

# From Bullying to Buddies a Story of Empathy, Compassion and Generosity

*This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.*

### Lesson Goals

Help students:

- Realize how calm conversation can be the starting point to resolve difficult situations.
- Understand how being empathetic towards people we have a problem with can help us better understand another person's motivations, give us a better opportunity to solve those problems and even to move toward forgiveness.
- Be aware of and identify bullying (both in-person and online) within their school, other activities such as sports and their local community
- Consider how even if we are not the bully or being bullied, we can all play a role in creating a community that respects others by affirming the dignity and value of every person and by standing up for others.
- Appreciate the power of forgiveness and being kind to those who have harmed us to help our relationship with them and to better ourselves.
- Better appreciate the challenges people face who experience homelessness, and how that can affect them.

### Primary Virtues / Character Traits

**Caring:** to help others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation; compassion in desiring to help others and with generosity in acting to help.

**Empathy:** trying to understand another person's situation, entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation.

**Compassion:** feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

**Generosity:** giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent.

**Respect for Others:** showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by "the golden rule": do unto others as you would want done unto you

### Secondary Virtues / Character Traits

**Forgiveness:** to stop being angry, resentful and desiring vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you; to grant pardon for an offense or debt; to free yourself from anger and another from guilt

**Fortitude:** mental and emotional strength in making the right decisions, in the face of difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation.

## Leader Introduction

We've all been bullied or made fun of at some point in our lives, and it's not a good feeling is it? It's especially difficult to be friendly and kind to someone who has bullied us, or someone else we care about. But today we're going to take a look at a dad in Texas named Aubrey Fontenot, who challenged his own negative feelings about his son's bully by reaching out to help the bully instead of being angry with him... and the results were life changing for everybody.

## Video Clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXY4W9DwpCM&feature=youtu.be>

## Leader Summary

Aubrey and his son Jordan, and Jordan's former bully turned friend, Tamarion, have a beautiful story and a love for each other that would not be possible if the bullying had been handled in anger. Fortunately, Aubrey chose instead to address the bullying of his own son with some simple but powerful virtues and because Aubrey "took the high road" Tamarion's family got the financial and emotional support they needed to have a home, and Aubrey's family gained a new member. Let's consider the virtues lived out in this story and how we can eliminate bullying in our own community!

## Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses or bullet points if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions - included within the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Aubrey, the father, said, "Kids can be mean, they're ruthless sometimes." What do you think causes students to act this way?  
(seeking popularity with other students, peer pressure, wanting to be in charge of others, because they feel isolated themselves, because they are embarrassed or hurting, because they do not have **respect** for other students)
2. Tamarion bullied Jordan because of the pain in his own life from being homeless and not having clean clothes or nice shoes and from being bullied himself. Do you see students in your school being made fun of or looked down on for what they wear and how they look?

What are some of the other reasons that students are bullied?

Let's practice some empathy ourselves. How do you think being made fun of for a situation completely outside your control makes someone feel, and do you think if we all stopped to consider this we would lessen the amount of bullying in our community?

3. Now let's try and place ourselves in the position of being a parent and your child is being bullied at school. How would you feel and how do you think you would react before seeing this story?

How exactly did Aubrey respond and what virtues did he live out in his response?

(Encourage students to name the key virtues and give specific examples of how Aubrey lived them out: **empathy** in listening to Tamarion, **compassion** in wanting to help him and **generosity** in giving of his time and resources to take Tamarion shopping, simply spend time with him and even help his family to get a home)

4. Aubrey's approach worked well in stopping the bullying of his son and even helping Tamarian, the former bully. Do you think Aubrey's example offers any lessons for us in how we can better approach bullies in our school and community?

(Encourage a specific discussion on the above virtue of **empathy** in trying to understand what is motivating a bully and it's not always because the bully is going through a hard time. Bullies often simply lack **respect** for other kids. To better understand what is motivating a bully someone needs to have a conversation with them. Encourage students to have a discussion of different scenarios where it is appropriate for the victim of a bully to have the discussion, where it's better for another student to have the conversation, and where it's probably better done by an adult such as a teacher, coach, parent. Discuss specifically how students can make these discussions happen.)

5. At the moment when someone is being bullied, in-person or in social media, and we are present what can we do to help? This is also an extended activity below.  
(If your school has specific guidelines please ask students to lead with a discussion of these.)

If it's safe for you alone, or along with others, to intervene please do so to stop the bullying, and in a way that calms the situation. Encourage students to discuss specific situations and what they think they should say and do.

Some other good tips from <https://www.stopbullying.gov/> and <https://bestrong.global/> are:

- Talk to a parent, teacher, or another adult you trust. Adults need to know when bad things happen so they can help.
  - Be kind to the kid being bullied. Show them that you care by trying to include them. Sit with them at lunch or on the bus, talk to them at school, or invite them to do something. Just hanging out with them will help them know they aren't alone.
  - Report any cyberbullying you see online to and show a trusted adult who can help.
  - If you think someone is in immediate danger, call the police!
6. What actions can you take to prevent being bullied yourself and how should we react if we are being bullied?
- Calmly and firmly ask your bully to stop or laugh it off. They want to see you get upset by your words, and chances are if they see you aren't upset they won't continue bullying.
  - Be the bigger person! Never assault your bully verbally or physically in response. (You could get in trouble too!)
  - Always think about what you post online. You never know what someone will forward.
  - Keep your password a secret from other kids. Even kids that seem like friends could give your password away or use it in ways you don't want. Let your parents have your passwords.
  - Think about who sees what you post online. Complete strangers? Friends? Friends of friends? Privacy settings let you control who sees what.
  - Keep your parents in the loop. Tell them what you're doing online and who you're doing it with. Let them friend or follow you. Listen to what they have to say about what is and isn't okay to do. They care about you and want you to be safe.
  - Talk to an adult you trust about any messages you get or things you see online that make you sad or scared. If it is cyberbullying, report it. Block all cyber bullies.
7. Sometimes when we see bullying, it's easier to join in and tease someone or to not do anything at all. What kind of virtues does it take to both rise above bullying and to engage a bully?  
**(Empathy, Compassion, Respect for Others, Fortitude** – especially in engaging a bully and rising above our own feelings of anger)
8. Aubrey said, "I know how far just a little bit of help can do for somebody." How do you think Aubrey's **generosity** affected Tamarian – what do you think he was feeling and thinking as Aubrey first spoke with him and then was so generous with both his time and resources?

