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# MANY WAYS UP

A Bullying and Mental Health Workbook

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Educators



Making a Difference: A Discussion Guide for the Novel, **THE ONLY WAY OUT**

KATIE KUPERMAN

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A Discussion Guide for the Novel, *THE ONLY WAY OUT*

KATIE KUPERMAN

## **Many Ways Up: A Bullying and Mental Health Workbook**

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# FOREWORD

If there is one comment I hear consistently from people who have read my debut novel, *The Only Way Out*, it is this: “You made me feel something.”

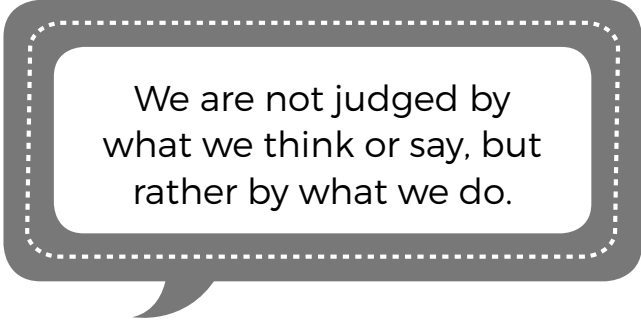
Some have stated the story brought them to tears. For several adult readers, it took them back to their high school years with a diverse collection of memories. Others, who have known loss, expressed that the story once again brought to the forefront those intense feelings related to their tragedy. What all of these have in common is the testimony that the novel touched them in some meaningful way.

Such responses have been gratifying beyond words. When I wrote *The Only Way Out*, the task I assigned myself was to draw attention to two serious issues faced by our young people today. I weaved a story that seeks to raise awareness about bullying and mental health in a manner that neither the heart nor the brain can ignore. To hear that many of my readers have felt about the book exactly as I wished them to, is a reward like no other.

When we are processing past events or trying to find better ways of learning from difficult situations, first we must *feel*. Those feelings may be a result of what we’ve read, what we’ve seen, what we’ve done or what we’ve experienced. Once we have a strong feeling or emotion, this creates a path that leads us to *learn and process*. Here’s when we raise our level of awareness, educate ourselves and seek to answer the questions we have. Then, comes action. When we understand what we felt, why we felt it, how it ties into our daily lives, and the next steps we can take in a positive direction, it’s time to *do*.

## MANY WAYS UP

As the philosophers remind us:



We are not judged by  
what we think or say, but  
rather by what we do.

Now, here I sit, celebrating the one-year anniversary of my release of *The Only Way Out*. The book received media coverage on television, landed news article features, earned me guest spots on podcasts, and attracted the attention of schools, principals and teachers in the educational space. Since the book's launch, I cannot begin to tell you how incredible it has been to share my emotional story with the world and to have such positive and encouraging feedback. When the dust began to settle slightly, I found myself asking an important question: *what next?*

Eventually, the answer to that question became crystal clear.

*This book* is next. The very one you're about to experience.

### **WHAT IS IT?**

*Many Ways Up* is not your run-of-the-mill nonfiction book, nor is it a typical classroom workbook. It is something in between. Something unique. Something accessible. Something that allows for the processing of information and feelings in real, concrete ways so we may work through them and use them to our advantage moving forward.

This is an accompaniment to my novel, and it is my goal and intention that the two pieces can serve as a "package" and "mini unit" on bullying and mental health for teachers, educators, counselors, parents, youth and young adults who want to advance the conversation and create change.



## Foreword

It is a nonfiction, narrative, workbook and teaching resource designed to help us raise our awareness around bullying and mental health, deepen our understanding of these issues, gain fresh perspectives within our own lives and the lives of others, and learn ways to move forward with actionable steps that make a positive difference.

*Many Ways Up* dissects 10 different elements (presented in the form of sections) of bullying and mental health struggles that are addressed in *The Only Way Out*. Every section includes discussion questions for in-class environments, educational components for knowledge building, tips for moving forward and a list of actionable tasks inclusive of visual and written exercises for solution-focused next steps.

