

“Thanks to electronic technology, bullying has grown even more common in teen culture. And yet many parents remain in the dark in regard to the dangers lurking in cyberspace as well as the locker room. Nicole O’Dell not only shines a bright light on this dirty little secret, but she offers some useful hands-on advice as well. A great tool for anyone who cares about teenagers!”

—Melody Carlson, award-winning author of  
*Diary of a Teenage Girl* and *TrueColors*

“Nicole O’Dell has created something that is—in my opinion—revolutionary in helping parents of teens. The idea of creating scenarios prior to issues arising and then coming alongside our teens to help them navigate those scenarios is going to help me a ton! My only regret is that I didn’t read this book sooner. If you are a parent, pick this book up. It will make you think differently about how you communicate with your kids.”

—Marybeth Whalen, Proverbs 31 Ministries writer and speaker,  
author of *The Mailbox* and *She Makes It Look Easy*

**Hot Buttons Series**

*Hot Buttons Internet Edition*

*Hot Buttons Dating Edition*

*Hot Buttons Drug Edition*

*Hot Buttons Sexuality Edition*

*Hot Buttons Bullying Edition*

*Hot Buttons Image Edition*



# **HOT BUTTONS**

## **BULLYING EDITION**

**Nicole O'Dell**

 **Kregel**  
*Publications*

*Hot Buttons Bullying Edition*

Copyright © 2013 by Nicole O'Dell

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

The author and publisher are not engaged in rendering medical or psychological services, and this book is not intended as a guide to diagnose or treat medical or psychological problems. If medical, psychological, or other expert assistance is required, please seek the services of your own physician or certified counselor.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

Scripture quotations marked CEV are from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4243-8

Printed in the United States of America

13 14 15 16 17 / 5 4 3 2 1

*The Hot Buttons series, as a whole, is dedicated to my mom who had to deal with more hot buttons when I was a teen than she'd care to remember. Also to my six children who have so graciously provided the research I needed to write these books . . . whether I wanted them to or not. And to my husband, Wil, who somehow managed to make my teen years look like a walk in the park.*



*Hot Buttons Bullying Edition is for the kids who are afraid to go to school. May the Lord of peace comfort them and keep them safe against the enemies who come against them. And may they see themselves through His kind and loving eyes.*

▶▶▶ *“One’s dignity may be assaulted, vandalized, cruelly mocked,  
but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered.”*

—DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

# Contents



<i>Preface</i> . . . . .	9
<i>Acknowledgments</i> . . . . .	13

## **Part One: Bullying Hot Buttons**

Chapter 1: Prepared: Answering <i>Why</i> . . . . .	16
Chapter 2: Watchful: Answering <i>When</i> . . . . .	26
Chapter 3: Proactive: Answering <i>How</i> . . . . .	34

## **Part Two: Identifying the Bullying Hot Buttons**

Chapter 4: The Victim . . . . .	46
Chapter 5: Cliques and Groups . . . . .	56
Chapter 6: Cyberbullying . . . . .	65
Chapter 7: Self-Harm and Bullycide . . . . .	75
Chapter 8: The Bully . . . . .	87

## **Part Three: Pressing the Bullying Hot Buttons**

Chapter 9: Protective Procedures . . . . .	96
Chapter 10: The Armor of God . . . . .	104
Chapter 11: Strategic Scenarios . . . . .	112

**Part Four: Parent-Teen Study Guide**

Chapter 12: Confession . . . . . 147

Chapter 13: Forgiveness . . . . . 152

Chapter 14: Clean Slate . . . . . 157

*Recommended Resources* . . . . . 165

*Notes* . . . . . 167

*About the Author* . . . . . 169



# Preface



**B**ullying.

Now if that isn't a societal buzzword, I don't know what is. We're worried about our kids being bullied, and we're even a bit nervous they'll act like a bully in the pursuit of popularity or to avoid abuse directed toward them. We're concerned they'll stand up to bullies and get the heat turned on them, but on the other hand, we're afraid they won't stand up to bullies and they'll be victimized.

It's exhausting to even think about the issue, let alone do something about it. And if we are ready and willing to act, what's the right thing to do? What advice do we give our kids? Fight back? Turn the other cheek? Tell a teacher?

I was bullied. Many of you were too, I'm sure. Those circumstances changed my life and have shaped who I am and what I think about myself. That story will unfold throughout this book and *Hot Buttons Image Edition*, because bullying and self-image often go hand in hand.

When it comes to our kids, it's less about teaching them to defend themselves, and more about teaching them to value

themselves. We need to worry less about how they handle individual incidents and more about the despair or inadequacy they may be feeling.

