

*These cases are a combination of real cases but the identities of the children, the families, and the schools have been protected.*

### **Case #1 - Touch Football**

At a small K-8 elementary school outside Charlotte, the fifth-grade boys were playing touch football at recess. As the game progressed, the touches got harder and the game got rougher; the intensity built quickly; no adult supervisor noticed. One boy, arguably the best athlete in the class, was tackled to the ground and had the wind knocked out of him. He was lying on his back recovering his breath when his friend, the boy who had taken him down, came over to offer him a hand up, in the fashion of professional athletes who sometimes offer a hand to an opponent on the ground.

Andy, the boy lying on his back, was still angry about the way he had been brought down. As Peter reached down, Andy kicked one leg up and hit Peter right in "the balls," causing him considerable pain. Peter recovered after a few minutes and the game resumed. At no point did an adult see or intervene in the action, nor did the boys report the incident to a teacher.

When a third classmate, Greg, arrived home, his single mother asked him numerous questions about the events of the day focusing, as she usually did, on behavior at recess. Greg animatedly described Andy kicking Peter in the groin and that boy's subsequent pain. Greg's mother was upset that no teacher intervened in the situation. She waited for a day or two, asking Greg follow-up questions, and did not hear anything about the incident being addressed. She then called Peter's father and asked him whether the school had notified him that his son had been kicked and bullied at recess. She reported that she was pretty sure that the school was covering the incident up. The father, blindsided, grew angrier and angrier, until he finally sent a mass email to the parents of all fifth-graders telling them that the school was hiding bullying problems at recess and naming Andy as the "bully." When the head of school called the father in and told him it was inappropriate for a parent to attack a child by name in a mass email, the father began a ground campaign to convince other parents that the school had a bullying problem. The boys, who were friends, continued to play together at recess and sat next to one another at lunch. The father's campaign continued.

### **Case #2**

At a K-8 girls' school in San Francisco, Margaret had been a confusing presence in the early elementary grades. A gifted student, she was anxious and somewhat isolated, at times; she cried easily in stressful social situations. Equally troubling was that her mother always felt like an outsider at the school, believing she was deliberately excluded by some of the high-profile mothers. Happily, Margaret had one close friend, Georgia, who stood by her through thick and thin.

At the end of fifth grade Margaret's family moved out of town so that her mother could take a high-powered job. The job did not work out. Her family returned to San Francisco and home and re-applied her to her old school. That summer, before seventh grade, some of her classmates learned she was going to rejoin the class. A couple of them posted social media messages in which they speculated that they could "make her leave again." Margaret's old friend, Georgia, who herself had left the school at the end of sixth grade, read the posts and forwarded them to Margaret, who showed them to her mother. Her mother reacted by calling the parents of four girls demanding that they apologize to Margaret. None of the mothers agreed and none of the girls apologized. Margaret's mother's call left the girls feeling under attack.

When Margaret arrived back at school, the social leaders in the class were distant from her. Two girls---one new to the class--- began slowly to befriend her, which was reassuring to the teachers who saw Margaret finding a place, but some of the class leaders were subtly unkind. Margaret believed that they gossiped about her, rolled their eyes at her and on three occasions in the fall, bumped into her hard, on purpose. Margaret talked to her new friends about these many slights. The seventh grade began to split into two camps, debating whether the more serious incidents had occurred or not. The teachers picked up on this development and, while keeping a close eye on things, felt Margaret was making her way. Margaret remained poised at school, but often cried at the end of the day when she reported developments to her mother. Her mother was enraged by what she believed was systematic bullying of her daughter, ignored by the school, and demanded the school obtain written apologies from the girl leaders.

### **Case #3**

Gerald arrived new in eighth grade at a K-12 boys' school in Saint Louis, He was very small compared to most of the boys in the class; he had not embarked on puberty, and when he was down in the gym, Harry, a far more physically developed boy in his class began to tease him about his small body and his lack of pubic hair. Gerald felt ashamed and did not report these incidents. Gradually, Harry stepped up his verbal attacks on Gerald, who tried to avoid him, but because athletics were a school requirement and they were in the same locker room, he could not entirely. Harry also stepped up his mocking comments between classes. Gerald tolerated these for months, gradually becoming more anxious and sad. His parents

worried that he was not liking his new school.

Finally, one day Harry and Gerald found themselves alone in the locker room. Gerald retreated to the training room in the back to avoid Harry, but Harry followed him and grabbed him. As a “joke,” Harry physically held Gerald down on a training table and taped him (chest and legs) to the table with white athletic tape. Then, pulling Gerald’s pants down, Harry left him naked and exposed. Moments later, and after reflecting on his actions, Harry returned, pulled Gerald’s pants up and released him, threatening that if Gerald ever told anyone, he would really make him pay.

Gerald, who was terrified, immediately went to a teacher to report the incident. Gerald’s parents were extremely upset, but put the matter in the school’s hands because Gerald did not want to be responsible for Harry get a public punishment. Harry’s parents were notified and were very upset by their son’s actions; they immediately found him a therapist.

**Case #4**

Nico was a new sixth-grade student on the PK-6 campus of an independent school in the Northeast. Nico’s family, new to the school community, had promoted him as a gifted student and athlete. Although he demonstrated some high abilities, he came across as overly-confident and intensely competitive in his first few weeks at school. He attempted to build friendships and his mother responded to offers for social gatherings but Nico and his mother were both met with resistance do to their social awkwardness and competitive approach. Within a month of his arrival, Nico had begun to alienate himself by complaining bitterly about unfair plays in four-square and refusing to be “out” when his peers insisted he was. Rather than backing off and choosing a social win over a four-square or academic win, Nico doubled down and verbally sparred with peers on a daily basis. His mother, distraught that he was not gaining socially, met with the school counselor to ask for support. The homeroom teacher agreed that he would benefit from social-skill building time with the counselor while she worked with the rest of the class to provide a more welcoming atmosphere. In conversation with the counselor, Nico understood how his competitive and argumentative nature was not working, yet he expressed the belief that he was better than his peers in most ways and the other students were wrong to ostracize him. His mother echoed the same belief-- that he was special and they just had not realized this about him, yet. Nico’s socially defiant behavior continued. The students in his class and other classes became increasingly tired of him and vacillated between shutting him out and pushing back when he insisted he was “right,” “in” or “the best.” His mother and father contacted the school counselor to report that they’d come to the conclusion that he was being bullied because it was a group of students “ganging up” on him. They demanded that this stop immediately as their son was becoming disheartened by school.

**Overview**

<b>Communication Goals</b>	<b>Fears of Teachers</b>	<b>Role of Administrators</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stay centered.</li> <li>2. Don’t get defensive.</li> <li>3. Don't get bullied.</li> <li>4. Remember child development.</li> <li>5. Follow protocol.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Time-Vacuum</li> <li>2. Intervention Uncertainty/Fear of Mistakes</li> <li>3. Parent Retaliation/Job Security</li> <li>4. Lack of Administrative Support</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Publicly back the process and your teachers.</li> <li>2. Privately support your teachers.</li> <li>3. Intervene at the right time.</li> <li>4. Adopt the parent if needed.</li> </ol>