A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PARENTS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY **EMILY BAZELON**, AUTHOR OF

STICKS AND STONES: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy

I put together this resource list as I did the reporting for my book, taking notes as I went on the many promising programs, books, films, and organizations I learned about along the way. The list isn't comprehensive so much as a work in progress: I add to it as I learn about new ventures. It's a series of entry points to the field of bullying prevention—which continues to grow. I hope this list will serve as a valuable jumping off point for your needs.
—Emily

MOVIES/VIDEOS

- *Growing Up Online* A PBS Frontline production about digital risks and opportunities for kids: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/

BOOKS

- *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls* by Lyn Mikel Brown. An informed, academic view of how girls hurt each other—and how our culture exaggerates this harm—by an education professor and activist. For parents and educators with the patience for academic prose.

- *Columbine* by Dave Cullen. The product of years of investigation into the 1999 suburban Colorado high school shooting, this groundbreaking work of reporting and thoughtful analysis deserves all the praise it has received. Cullen is especially sharp in writing about the psyches of the two shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. An excellent read for everyone, teenagers included.

- *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* by Mizoku Ito. A set of essays about growing up in the digital era, and how their access to the online world is changing kids. An ethnographic investigation, with 23 cases studies, written accessibly.

- *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* and *The Blessing of a B Minus* by Wendy Mogel. The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, by Wendy Mogel. My favorite parenting guide: Indispensible, practical advice for parents aboutg how to raise kids to be resilient. This book is written largely for parents of young children; for parents of teenagers, Mogel followed up with more excellent advice in The Blessing of a B Minus.

- *Schoolgirls* by Peggy Orenstein. The author vividly describes the lives of a variety of girls from two different schools in California, weaving in research to explore why adolescents think the way they do.

- *You Can't Say You Can't Play* by Vivian Paley. In this short classic, a kindergarten teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory School dissects social rejection among elementary school children. To combat it, she encourages students to say "you can't say you can't play"—and best of all, tells us their reactions. A great read.

- *The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth* by Alexandra Robbins. Mapping the social hierarchy of high school, from popular to outcast, this book follows seven kids with an eye to the qualities that make them stand apart and their journeys to self-awareness. Perceptive and well told.

- *Oddly Normal* by John Schwartz. A New York Times reporter's acutely felt memoir about raising his gay son, who tried to kill himself after coming out to his classmates at the age of 13. Especially insightful about the challenges of advocating for a child with unresponsive school officials.

- *Odd Girl Out* by Rachel Simmons. An award-winning, pioneering book about the social intricacies of girlhood. Simmons is especially good on the subtlety with which girls can undermine each other—and the strength they can offer through friendship. In an updated 2011 edition she offers ideas for coping with bullying in person and on the Internet.

- *Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry* by Lenore Skenazy. A screed against helicopter parenting: With zest and vigor, the author argues that giving children more freedom at a relatively young age will teach them to be independent, and that's all to the good. A polemic that will especially appeal to like-minded parents.

- *Talking Back to Facebook: The Common Sense Guide to Raising Kids in the Digital Age* by James P. Steyer. The head of Common Sense Media argues for setting limits on kids' Internet use and other screen time. With helpful age-based guidelines.

- *Queen Bees and Wannabes* by Rosalind Wiseman. The inspiration for the movie *Mean Girls,* this book canny analyzes the social structure of "Girl World". Wiseman offers smart advice to both teenagers and adults. A classic of the genre.

- *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads* by Rosalind Wiseman. The author extends her sharp analysis to the world of adults, offering advice about how to deal with conflicts with teachers, coaches, and difficult fellow parents.

ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

- **The American Federation of Suicide Prevention** is dedicated to decreasing the number of suicides across the country. AFSP funds scientific research related to suicide prevention, hosts programs for those who have been affected by suicide or are at risk, and educates the public about suicide prevention. http://www.afsp.org/

- **The Berkman Center for Internet & Society** at Harvard University explores cyberspace, studying its development, dynamics, norms, and standards, and assessing when and whether laws and sanctions are needed. http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/

- **The Born This Way Foundation** created by pop star Lady Gaga, focuses on youth empowerment and equality by supporting programs that address bullying and crises of identity. http://bornthiswayfoundation.org/

- **The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use** helps youth, families, and schools manage Internet use and online risk. http://csriu.org/

- **Common Sense Media** advocates for kids in the world of media and technology. It offers reviews and advice for parents about movies, TV programming and games and has a campaign called Stand Up to Cyberbullying. http://www.commonsensemedia.org/cyberbullying

- **The Crimes Against Children Research Center** at the University of New Hampshire conducts research on the problems of child victimization and maltreatment and family violence. http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/

- **The Cyberbullying Research Center** provides information about the nature and consequences of online harassment and cruelty. The center's website functions as a clearinghouse for information about the use and misuse of technology, providing data, narratives, and resources to fight online aggression. http://www.cyberbullying.us/

- **The Family Acceptance Project** at San Francisco State University does research, education, intervention and policy work on behalf of LGBT youth. The project tries to alleviate the risks of suicide, substance abuse, HIV and homelessness by working with teenagers and their families. With the goal of helping families from varied cultural backgrounds mitigate suicide risk, FAP has developed a series of multicultural, research-based materials offering "Best Practice" guidance for families of LGBT youth.

- **The Gracie Academy Bullyproof** program uses martial arts as a form of self-defense. Instructors advise students to deal with conflict through dialogue and, if attacked, to use martial arts to gain control until help arrives. http://www.gracieacademy.com/bully_proof.asp

- **The Sikh Coalition** is a community-based civil and human rights group that focuses particularly on assuring that Sikhs can practice their faith freely while being part of their local communities. The groups works to mitigate backlash violence, including bullying, against Sikhs, Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians. http://www.sikhcoalition.org/

- **The Southern Poverty Law Center** has brought successful lawsuits on behalf of bullied students, including a recent case for LGBT students in the Anoka-Hennepin school district in Minnesota. It provides materials on teaching tolerance, including the documentary "Bullied" about Jamie Nabozny's lawsuit. http://www.splcenter.org/

- **Stopbullying.gov** a federal government website, has information and resources about and who is at risk for bullying, and how to prevent and combat it, from government agencies including the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services.

A Q&A WITH EMILY

Dan Olweus, a Scandinavian psychologist who launched the field of studying bullying, came up with a good definition in 1969. He limits bullying to verbal or physical aggression that occurs repeatedly and involves a power differential— one or more children lording their status over another. That definition is still standard among academics.

It seems like every week, there is a bullying story in the news. Is this because bullying has become more prevalent, or because we are more aware of it?

Bullying isn't really on the rise, according to the studies that have tracked it over the past 25 years. But recent stories about bullying have gotten a ton of national attention and raised our antennae. So have laws that increasingly require schools to address bullying. Also, bullying does feel more pervasive for a lot of kids when it happens, because it often extends to the Web, which they can access 24/7. Going home from school used to be a respite for kids who were being targeted. That's often no longer true. And now that bullying happens on social networking sites and in text messages, it is more lasting, more visible, more viral. That's how the problem has morphed over the last decade.

Is there a crisis of bullying in the nation's schools?

Bullying is definitely not an epidemic, as you sometimes hear. And increasingly, schools are trying to address it. But they're not having uniform success, of course, and some of their efforts tend to be ineffectual, like one-time assemblies, or straitjacketed, like zero-tolerance policies.

What are the most common perceptions parents and educators have about bullying?

I hear parents complain about schools that aren't doing enough and I hear principals complain about regulations that bury them in paperwork. There are some good programs for addressing bullying, which I write about in my book, but they take real work. Across the country, dealing with bullying is very much a work in progress.

What do you say to educators and adults who say bullying is just "kids being kids"?

It's not! The vast majority of kids do not bully. And the ongoing cruelty that bullying involves can do serious damage. This is not a problem to be shrugged off— that's just nuts.

OK, but at the same time, is much of what gets talked about as bullying in the media in fact better described as general meanness? Do you see an important distinction there?