As I've shared in each Hot Buttons book, the game of Scenarios came about years ago when I was searching for ways to lead my children to make good decisions. Knowing that young people learn best through personal experience, but also knowing that I didn't want to leave them on their own until they were faced with temptation, I decided it would be far better to talk to them proactively about issues they would one day face than it would be to wait until they were buried under the consequences of their poor choices.

I knew I'd have to be willing to talk about the tough subjects like sex, drugs, alcohol, addictions, dating, and pornography, perhaps even before they knew what those things were. If I had any hope of being as proactive as I wanted to be, no subject could be off-limits and nothing could be ignored.

The practice of working through Strategic Scenarios became a favorite activity in my home and proved invaluable in preparing my teens to make good choices. The best part was the talks we'd have after the choices were made and the consequences were presented. My children felt free to explore, ask questions, safely experiment with the options—and then, when similar scenarios came up in real life, they were prepared to make the right choices.

The topic of bullying is a bit different, though. It isn't necessarily a choice (unless we're talking about the bully's behavior), but it can definitely lead to a host of poor choices and identity issues. For that reason, I recommend that you read this book along with the support of *Hot Buttons Image Edition*.

The Hot Buttons series was birthed as a way for you, Mom and Dad, to bring the principles and practices of my family's Scenarios game into your home, and I trust you'll see the same results I have. Purposeful dialogue about hot-button issues gives you the opportunity to sneak in some "personal experience" while also teaching your teens and preteens that their opinions are important, and their confusion is valid. *Hot Buttons Bullying Edition* is a manual for those tough, preemptive discussions you need to have with your children about relationships and the proper treatment of others.

**In general, there are five aspects to successfully battling worldly issues in our kids' lives:**

- Time
- Communication
- Example
- Consistency
- Prayer

You'll find those five elements woven throughout every section of this book. In part 1, I cover the why, when, and how of confronting the issues preemptively and what to watch out for along the way. Part 2 looks at the specifics of what your tweens and teens face as it pertains to bullying.

In part 3, you'll be able to take away practical and precise words in the form of Strategic Scenarios that will help you press the hot buttons that relate to bullying. Scenarios cover issues like popularity, cyberbullying, texting, religious persecution, and disabilities and other perceived weaknesses. I'll share truths about the topic, help you figure out how to handle

it in your own home, and give you a prayer you can pray to ask God to help you with that particular issue.

If you're familiar with Hot Buttons books, you've likely worked through part 4 already, where you and your children are walked through the dual processes of confession and forgiveness, both within your family and in your relationship with God, and have identified specific hot-button issues, worked to reverse mistakes, and worked to repair damage that may have already been done. I recommend that you work through the parent-teen study guide, even if you've done it before. The Lord will show you new things as you approach His Word for answers on each new hot-buttons issue.

# Acknowledgments



**T**hanks go to Kregel Publications for taking on this Hot Buttons project and for allowing me the opportunity to tackle the issue of bullying. It's been a true privilege to work with the Kregel team. I especially want to acknowledge the efforts of my fearless editor, Dawn Anderson. Thank you for tirelessly working to shape these books into quality resources.

I also want to thank my Facebook and Twitter followers. You are always so great to fire back your personal stories and helpful input whenever I have a question. You'll see that your responses helped shape the direction of parts of this book.

As always, I must thank my family who are a never-ending source of support and encouragement as I labor over my writing projects. Whenever the content gets heavy or the doubts press in, you shine the light at the end of the tunnel and talk me through it.

And, most importantly, to my Savior, Jesus Christ, thank You for Your unconditional love that speaks to hurting and abused souls stuck in the mire of insecurity and bullying.

**PART ONE**

**Bullying**  
**HOT**  
**BUTTONS**

**W**hat exactly is a hot-button issue? A *hot button* is any issue that is likely to trigger intense reaction. It's a topic that people generally agree is inflammatory or controversial. It hits hard and is often confusing—usually life-changing—and so it *requires* attention from parents raising tweens and teens. My goal in writing these Hot Buttons books is to face these topics now, together, so you can walk your kids through the necessary prep work, rather than ignore the issues and wait until they creep up sometime down the road. You have the parental right and the godly responsibility to hit these issues hard, head-on, preemptively instead of simply reacting to the challenge-of-the-day. Once your teenager brings a subject up to you or you find out it's a problem, you've missed the opportunity to lay the foundation on that topic. Someone else already did it for you.

# Prepared:

## Answering *Why*

Since bullying is something that happens to your kids, not really something about which they have to make a moral decision, it might seem logical to just wait and see what happens. Why launch into a whole bully-education campaign if it's unneeded?

Here's why:

- Bullying can happen at any time.
- Early bullying may pass unnoticed by adults.
- The first response is the most important one.
- The experience of being bullied can affect many areas of life and spill over into choices and temptations.
- Your tween or teen might be tempted to act as a bully at some point.
- Your tween or teen is highly likely to witness bullying at some point.

