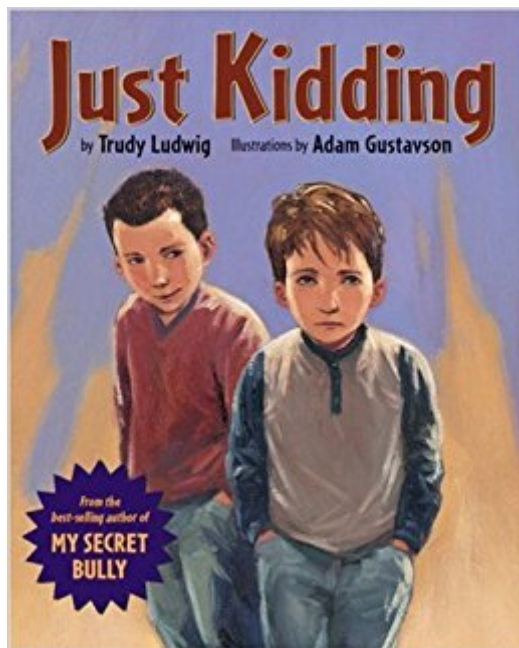


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# Just Kidding



## Synopsis

A rare look at emotional bullying among boys from the best-selling author of *My Secret Bully*. D.J.'s friend Vince has a habit of teasing D.J. and then saying, "Just kidding!" as if it will make everything okay. It doesn't, but D.J. is afraid that if he protests, his friends will think he can't take a joke. With the help of his father, brother, and an understanding teacher, D.J. progresses from feeling helpless to taking positive action, undermining the power of two seemingly harmless words. Trudy Ludwig takes another look at relational aggression, the use of relationships to manipulate and hurt others, this time from the boy's point of view. Back matter includes discussion questions, a "dos and don'ts of teasing" list, and a resource guide for parents and teachers. Endorsed by Full Esteem Ahead, The Hands & Words Are Not For Hurting Project, and The Ophelia Project.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

## Customer Reviews

Grade 1-5 — This companion to *My Secret Bully* (Tricycle, 2005) addresses the topic of teasing. D.J. is tired of Vince's mean-spirited comments at school. Vince knows which buttons to push, using the "I was just kidding" defense when he goes too far. Unsure how to handle the situation, D.J. talks with his father and his teacher and learns a few strategies to help him deal with putdowns. Most importantly, he realizes that he isn't the problem and that he hasn't done anything

to deserve Vince's taunts. This frank and plausible story will help youngsters to distinguish between good-natured teasing and the destructive variety, empowering them by providing options they can use when faced with bullying. Realistic acrylic paintings beautifully capture the text's mood and action. Gustavson is adept at revealing the subtle emotions of his characters, and both D.J. and Vince will strike a familiar chord with readers. A foreword by a bullying-prevention consultant outlines four points that educators and parents need to impart to victims of this behavior. Also provided are conversation starters for further discussion, a list of pertinent organizations and Web sites, and suggested reading for both adults and children. This useful resource is an important addition to school and public libraries.

—Carol L. MacKay, Forestburg School Library, Alberta, Canada

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K-Gr. 3. Waiting to be chosen for a pickup game of basketball, D. J. hears Vince challenge Cody to a game of Rock Paper Scissors: "Loser gets D. J." It's not the first time Vince has crossed the line, but D. J. can't figure out how to respond. With a helpful suggestion from his dad and support from a teacher, D. J. begins to handle his problem. The story offers a realistic portrayal of a bully who uses words in hurtful ways but avoids punishment. It also offers hope that children can break the pattern, at least if the adults around them are aware of the problem, competent to deal with it, and supportive of the children involved. The book concludes with a list of "Teasing Dos and Don'ts" for kids. In addition, a detailed foreword offers suggestions to parents and teachers trying to help children in this situation. The well-composed illustrations, apparently acrylic paintings, offer sensitive portrayals of children in realistic settings. Pair this with Becky Ray McCain's *Nobody Knew What to Do* (2001). Carolyn Phelan