I've created the content with the following objectives:

- Be accessible
- Open doors to fresh perspectives and new ideas
- Present realistic solutions and steps forward
- Enable readers to gain insight and better understand themselves and others
- Create dialogue and discussion
- Break the silent cycle
- Encourage, inspire and motivate people to talk openly and speak up

I wrote *The Only Way Out* to evoke emotion and awareness.

I wrote *Many Ways Up* to take that emotion and awareness, and translate it into real-life applications and a collective movement towards meaningful, positive change.

The latter cannot come without the former.

First, we *feel*.

Then, we *learn*.

Finally, we *do*.

You'll also notice each section of the book ends with its own key message takeaway for these three critical components of FEEL, LEARN and DO.

## **TOGETHER IS THE ONLY WAY OUT**

The world now refers to bullying and mental health as epidemics plaguing people on a global scale. These are no longer problems only a few people face.

- 1 out of 3 teens is bullied worldwide (UNESCO)
- 10% of children and adolescents experience a mental illness worldwide (WHO)
- Suicide is the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in 15-to-19-year-olds worldwide (WHO)

We are seeing widespread, alarmingly high rates of bullying and mental illness, particularly among youth and young adults, and the two issues often go hand in hand. Bullying can lead to negative mental health repercussions, and mental health struggles can lead to acts of bullying as well as the inability to cope with distressing situations.

We were put on this earth with a tremendous gift.

The gift of communication.

We are able to talk to one another. Make plans. Teach. Learn. Create laughter. Express our feelings. Get things off our chest. Ask a person for a favor. Tell someone where to go. Sometimes, even deciding not to respond and to turn the other way is an effective form of communication.

If we take a second to think about this gift, this human skill, it doesn't take long to realize how special it is. The unfortunate reality, however, is that we don't always use it. In fact, sometimes in the direst situations when we need to use it the most, we can't. We feel paralyzed. Trapped. Afraid.

*"I can't say that—what will they think of me?"*

*"This is far too embarrassing. I need to keep this to myself."*

*"I'm in trouble, but no one will understand."*

*"I don't know how to talk about this."*

*"I have no idea where to start."*

## Foreword

We are all humans, living our lives together side by side. Whether we like to acknowledge our connection to one another or not, it's a fact. Your troubles aren't the same as his troubles, her troubles, their troubles or my troubles, but we all have them. There is no need to go it alone. You're on your journey and everyone else is on theirs, and yet we can learn from one another and appreciate each other's circumstances. Sometimes our willingness to be vulnerable makes others relate more—not less.

How many times have you read an article or watched a video where someone opened up about themselves and shared a piece of information that made you say, "Phew! I'm so relieved I'm not the only one." Or imagine a friend told you something in confidence and instantly you could relate to one another on a mutual struggle at a whole new level?

Communication creates connection.  
Communication brings us together.

If we can foster a sense of togetherness instead of judgment and segregation, we can come to a point of regular, open and honest communication—no matter what the topic is. In the vast majority of cases, the biggest tragedies associated with bullying and mental health can be attributed to a lack of communication, silence, isolation and seclusion.

British Columbia teen, Amanda Todd, felt secluded from the friends she'd made and the world around her because of a relentless cyberbully and a series of events that all stemmed from one personal "mistake" online that haunted her until the day she died.

It was reported in many news outlets that Texas school shooter, Salvador Ramos, was bullied and over time this led to him gradually dropping out of school and adopting a more reclusive way of life with little to no communication with others.

Manitoba teenager, Daniel Lints, had everything going for him but after he was coerced into an explicit digital exchange, he chose silence and died by suicide.

A 12-year-old elementary school girl in Tokyo, Japan, took her own life after being bullied by her classmates on a chat app on the iPad she used at school. The girl's mother reported that she had no idea her daughter was bullied until after she killed herself.