This is another one of those issues that must be tackled openly and honestly before it actually arises in the life of your kids (or if it



already has, hit it hard now). When I dealt with bullies for the first time, it came as a complete shock, out of nowhere, and I was not prepared to handle it. You'll see in later chapters, and in *Hot Buttons Image Edition*, how that bullying led me to make bad choices.

Merriam-Webster defines a bully as someone who is habitually cruel to others who are weaker.<sup>1</sup> Though bullies exist in all walks of life and at all ages and success levels, for the scope of this book we'll be looking at bullying that affects school-aged children from late elementary school through high school.

Bullying is pervasive. In fact, the National Education Association estimates:

**Each weekday, 160,000 students skip school to avoid being bullied.<sup>2</sup>**

A Clemson University study released in 2010, in which researchers surveyed 524,054 students at 1,593 schools across the nation to assess bullying in grades three through twelve, found:

**Seventeen percent of kids reported being bullied two to three times a month or more. And many reported that it had been going on for more than a year.<sup>3</sup>**

Aggressive. Antagonistic. Cruel. Those are some of the words that come to mind when thinking about bullying. Bullying is repetitive, or has the potential to be. It involves a power struggle over popularity, physical strength, or any other fear or desire that can be used as a means to control

another person. More than just physical intimidation, bullying can include sexual innuendo, gossip, exclusion, and more.

Bullying takes various forms: *verbal*, *social*, and *physical*.<sup>4</sup>

*Verbal* bullying is saying or writing mean things, either privately, in front of others, or online (which has its own term—*cyberbullying*), and can involve

- Teasing or name-calling
- Sexual innuendos or comments
- Taunting—trying to goad someone into doing or saying something
- Threats—physical or otherwise

*Social* bullying will feed off the victim's desire for friends or popularity, and can threaten damage to the victim's reputation or relationships. Social bullying can involve

- Exclusion from groups or activities
- The spread of rumors, gossip
- Public embarrassment
- Social threats

*Physical* bullying involves real or perceived threats or actions against the victim's body or possessions. Physical bullying can involve

- Outright fighting
- Hitting, kicking, pinching, or other forms of physical abuse

- Spitting
- Covert tripping or pushing
- Stealing, hiding, or breaking someone's possessions

We're moms and dads, so the thought of our children suffering abuse like this at the hands (or mouths) of their peers is sickening. And equally disturbing is the thought that our own preteen or teen may be the one who behaves as the bully. We must do something to help rid our society of the drive and the attitudes that lead to bullying.

### **Dispel the myth of effective insulation.**

As Christian parents, we try to insulate our families from negative outside influences, but bullying is one area where that's nearly impossible. It takes only one twenty-minute recess to turn our kid's world upside down. And all sorts of triggers can precipitate that kind of conflict. A look, a rivalry, the wrong shoes, even an unfounded rumor. So, if you don't take the time, ahead of the first conflict, to equip your son or daughter with appropriate knowledge and responses, a lot of damage may be done before you even find out there is a problem.

I'm sure you wish, as I do, you could walk with your kids through the battles of life—guarding and guiding them through each pressure-filled moment, each decision between right and wrong, each temptation. If only we could pray a bubble of protection around them, and not let them see or experience any of the grim effects of sin or poor choices—their own or others'. Or maybe we could simply horrify our kids with our own stories and impact their choices by sharing our experiences. We'd

share what we learned, and they'd commit to avoiding those pitfalls and mistakes. Simple, right?

Unfortunately, that's just not the way it works.

Assuming your kids will be able to effectively navigate relationships and deal with bullies without preparing them to do so is like pushing them off a cliff and hoping they'll learn to fly before they hit the ground. Without the prep work to strengthen them and arm them with the tools they need they'll fall flat in the face of tough interpersonal conflicts.

### **Intentionally prepare.**

Each pressure-filled moment of bully-induced fear or each temptation-ridden moment when a child considers mistreating another in the pursuit of popularity or approval is backed up with some level of preparation—the groundwork we've done, whatever that may be. In that moment, that foundation is the only resource our children have to turn to. In that instant, their commitment to right or wrong is what it is, and there's no opportunity for us to further gird it up in any way. They're on their own, with whatever tools we've already given them.

That might sound harsh or overstated, but it is reality. It's difficult to raise wise, godly young people who are willing to deny themselves the approval of friends, attainment of popularity, or a better social status. That commitment is birthed in our kids through training and an understanding of the big picture. Knowing that, do you want to work even harder to arm them with battle preparation?

Picture your tween at that first moment of experiencing the words of a bully. What will those words do? Will they bounce off the armor that's

in place because of the preparation that's been done, or will they pierce right into the heart and mind, doing instant damage?