Within our school and community, how can we be generous in small ways that can make a big difference for someone else or for our community as a whole?

9. Let's share some experiences where we or someone else we know chose to act kindly in a situation where they could have been angry instead? What was the outcome, was the problem resolved or at least made better?
10. Do you think that in a situation where we are harmed if we reach out to the person who harmed us to resolve the situation with empathy and even with caring this would make us weak, or would it empower us?  
(If students don't bring it up themselves, discuss how "making the first move" to improve a situation where we were hurt actually empowers us, and affirms our own **respect for ourselves** because we are showing that we won't allow harmful things to define us.)

**Good advice to present to students:** Encourage students to talk to a trusted adult if they are being bullied. Discuss how talking about our feelings helps us to feel less alone and an adult can help us make a plan for how to deal with the bullying and how to stop it.

### Journal Writing Options

1. Do you think that it was easy for Aubrey's son, Jordan, to **forgive** Tamarion for bullying him? Write about a time that you chose to forgive someone who hurt you and how forgiving them changed how you felt about the situation and how you then felt about yourself? Did forgiving the other person help to solve the problem?
2. Write about a time that you've witnessed bullying. How did you respond? Looking back on your actions did you do what you should have, or would you now change your response in a similar situation? Looking over the virtues for this lesson, what virtues did you live out in your actions or would you now choose to live out?

### Extended Activities:

1. Organize students into small groups of 3-5 to create a skit that shows an example of bullying within their school or local community, and how to constructively engage the bullying incident. At the end of the skit students should state the virtues they lived out in constructively handling the bullying. Have students present their skits before the class to draw attention to the ways we can prevent and engage bullying. You may want to review some of the ideas you discussed in questions 5 and 6 to help students develop ways to constructively engage bullying within their skits,
2. Organize students into small groups of 3-5 and have them discuss what bullying is, examples of it, and why it's important to identify bullying. Ask them to think about how we can help both the victims of bullying and the bullies. Then, have students pretend to write a policy for their own school on how to eliminate bullying.

### Resources on Bullying

These are good websites and on the next page good strategies to help us more effectively engage bullying: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/> and <https://bestrong.global/>

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## RESPONDING TO CYBERBULLYING CHECKLIST

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**1. Talk about it.** Tell someone if you're the target of cyberbullying. Whether it's your parents, a teacher, or another trusted adult, or even your best friend, never keep the fact that you're being bullied to yourself. We know it's not fun and it's hard to talk about it, but you should give others a chance to come through for you. It could help make the problem go away, which is the ultimate goal.

**2. Ignore them.** If there is an isolated incident where you are being bullied, don't respond to the instigator. Cyberbullies who do not get a response from their target may just move on. They are looking for a response—don't give it to them!

**3. Never retaliate.** Be the bigger person and never retaliate against someone who cyberbullies. Retaliation only further perpetuates the cycle of violence, and does nothing to solve the problem. Plus, if you retaliate you could get into trouble for what you are doing or saying to them!

**4. Tell them to stop.** For repeated bullying, if ignoring the bully doesn't work, tell them to stop. Let them know that what they are doing is hurtful and, more importantly, lame and uncool. Be respectful in approaching them and never come off in an aggressive manner.

**5. Laugh.** If someone says something funny about you, try to laugh it off. Maybe they really are just trying to be funny and not hurtful. Sometimes we say funny things or make fun of a friend as a way of fitting in. Of course this can be taken too far. If it is not funny at all, and you really are hurt by what was said, try one of the other responses listed here.

**6. Save the evidence.** Record all instances of cyberbullying. Print out messages and emails, save text messages, and capture screen shots when cyberbullying occurs. Then turn these documents over to an adult who you believe can help.

**7. Block access to cyberbullies.** Block cyberbullies from contacting you. Most websites and software programs have the ability for you to block certain users from messaging you or even being able to "see" you online. Newer phones have the capability to block preset phone numbers, and you can also contact your cell phone service provider (for example, AT&T or Verizon) to help. If certain people simply cannot reach you, it will be more difficult for them to bully you.

**8. Report it to the content provider.** If you don't know who the cyberbully is, contact the content provider of the site where the cyberbullying is occurring and make a report. The most popular web sites (like Tumblr, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Google) make it pretty easy to report cyberbullying. Harassment is a violation of the terms of service of all reputable web sites.

**9. Never pass along messages from cyber- bullies.** If you receive a hurtful or embarrassing messages or photos of someone else, delete it and refrain from forwarding it to others. Don't be part of the problem, be part of the solution. You can stop cyberbullying by letting your friends know that is simply isn't cool.

**10. Call the police.** If you feel your safety (or the safety of someone else) is in danger, call the police immediately. Any time there is a threat, tell an adult. They can help you make sure that your safety is protected.