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## Bully Prevention Month: 8 Powerful Tips To Help Parents Protect Their Children With Disabilities

*By Shirley Gomez | Oct 13 2017, 07:00PM EDT*

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October is bully awareness month and children with health problems and disabilities are 15% more likely to be bullied. Sheri Sobrato Brisson, a brain cancer survivor, is sharing with Latin Times how parents can help their children when they are struggling with a long-term illness and are being bullied.

Photo: Getty Images

October is bullying prevention month, and according to **Sheri**

**Sobrato Brisson**, a brain tumor survivor who discovered the importance of self-reflection during her recovery, young people living with serious health conditions face challenges their peers can't even comprehend. You'd think their classmates would cut sick kids some slack. Sadly, that is not the case. Teasing someone for a difference that already limits them is just mean, but we all know that kids can be cruel. [Study](#) after [study](#) after [study](#) back this up, showing on average that young people with disabilities and health problems are 15% more likely to be the victims of bullying than their healthy peers.

Most studies show it's about being different. "Unfortunately, children who stand out in any way, because of their health, their race, their orientation, or anything else that distinguishes them from most kids in a school, can find themselves a target of bullying," said **Mark Schuster**, M.D., professor of pediatrics at Children's Hospital Boston and Harvard Medical School, in an article for The Center for Advancing Health. This is no longer a hidden problem, and The U.S. Department of Education has even released [specific guidelines](#) to help schools reduce bullying of disabled students.

"As an advocate for young people with medical needs, I applaud this effort, but I feel like these guidelines only address one side of the coin – the side of teachers and school principals." said Sobrato Brisson. "Parents and caregivers have significant role in bullying prevention too."

Here is a list of ideas parents can implement today and every day to help make sure your medically complex child isn't the victim of bullying:

1. Don't assume that your child will come to you if they are bullied—sometimes they are ashamed or may think the ridicule is somehow their fault.
2. Teach children that they should not only stand up for themselves, but for others as well.
3. Find time to talk about the school day and ask your child to not only report the facts about what they did, but to also talk about how he or she feels about it. Be on the lookout for signs that something is bothering your child emotionally, and don't hesitate to ask why.
4. Assume your child is telling the truth about what happened and be on his or her side. Don't make your child feel worse by doubting what he or she says. Try to understand their perception of the situation.
5. Don't minimize what has happened or try to imply that it was no big deal.
6. Help your child understand more about their illness or disability. If they are confident in explaining their health challenge or disability, they will be better equipped to help others understand.
7. Help your child be proactive in resolving their situation. Only when absolutely necessary should you come to your child's defense. If possible, it is better to help your child build their own conflict-resolution skills.
8. It may be easier for teens to talk about a problem once they have had chance to get their feelings out through art or writing before starting an emotional discussion with a supportive adult.

By engaging with our medically complex kids and working to proactively address bullying, we can help ensure our challenged kids meet a community of support rather than one of stress when the school bell rings. As much as we wish school would just handle it, it's everyone's responsibility to create a community of tolerance around any young person with a difference, be it illness or anything else.

On October 23, Brisson and socially-conscious tech entrepreneur **Rosemary Lokhorst**, are launching the first ever free mobile game "[Shadow's Edge](#)." The game will encourage teens to dive deeper into their emotional journey through intriguing game play that includes journaling and expressive arts.