### Take the mystery out!

Parents can help their kids achieve the level of advanced preparation they'll need to stand by

- helping them figure out why they should care;
- giving them the tools they need to succeed; and
- walking them step-by-step through the process of making good choices.

*Why should they care?* When your child is not the victim, what's in it for him to stand in the face of peer pressure or bullying, risking friendships, popularity, relationships? What about when your child is the victim, and she's being bullied into doing something she knows is wrong or even bullied about her relationship with God? Kids need to see the value in preserving their integrity in the face of bullying or other abuse.

Worse yet, what if your child is the bully? When we realize that our kids have mistreated another (and it's common even among Christian kids), we have a lot of work to do. There's often an emotional disconnect that prevents the bully from feeling compassion, and it's difficult to elicit a regretful or sorrowful response. We may need to eradicate an entitlement attitude in order to make the bully aware of the problems and to help them toward a balanced acceptance of self and appreciation of others.

*What tools do they need?* Our teens and preteens need options. A life busy with wholesome church activities and sports—rather than too much time home alone riddled with boredom and mischief with an Internet available for wreaking havoc on others or being bullied themselves. They need to be part of a family that is serving the Lord and they need to see parents who practice what they preach. They need to continuously grow in the knowledge of the Word and in relationship with God.

God-honoring parents must prepare kids for the backlash that inevitably comes from taking a stand against peer pressure and bullies. Persecution, disappointment, and even out-and-out rejection when they choose to stand for what's right should be expected.

Children need to reach their teen years already armed with the tools necessary to make the hard choices—willing to withstand and endure persecution for the sake of Christ. And they need to be prepared with the words and tools they need to keep themselves safe from bullies and to even use those incidents as a means of sharing God's love with others.

And they need . . . *you!*

*How can they walk through this?* They need you to walk them, hand in hand, step by step. Mom, Dad, guardian, youth worker—they need you to be aware of what's going on. They need you to know them well. Bullied tweens and teens are desperate for someone to notice what's happening to them. Much bullying could be avoided if Mom and Dad were highly involved at the start. This requires time, communication, and godly insight into the minds of your kids.

## **We can be confident parents, even in these scary times!**

Our kids are bound to face relationship struggles they are ill-equipped to handle, and it's very difficult not to panic. We realize that our kids' decisions related to peer pressure and the pursuit of popularity will affect the rest of their lives. We're torn between the extremes of denial—just letting go and hoping that everything will work itself out in the end—and tyranny—locking them up for a few years and checking in at, oh, around age twenty-two. We doubt we're up to the task either way.

We do have a promise to cling to, though.

**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6)**

Let's break that down.

### ***Being confident of this:***

You can be sure that this is the way it is. It's a promise.

### ***He who began:***

Who began it? "He" did. Not you. Not your teen. God started . . .

### ***A good work:***

The work He started is a good and righteous thing.

*Will carry it on to completion:*

It will be finished. He didn't start something only to see it fall to pieces because of some teenage mistakes. It will be completed. It's a promise of God, and I choose to believe Him.

*Until the day of Christ Jesus:*

Here's the thing, though. Every one of us, including our teens, is a work in progress. This work, which will be completed, has a long way to go . . . until the day of Christ Jesus, to be exact.

The battle we fight in protecting, shielding, and preparing our teens for life's hot-button issues isn't as black-and-white as a physical battle in which the wins and losses can be easily quantified. Bullying, popularity, and the choices involved are often internal matters of the heart that we may struggle to identify.

We must often blindly face the battles for our kids, operating more on faith than on sight, being obedient to the call of Christ and reliant on the leading of the Holy Spirit. We have been given tools in God's Word to prepare us to guard against the confusion of this world, however. And we're granted partnership with the Holy Spirit, who will lead and guide us according to godly wisdom and sight. That guidance is invaluable as we prepare our kids for the interpersonal conflicts they will face.

CHECK POINTS >>>



# CHECK POINTS

- ✓ The experience of being bullied can affect many areas of life and spill over into choices and temptations.
- ✓ Bullying is repetitive, or has the potential to be. It involves a power struggle over popularity, physical strength, or any other fear or desire that can be used as a means to control another person.
- ✓ Bullying takes various forms: *verbal, social, and physical*.
- ✓ We must do something to help rid our society of the drive and the attitudes that lead to bullying.
- ✓ Each pressure-filled moment of bully-induced fear or each temptation-ridden moment when a child considers mistreating another in the pursuit of popularity or approval is backed up with some level of preparation, whatever tools we've already given them.
- ✓ Bullied tweens and teens are desperate for someone to notice what's happening to them. Much bullying could be avoided if Mom and Dad were highly involved at the start. This requires time, communication, and godly insight into the minds of your kids.
- ✓ We must often blindly face the battles for our kids, operating more on faith than on sight, being obedient to the call of Christ and reliant on the leading of the Holy Spirit.