## MANY WAYS UP

*What if these people felt accepted and loved for what they were going through?*

*What if they knew they had trusted people to turn to, talk to, and work through problems with?*

*What if the customary and encouraged protocol was to talk to someone right away, which would then guarantee them real and immediate help?*

*What if more people knew and helping hands were offered?*

*What if they didn't feel so alone?*

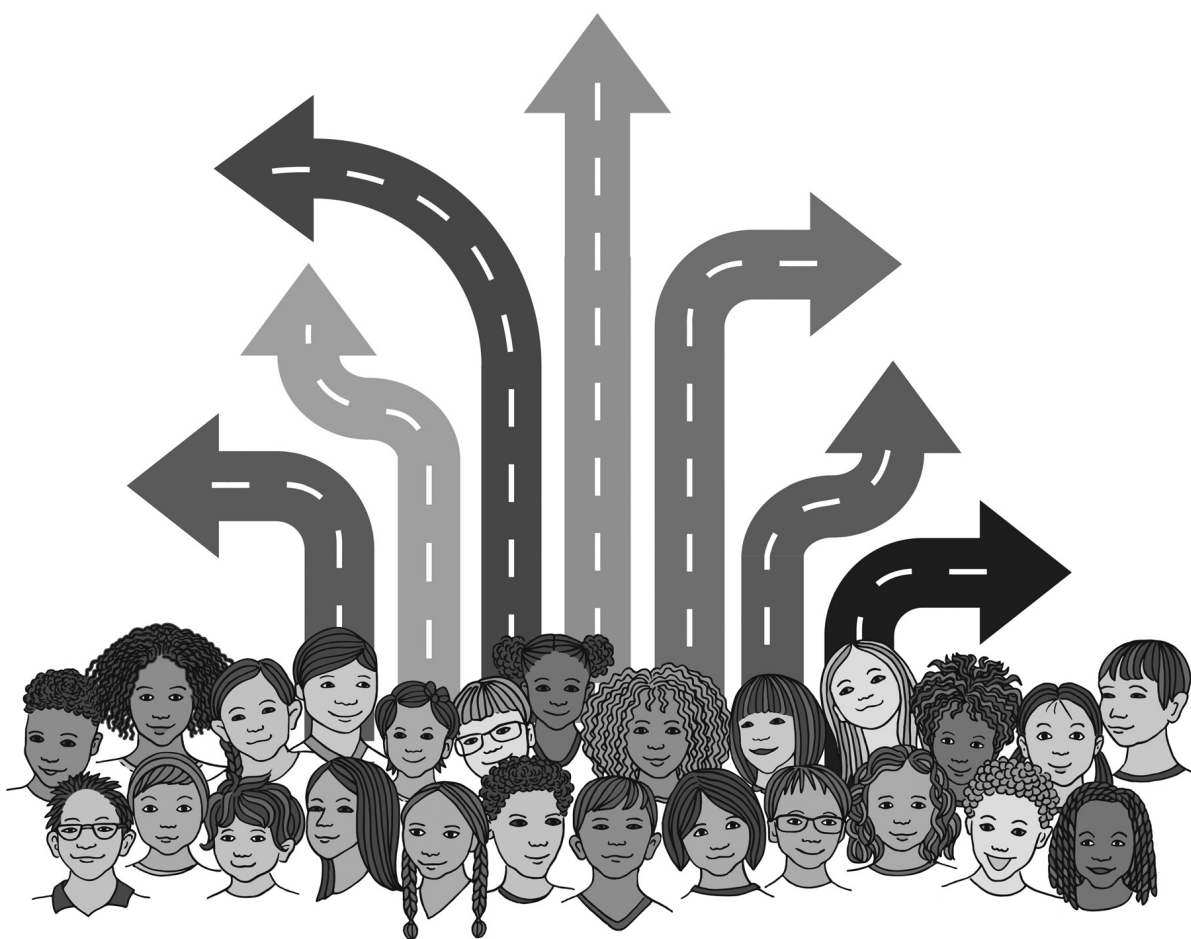
*What if they felt a strong sense of togetherness?*

Would these tragedies still have happened?

It is my strong hope and vision that *Many Ways Up* may act as a step in a positive direction to help our young people of today build awareness, strengthen their minds, and always know that it's right to talk openly and speak up.

1

# THE ACT OF BULLYING



MANY WAYS UP

**W**e took the last few steps towards the cafeteria doors but were suddenly halted close to the opening. A rather large lineup had formed. I suppose everyone else had the same idea we did.

