs. Problem Solving. Address bullying, "Cliques", and negative social dynamics by pre-emptive 'creating' rather than dealing with issues as they come up. Shift students into positive class dynamics by **creating a culture of kindness and inclusion** in your classroom. When you promote small acts of positive behavior on a regular basis, like holding a door open for someone, complimenting, and encouraging, then negative behaviors tend to fall away. *An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.*

Take the Lead. The best way to teach good *Middos* is by example. Join your class for recess to model positive dynamics and social skills. We know it's a big sacrifice to give up your break, but teachers report that joining the class for recess the first few weeks of school will lead to fewer social problems for the rest of the year. Establish a method for making fair teams, and model inclusiveness and encouragement ("Nice try Reuven"). A teacher who is more engaged will pick up on subtle forms of bullying before they get out of hand.

Girls vs. Boys. Just as a rebbe can help boys learn to be inclusive when playing group sports, a teacher can teach social graces and help girls learn to invite others into a group discussions. These scenarios will come up constantly in real life at simchos, bungalow colonies, etc.

Class Rules. Class rules should mandate inclusion, forbid name calling and be strictly enforced.

Empower the Bystanders. Kids won't stand up to bullies out of fear of becoming the next target, but there is strength in numbers. If the kids are very aware of the class rules and secure in the knowledge that they are enforced, they will feel comfortable speaking up. Inclusivity is a notion that should be continually reinforced.

Connection Before Correction. The Mechanchim who truly stand out are those who take the time to forge a personal connection with every student. All it takes is a few seconds a day to show that you care. A personal relationship makes discipline easier and more effective. This type of positive engagement can impact a child's entire future.

Personality Clashes. Sometimes a Rebbe or teacher's style doesn't jive with the personality of one of the students. If you are having a harder time connecting with a particular student, consider whether that student requires a different approach.

Role-Playing. Role-playing is an invaluable educational tool. It can be used to help an aggressor learn better communication skills, help a victim learn techniques to mitigate bullying, or help a class learn the difference between being passive or active bystanders.

Perspective Taking. Like role-playing, perspective taking helps shift a child's outlook and inculcate values. Teach an alpha personality that being kind makes you a winner-even when you lose the game, or a queen bee to see that her nasty behavior isn't admired. Help a victim understand that a bully is to be pitied rather than feared. Conduct some class exercises to help students experience what it feels like to be included, excluded, encouraged, etc.

Cognitive Reframe. Help students with strong personalities to use their strengths in a positive way. “You are such a great player and I know how much you love to win. I am so impressed that you let weaker kids play. That’s really special.”

From Victim to Victor

Reactivity. This is the number one reason some children become perpetual victims. Bullies feed off a victim’s reaction, which gives them a feeling of power. A bully may initially pick on a child whose personality, looks or behavior make them an “obvious” potential target, but how that child reacts will determine whether or not the bullying becomes chronic. Use every tool at your disposal to hammer home this message. Reduced reactivity = reduced bullying.

Absorbing the Punch. Fighting back adds fuel to the fire. You can’t argue or fight with someone who won’t engage. You can also teach a victim to respond by looking the bully in the eye or cracking a joke. Role-play these scenarios to empower a victim.

Disarm a Bully with Kindness. Remaining calm and responding to bullying with kindness, an apology, or even open envy will take the fight out of them.

Bully: “You’re so fat!”

Victim: “I wish I was as skinny as you.”

An exchange like this takes the wind out of a bully’s sails.

Model Supportive Language. Bystanders can provide valuable support even when they are too afraid to stand up for a victim. Teach kids to say things like “I saw what happened. That wasn’t nice.”

Build Confidence. Every child needs to develop their sense of identity. Help students pinpoint their own strengths and interests. Steer students towards a hobby or bring out a talent to make every kid feel special.

From Friendly to Friend. Victims often feel isolated and develop a diminished sense of self which makes it even more challenging for them to make friends, while children are drawn to those who exude power and are fearful of becoming target if they befriend a victim. A rebbe/teacher can

orchestrate friendships and help build a support team for a victim by either directly encouraging three or four kids to interact with him, or by initiating fun group activities that will set friendships in motion.

Do's & Don'ts

Don't wait until negative class dynamics develop before addressing social issues.

Do take a proactive stance by establishing rules and joining your class for recess the first few weeks of school to enforce and model good social skills.

Don't make a general announcement that every student has to include Reuven or Leah which will generally result in pushback and make the victim feel like a nebach case.

Do approach several children who seem like potential candidates to befriend a victim or child who is being excluded, and create opportunities for them to work together outside of class time. Encourage a friendship

Don't label a child "mean" when in fact they may just be a Type A personality looking to win at all costs.

Do take the time to consider the facts and use perspective taking or role-playing to help a child re-define their goals.

Don't allow one student to become the class king or queen.

Do help create a healthy balance through regular group activities. Break up an "Alpha group" by dividing its members among other groups.

Don't focus solely on the bully and victim.

Do teach bystanders to stand up collectively. Empower them with rules and catch-phrases. "In our class everyone is included. It's the rule."