Yes. The Olweus definition is helpful precisely because it's limiting—it makes clear that two-way, mutual conflict is not bullying. At the same time, when bullying is going on, it's a form of mistreatment that kids often find very upsetting and that links up with serious problems like mental health problems and low academic performance. That's true for both bullies and targets. So, the bullying label is one we should use sparingly, because when it applies, it has real significance.

First, make sure you have all the facts. Sometimes an accusation of bullying can seem simple and turn out to be more multidimensional once you understand the full context. Your job, of course, is to support your child. And sometimes it will be very clear that he or she is in the role of victim and needs your protection. Sometimes, however, you will learn that she is caught up in drama and has played an active role, rather than being simply at the mercy of bullying. The first step toward offering the most useful help is to make sure that you have a thorough understanding of what's going on. It's important to protect your child but it's also important not to cry wolf about bullying. And if what's happening really is bullying, the more specific examples you can cite, the better for making your case.

Once you feel confident you have the whole picture, you should think about whether it makes sense to reach out to the parents of other kids who are involved. If you have reason to think they're part of the problem, or you don't know them at all, this may not be a wise course of action. But don't decide against it just because broaching the subject would be awkward. If you have reason to think the other parents involved are reasonable and trustworthy people, you may be able to work together for everyone's benefit. It's great to be able to model to your children how to resolve conflict in a healthy way. Sometimes, however, if you're dealing with a difficult family, it makes sense to urge your child to extricate herself from a bad friendship. If she is close to someone who is making her feel rotten, maybe she needs to walk away.

Remember that even legitimate complaints can boomerang if they're not carefully framed. If school officials aren't responding the way you think they should, you may have to keep pushing by going up the chain of command. But remember they are people, too, with a heaping plate of responsibilities and duties, and the more you respect the role they play, the more likely they may be to sympathize. At least give them the benefit of the doubt for starters and save the frontal attack until you really feel you have no other choice.

Let's say you have a child who is being bullied online or via texting, and the school administration says they can't police that. What should you do, as a parent?

First off, if this is happening on a social network site, you can ask the site to take down any content that violates its rules, as many harassing posts do. If the site happens to be Facebook, when the target of an abusive post reports it himself or herself, they will generally take his or her word for it, they told me. So your child should report the abuse to them. You should also print out mean content, or take a screen shot, so you have a record of it—even if you feel like you'd rather make it go away by deleting it. It's almost never a good idea to reply to a harassing post. If you're child is having continuing trouble on a social networking site, you might counsel him or her to take a break for a while (though that can be a hard sell!) They can always go back when things have calmed down.

Police have the authority to address cyberbullying under the harassment laws of most states. If you think the situation warrants the involvement of law enforcement and that they'll be helpful, you can involve them. But this should be a thought-through decision rather than a knee-jerk reaction because it can also trigger a response that's more heavy-handed than the misconduct calls for.

This isn't an exhaustive list, and as I mentioned, some schools are best served by programs that address social and emotional learning, or school climate, or character building more broadly. But to answer the question: I like the anti-bullying approach that's part of Positive Behavioral and Interventions Supports (bad name, I know, PBIS for short). PBIS is a framework for improving school discipline, and research has shown it can reduce the rate of office referrals, suspensions and expulsions, and bullying.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, founded in Norway, works with schools on three levels—the campus, the classroom, and the individual student. In the United States, the federally funded Blueprints for Violence Prevention assessed more than 900 programs for juveniles and chose Olweus as one of only a dozen proved to be effective, and the only program specifically directed at bullying.

Second Step and Steps to Respect, two programs from the Committee for Children in Seattle, aim to prevent bullying by strengthening the bonds between adults and children in schools. Research has shown that Steps to Respect can reduce the acceptance of bullying and aggression among participating students.

Bullyproofing Your School, a program run in conjunction with the National Center for School Engagement, is designed to battle bullying through the creation of the "caring majority"—a group of students who ensure that their school is a safe place.

Roots of Empathy is a Canadian program that brings babies into classrooms, with their parents, to teach kids about infant development and caring for others. Students who have participated have shown less aggressive behavior, more acts of kindness, and better understanding of babies and their emotions.