*“Watch it!” the tall girl ahead of us snarled, looking directly at Rebecca.*

*“Sorry,” Rebecca answered sheepishly, appearing quite stunned.*

*Despite the compassionate and apologetic nature of Rebecca’s response, the girl continued to stare. Looking Rebecca up and down in a judgmental, condescending manner, the hateful stranger rolled her tongue over her teeth. After swiftly flashing an evil glance in my direction, she turned around to face the line in front of her.*

*Rebecca and I slowly turned our heads towards one another and shared a look of alarm. Rebecca’s face was flush with embarrassment and my heartbeat quickened as my nerves escalated. As much as I could tell how badly we each wanted to exchange our take on the confusing encounter that had just taken place, we most certainly couldn’t with her standing right in front of us! Thank goodness our awkward moment was masked by the hustle and bustle of the cafeteria.*

*~ Chapter 3, The Only Way Out*

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**TAKE A MOMENT**

*Gain a deeper understanding.*

1. In this scene, is this an act of bullying towards Rebecca? Why or why not?

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## 1. The Act of Bullying

2. Do you think it's okay for "the tall girl" to act this way towards Rebecca? How did her actions, words and behaviors impact Rebecca?

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3. Could Rebecca and Kaitlyn have acted differently here? If yes, how? What would that have looked like and how would the outcome have changed?

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### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

#### *Perception is everything.*

1. For some, this altercation might be considered significant. To others, it might not have been given so much as a second thought. It is largely a matter of perception. How you perceive a situation is a major contributory factor to the way in which you decide to respond.
2. While it's good practice not to take things too seriously, never hesitate when it comes to your own self-worth and safety. You deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. This is your right.
3. Heighten your awareness. Be conscious of what happens *to* you and *around* you. Evaluate situations to the best of your ability. If you believe action is required, handle it immediately, in the way you are most comfortable and think will be most effective.

## WHAT IS A BULLY?

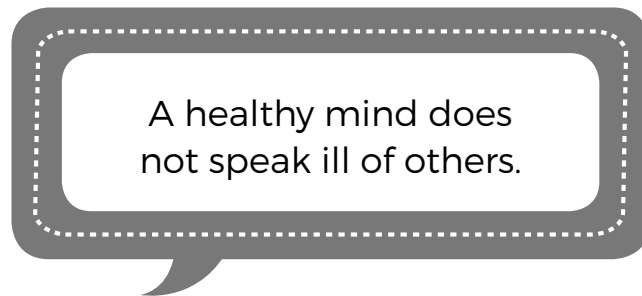
A bully can be defined as a person who continually seeks to harm, intimidate or coerce people they perceive as vulnerable. The repetition and deliberate targeting of those with “less power” is what separates *bullying* from run-of-the-mill *aggression*.

Instead of focusing on what a bully is, however, let us refocus on the *act of bullying*. It isn't wise, fair or accurate simply to label people. A person who engages in bullying behavior, is not a “bully.”

Why not?

Because they have the ability to stop that behavior. There is an opportunity for change, and we cannot discount that nor discourage it.

## PEOPLE WHO BULLY



Bullying doesn't simply happen out of nowhere and for no reason. It is the result of some prior issue, challenge or unaddressed situation. For example, it can arise after trauma, problems at home, peer pressure, low self-esteem or self-adjustment and mental health struggles.

There are no excuses for bullying, however, it is a worthwhile exercise to take a look at possible underlying factors so that we may better understand why people engage in bullying behaviors.

Psychologists state that people bully as a means to get what they want or to establish dominance (at least in the short term), and because they lack the social skills to do this without harming others.



