

# DISCIPLESHIP | MATTERS

**Studies have found that 80 percent of students** base their self-worth on academic performance, and adolescents with low self-esteem are more likely to have poor health and involvement in criminal activity. The traditional academic setting serves some children better than others. Not all children learn alike. Not all children have supportive home environments. Providing support during the school years is an excellent way for churches to reframe their ministries for youth, children and families. Such ministries also allow for community-building collaborations among parents, churches and schools, which can go a long way to helping students feel valued, build confidence, and move toward academic success. Many schools offer after-school tutoring and remediation programs—an excellent opportunity for a school-church partnership in which church members volunteer as tutors and mentors. Churches can develop their own tutoring programs with the help of members with education experience. Such programs allow for interaction outside of typical church activities—a win-win situation in which ministry leaders and members build relationships with children, while children receive academic support. Several nationally known tutoring services are available. Churches might make it a mission project to identify programs and provide subsidies for parents who are unable to cover costs. Helping children succeed in school is a mission with long-term benefits for the children, the church and the community.



The human brain and heart that are met primarily with empathy in the critical early years cannot and will not grow to choose a violent or selfish life.

— Robin Grille, psychologist and parenting educator

## **Bullies are not just found on the playground or among children.**

Bullying takes place at work, among friends, in families and in church. Judgmentalism is a form of bullying, and Christians often become bullies when challenging the beliefs of others. John 13:35 provides a good benchmark for all interactions: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Visit [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov) for a wide range of helpful resources.



*All the children who are held and loved . . . will know how to love others. Spread these virtues in the world. Nothing more need be done.* — Mengzi (Mencius), c. 300 BCE

**Bullying**, defined as “unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance,” is distinguished from other forms of harassment by that power imbalance and its repetitive nature. It is important to: 1) **avoid minimizing it** with characterizations, such as “kids just being kids”; 2) **build awareness**, through training and prevention programs, about what bullying is and how it is experienced; 3) **sound the alarm** on bullying when you see it; 4) **empower children** to speak up when they see or experience bullying; 5) **follow up** with targets of bullying with support and techniques for self-protection; 6) **address aggressive behavior** through counseling and consequences.

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.