

Parent tips for raising strong readers and writers

Growing readers!

Brought to you by Reading Rockets, Colorín Colorado and LD OnLine

Standing Up to Bullying: Children's Books to Build Social and Emotional Skills

Learn some basic facts about bullying, a growing problem affecting our schools and our communities. Children's books can help our kids see the world from different perspectives and build empathy. In this article, you'll find books we recommend for strengthening social and emotional learning, as well as books that deal with bullying head-on.

What is bullying?

Children tease and can sometimes play roughly, and caring adults can guide children towards kindness. But bullying is different. It is **deliberate**, done with the intention of hurting someone. It is **repeated** — a child who bullies often targets the same child again and again. And it involves a **power imbalance**, where the child who bullies usually chooses a classmate thought to be vulnerable in some way.

Bullying can express itself in these ways:

Physical: using physical actions to hurt, including hitting, pushing, kicking, and beating up

Verbal: using words to hurt, including yelling, name-calling, taunting, insulting, and threatening to harm

Social: using friendships to hurt, including excluding, spreading rumors, and turning friends against each other

Cyberbullying: using cell phones, social media, and online gaming to send and widely share hurtful messages or images

Bullying is a growing problem, affecting our schools and our communities. Increasingly (especially for older children), it is happening online, expanding the number of kids who get bullied and bully others. The Internet can provide a shield for bullies to hide behind, but it certainly does not protect the targets of bullying.

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The child who is being bullied feels the emotional or physical sting sharply and can feel powerless; classmates who witness the bullying often don't know what to do; and the child doing the bullying is struggling, too, with anger issues and more.

How can schools and families work together to stop bullying? It starts with creating a school culture that embraces and celebrates diversity and differences, has zero tolerance for bullying behavior, embeds social and emotional learning (SEL) opportunities in classrooms and school events, and provides guidance for teachers on responding to bullying in a direct, effective, and loving way — supporting the child being bullied, the bystanders, and the child who is bullying.

There are excellent online guides and toolkits for schools to use, including [Eyes on Bullying Toolkit](#).

The powerful bookshelf

At Reading Rockets, we believe in the power of books to help children see the world from different perspectives and build empathy. Children who can empathize respond to others with thoughtfulness and understanding. Why is my classmate wearing a headscarf indoors? A beautiful picture book about choosing a new hijab for the first day of school can open windows.

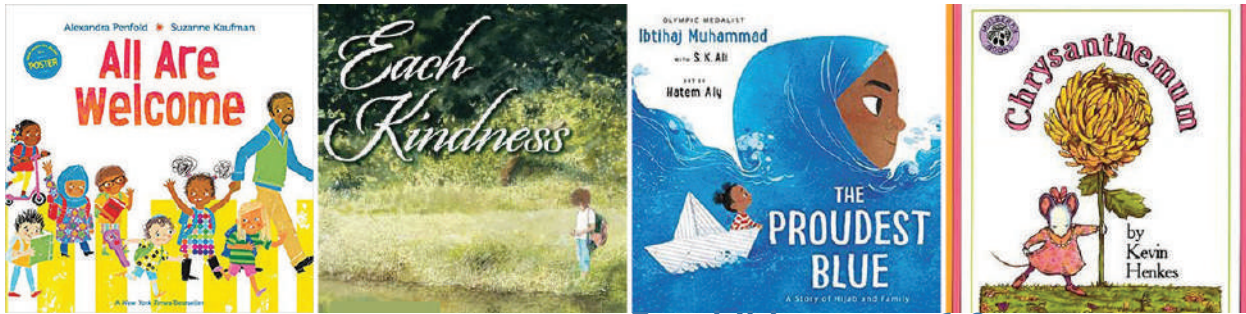
Through stories, children can meet characters who are dealing with strong emotions and who learn to manage those feelings in positive ways. What a powerful model for kids, especially when they've formed a personal bond with the vividly drawn characters.

Some children's books tackle the tricky topic of how to handle conflicts at school or in the neighborhood. Sometimes it's as simple as inviting the shy new kid to join in and play. Sometimes it's about learning to find your own individual voice. And sometimes it's about leaning on an understanding adult to help your classmates see your true strengths.

The messages in these stories can be subtle and powerful. They give kids a chance to reflect, think about their own beliefs and social interactions, and talk with their classmates and family about thorny issues.

Here are some of the books we recommend for strengthening social and emotional learning. Some of the books deal with bullying head-on.

Books about building empathy and perspective-taking, respecting others, and fitting in

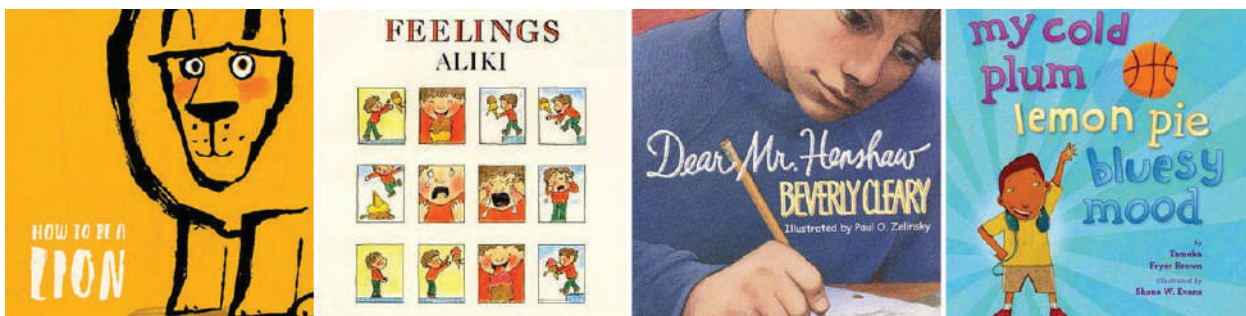


For children ages 6-9

For children ages 3-7

- *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold
- *Bully* by Laura Vaccaro Seeger
- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
- *Freckleface Strawberry* by Julianne Moore
- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña
- *Lily Macaroni* by Nicole Testa
- *The Can Man* by Laura Williams
- *Crow Boy* by Taro Yashima
- *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Families* by Susan Kuklin
- *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes
- *I Walk with Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness* by Kerascoët
- *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig
- *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family* by Ibtihaj Muhammad
- *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts
- *Under My Hijab* by Hena Khan

Books about building awareness of emotions and self-control



For children ages 3-7

- *Feelings* by Alike
- *How to Be a Lion* by Ed Vere
- *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes

For children ages 6-9

- *Anh's Anger* by Gail Silver
- *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary
- *My Cold Plum Lemon Pie Bluesy Mood* by Tameka Fryer Brown
- *Zen Shorts* by Jon Muth

Books about practicing conflict resolution



For children ages 3-7

- *Bootsie Barker Bites* by Barbara Bottner
- *Can I Play Too?* by Mo Willems
- *Louder, Lili* by Jennifer Choldenko

For children ages 6-9

- *Clever Tortoise* by Francesca Martin
- *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson
- *King of the Playground* by Phyllis Naylor Reynolds
- *Mr. Lincoln's Way* by Patricia Polacco
- *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill
- *What James Said* by Liz Rosenberg

For children ages 8-10

- *Jake Drake, Bully Buster* by Andrew Clements
- *Shredderman: Secret Identity* by Wendelin Van Draanen

Books about empathy, perspective-taking, emotions, and conflict resolution: For older kids (ages 9-12)



- *Bully* by Patricia Polacco
- *Eagle Song* by Joseph Bruchac
- *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
- *Real Friends* by Shannon Hale
- *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier
- *They Call Me Güero* by David Bowles