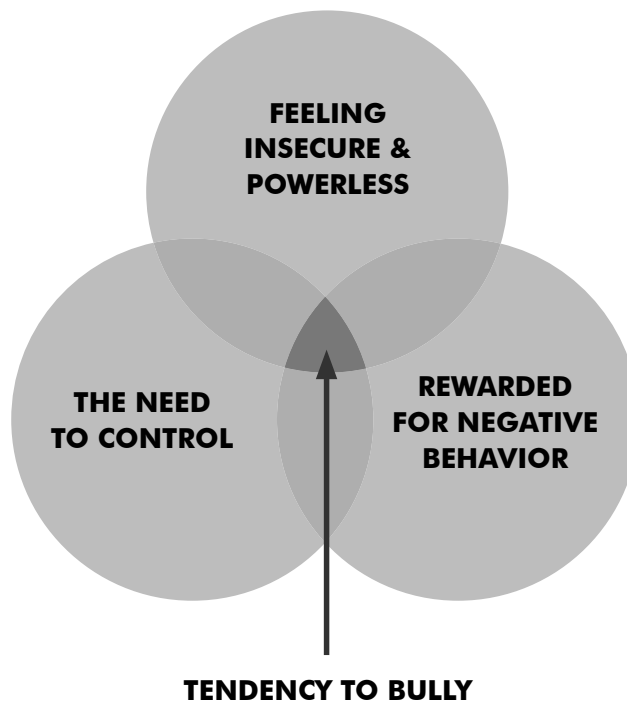
## 1. The Act of Bullying

Research finds that those who engage in bullying behavior:

- Are not “prosocial” (positive, helpful, promoting friendship and social acceptance)
- Do not understand others’ feelings
- Tend to be paranoid (misreading the intentions of others, inserting hostility in non-hostile situations)
- Often have strained relationships with peers and parents
- Suffer from low self-esteem

According to BetterHelp, an online mental health platform offering licensed services to consumers, there can be many reasons *why* people bully, but a few are most common.

Take a look:



## MANY WAYS UP

We have a tendency for bullying to take place when three elements converge and exist together:

1. Feelings of insecurity and powerlessness
2. The need to control
3. Being rewarded for negative behaviors

This further illustrates why it is so important for feelings to be openly expressed. When they are, these feelings can be understood and then subsequently addressed in an efficient and effective manner. If an act of bullying takes place, it is critical that we take a stand to prevent control, create a support group around us, stay neutral with our emotions to show they do not have power, and deal with it quickly so bad behaviors are not rewarded and it does not become a repetitive event.

Bullying is wrong and we cannot excuse people for treating others in this way. What we can do, however, is attempt to comprehend *why* it is happening. Putting ourselves in someone else's shoes is a simple exercise that can give us fresh insights. If we can even partially understand where someone else is coming from, what they are feeling or what they are going through, then we can have a more humanistic response. This will not only be more productive, but it will also reestablish a sense of togetherness instead of further segregation. If the person doing the bullying is understood and helped, there is a greater likelihood of the behavior stopping as opposed to persisting and causing further damage.

## MOVING FORWARD

If we engage in bullying behavior towards others, the first step is full, nonjudgmental acknowledgement. *"Yes, I am doing this."*

The second step is coming to terms with the fact that because our behaviors negatively affect ourselves and others, they are wrong and must be addressed. We all make mistakes and we all have the ability to make positive changes, outwardly and inwardly. *"I did something wrong, I know it was wrong, so what will I do differently next time?"*

The third step is figuring out the WHY behind our actions. Why did we bully? It's time to tap into our emotions, run towards our feelings (not away from them) and start unraveling the core,

## 1. The Act of Bullying

root reason for lashing out. If we can find this, identify it and then deal with it effectively, we can see positive changes within ourselves.

The fourth step is getting help. Maybe that looks like an open conversation with a friend we can confide in. Or maybe we tell a loved one what we're going through. Or, perhaps it's on a professional level with a therapist. There's no shame here. We're all fighting battles of one kind or another. It's up to us to get the support, love, guidance and togetherness we need.

The fifth step is putting it all into action. Acknowledge, accept, understand, manage, change. Deeper understanding and new perspectives that let us truly comprehend what is happening inside of us, which further fuel our actions, are what ultimately set us free. Maybe we thought freedom would come by putting others down so we could be lifted up. Perhaps we simply didn't know any better, or we didn't yet have the awareness and skills to get what we needed a different way. It is possible to lift ourselves up higher by feeling empowered through a deeper understanding of who we are, what we care about, what drives us and how we want to be in the world. All of this then gets translated into everyday actions that treat both ourselves and others fairly, and create genuine happiness.

## **ACTIONABLE TASKS**

### **1. Self reflect.**

Do a ten-second personal check-in every day. Before you go to bed, evaluate how you felt about the day that is now just about finished. There are only three symbols to choose from to keep this quick and easy.

