Bullying has become an epidemic in communities, homes, online and our schools. For example, bullyingstatistics.org cites the following data:

- Bullying victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, according to studies by Yale University
- A study in Britain found that at least half of suicides among young people are related to bullying
- According to statistics reported by ABC News, nearly 30 percent of students are either bullies or victims of bullying, and 160,000 kids stay home from school every day because of fear of bullying

Bullying is definitely a problem. Myths about bullies being dumb or weak are in fact not true. Bullies are not stupid – they know how to get away with their behavior, often targeting their victims in front of peers when adults are absent.

There are a number of strategies available to deal with bullying. Below I offer a simple acronym that teachers and parents can offer to students to help combat this epidemic by teaching them that they are KEY to stopping or preventing bullying. I call this handling bullying like a B.O.S.S.

Adults can empower children to become helpful bystanders by discussing with them the different ways bystanders can make a difference, and letting them know adults will support them, if and when they step forward. Teaching kids the acronym B.O.S.S. can help students remember they can stand up and stop or reduce bullying.

**Bystanders hold the key**
- **O**pen your mouth
- **S**tand up for yourself and others
- **S**tick together

*Bystanders hold the key* because their actions can influence what the bully chooses to do once he or she has started the attack. Most bystanders who have not been taught strategies to stand up to bullying will behave as follows:
- Laugh at the bully’s comments or actions, encouraging the attack to continue; and/or
- Join in on the verbal or physical act with the bully.

Instead, teach kids to:
- Avoid laughing at what is happening
- Step in to let the bully know you do NOT approve of what he/she is doing, or
- Walk away when the abuse begins (to find a trusted adult)
**Open your mouth** to help the victim. There are different ways the bystander can verbally help the victim.

- If you feel safe, talk to the bully privately
- Ask the bully what is going on or if he or she is aware that what is happening is bullying
- Tell the bully it’s not okay
- Tell a teacher or adult you trust and let him or her know what is happening
- Verbally confront the bullying situation by asking the bully, "Hey, What are you doing?" which puts all the responsibility back on the bully. (Listen to a clip from the Hey Watcha’ doing? rap song from The Power of Bystanders Activity Guide)

**Stand up for yourself and others** with confidence.

- With shoulders back and head up use your strong words to let the bully know you disapprove. "That’s mean!" "That’s not funny!" or "Stop, leave me/him/her alone!"
- Tell the victim "Let’s get out of here." (Inviting the person to leave is a powerful way to show support and provide an escape.)

**Stick together** with a group of friends to alleviate the bully’s power and provide support for each other.

- The more people that take a stand against bullying, the safer your school will be for everyone. (Most kids do not want bullying in their school.)
- Support the person being bullied after the situation is over. Ask him or her what you can do to help or remind the victim that he or she is not to blame.

Using these hints is a great way to empower bystanders and help put an end to bullying!

For a great story that demonstrates these hints in action, get my new book and activity guide from Boys Town Press, and teach your students to stand up to bullying like a B.O.S.S.
B.O.S.S.
Bystanders: key to stopping bullies
Open your mouth: Use your strong words
Stand up: help the victim
Stick together: tighter than a glove