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Trudy Ludwig is a genius and understands the deleterious effect of teasing and peer cruelty and bullying. Bullying is not limited to children. In some cases, teachers, bosses and co-workers have also been involved in bullying tactics. Many companies provide handbooks of unacceptable behavior, among which is often included "blocking somebody's path; verbal or physical coercion of any person on these premises or during the usual course of business...zero tolerance policy." D.J., a tween (8-12 years) faces his nemesis Vince, who hounds, heckles and harasses him. Whenever D.J. complains that Vince is verbally drawing blood, the latter gives him the stock comment of he's just kidding and can't D.J. take a joke. I have known adults do this to children and believe me, that does NOT engender good feelings nor teach humor. When adults do this to children, it makes

children feel like they have no recourse and that "sense of humor" means endure somebody having fun at their expense. It teaches deceit, e.g. going along and pretending to find it funny; avoiding dressing downs and questioning the existence of their OWN senses of humor when all the while resentment and erosion of esteem is building. However, peer teasing escalates to physical violence as is shown in this story. Vince steps up his verbal abuse of D.J. and humiliates him in front of their teammates. That is bad enough, but when he starts hitting D.J. on the bus, D.J. knows he has to take his concerns to someone who can help. D.J.'s dad gives him bad advice when he says D.J. can't fight back verbally or physically to Vince. We all know that ignoring bullies often steps up their harassment campaign. Luckily, the boy's father takes D.J.'s concerns to his teacher, who wisely includes the school counselor. I've been targeted by bullies and I've seen this time and again. I was told to "deal with it;" "s/he's only kidding;" "can't you take a joke;" "where's your sense of humor" and I even had teachers do this. In one case, a teacher wrote that a child was "happier than ever" because the child stopped verbally objecting to the teacher's snide personal comments, cloaked in the guise of "humor." Whenever that child objected, the child was upbraided for not having a sense of humor and how important it is to laugh at oneself. Horse feathers! The child was NOT happier than ever; this was a child with Asperger's who was "giving the desired response" so as to avoid disfavor and further repercussions, all of which was disclosed during later interviews. That is what NOT to do when a child is being hounded by bullies. No child should be taught to be a silent, emotional masochist and accept this kind of treatment from anyone. There is NO excuse for it and it is paramount to defend one's own child instead of making excuses for Other People's Children. In recent years, I have seen adults on talk shows describe how heckling and harmful peers have impacted their current lives and hurt their esteem. I recommend this book along with MY SECRET BULLY and SORRY. No parent or educator should be without these three gems of wisdom.

I read Just Kidding to fifth grade students as part of a unit on bullying and the connections made by students were amazing. The more ways that student hear - "You don't have to suffer from bullying" - the more we will be able to impact the devastation caused by bullying and cruelty. Like Trudy's first book, My Secret Bully, this book presents the idea that bullying can happen within friendships, not just by an unknown thug. Kids have the hardest time knowing what to do about bullying when the offender is someone they like and wish to have as a friend. Just Kidding offers excellent suggestions - from using humor, finding strength in numbers, and getting support from school staff. This is a must-have book for counselors, teachers, and parents of tweens.

This is an excellent book for the classroom or school counselor. I love that Ludwig has books which focus on both male and female bullying and how to cope. She does not sensationalize the issue, but puts the situations in the context of the children's feelings, making the stories relatable to them. When I meet with a student who is dealing with aggressive behavior from another child, we start off the session with one of Ludwigs books, and use them as the foundation for further discussion. So far, they have been really helpful.

All the books by this author on the subject of bullying are a must have in elementary school classrooms and libraries. Elementary aged children can't always express their feelings about how others are treating them or their friends. This book uses real life situations that children can understand and perhaps even identify with. Perhaps the catalyst to solving a very serious issue in schools today.

Love her books. I bought two and will buy more. They are a perfect starter for the beginning of the year.

Bought for my grandchildren, led to great conversations about respecting other children's feelings.

Great book

For years I've tried getting this point across, this book is perfect. The students see the effect in the story and I bring it back up each time we have a situation arise when someone says, "I didn't mean it." or "I was just kidding."

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