- ✓ = "Good" to "Great"
- ~ = "Just okay"
- ✗ = "Less than okay" or "Bad"

Grab a pencil, pen or marker and in the top row, make a check mark for the days that were anywhere from "good" to "great." Make a squiggly line for the days that were "just okay." Then mark an X for any days that were "less than okay" or "bad."

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In the bottom row, jot down a quick comment explaining why you felt the way you did that day.

Start tonight.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Comment	Comment	Comment	Comment	Comment	Comment	Comment

Do a two-minute personal check-in every week. For example, on Sunday evening, write your symbol for the day, and also take a look at your full week. How was it? How did it go? Before you take a long, hard look, think in your head first. Then compare how you feel with how your week actually looks on paper. When you make things visual, physical and tangible (like right above on this piece of paper), they carry much more weight. You can gain insights that may have otherwise been difficult to discover.

Do this for four weeks in a row. Then take a look at the last month of your life in this format and see how it appears. How many check marks, squiggles and Xs do you have? Are you surprised by the result? Or does it generally reflect the way you feel overall?

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1. The Act of Bullying

**2. Make the connection.**

Take a look at your calendar of check marks, squiggles and Xs, and think about these symbols in relation to your outward actions and behaviors over the last month.

What happened on the days when there were check marks?

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What happened on the days when there were squiggles?

-----

What happened on the days when there were Xs?

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Is there an association you can make? Were good days those when you felt accepted, recognized, appreciated or accomplished? Were bad days associated with negative incidents, or ones that made you feel inadequate, self-doubtful or unseen for who you really are?

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Do you notice any patterns? Are there things you can do to maximize your check marks and minimize your Xs, and even squiggles? What are a few ideas you have?

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### 3. The people factor.

Sometimes our negative feelings and emotions stem from a person, or several people, in our lives. Maybe they said something rude, or picked a fight with us, or constantly say or do things that make us feel badly. As difficult as it might be, the many ways up all begin with communication.

Talk to them.

Explain how they made you feel.

Tell them why you're approaching them and what ideas you have to fix the issue.

Jot down a few of your ideas.

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### 4. Incorporate and integrate.

You see your feelings on paper.

You recognize connections and patterns between your feelings and your behaviors.

You get help and support, and you have thoughts about how to make positive changes.

Now, it's time to take what you've learned and recognized within your life, and incorporate it into your daily routine. The key is baby steps, just one at a time. When we try to blast the rocket ship into outer space without first building and constructing it accordingly, it won't soar like we envisioned.

Look at your marked up calendar each morning. Review the ideas you wrote down about how to make more days check mark days. Try one and evaluate how it works. Have open conversations with people—both the people you have issues with, and the people offering their support to you. Keep it open. Keep it shameless.

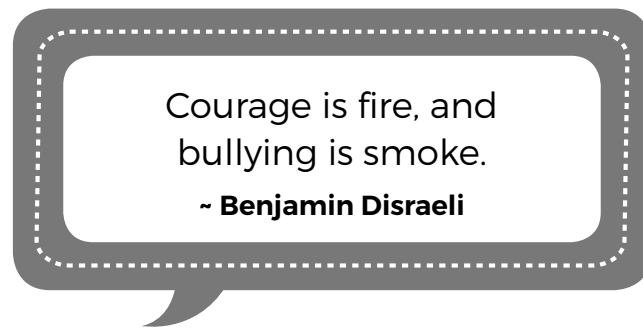
## 1. The Act of Bullying

Write down one positive affirmation (a short statement that makes you feel good, inspired and motivated).

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Copy what you wrote above onto a sticky note and put it in a place where you'll see it every day.



## **FEEL**



*If you're bullying others, this behavior isn't coming from nowhere. It is likely that you don't feel your best. Acknowledge those feelings (sad, alone, frustrated, angry, unseen, inadequate).*

## **LEARN**



*It's important to take the necessary time to learn about yourself and your feelings. The same way we learn a new subject, or watch a how-to YouTube video, sometimes we need to allot some personal time to look within and learn about who we are and what we're going through.*

## **DO**



*Use your findings and do something with them. Talk to someone. Seek help. Take a step to make it more of a check mark day. Think before you act. Approach people in a new way. Try a different tactic to get what you want.*