

How to bully-proof your kid



A No Bully workshop for parents and guardians

Ten ways to bully-proof your child

1. Ask your child who their friends are and what they do at recess. If you are concerned that your child is isolated, raise this concern with your child's teacher.
2. Promote your child's social life. Get involved in your child's school. Make friends with other parents. Arrange frequent play dates for your child with a range of different kids.
3. Have conversations with your child throughout their childhood about differences. Teach them to respect and value those who are different than them.
4. Be careful how you talk about others in front of your child. If you gossip or put down others, you are teaching your child to do the same.
5. Champion respect for everyone in your home and help us stop bullying at school. Don't allow your children to intimidate or bully each other. Be a role model for intervention
6. Teach your child what happens when friendships go wrong. Tell them that feelings of anger, sadness, jealousy and confusion are normal. Explain that – whatever they might be feeling – bullying, retaliation and revenge are never acceptable responses.
7. Set limits to your child's exposure to violence in music, movies, games and media. Restrict internet access to computers in the shared areas of your house. Ask your child to switch off their cell phone at night and leave them for recharging in the living room.
8. Have a conversation with your child about social networking sites and the effect of posting false words, rumors and hurtful images. If your child wants to join a social networking site, reach an agreement that gives you access and ask that they restrict access to friends only.
9. Don't expect your child to tell you that they are being harassed or bullied. Watch for indirect signs that things are not going well for your child: stomach aches, headaches, irritability, depression, social withdrawal, sudden change in behavior, reluctance to go to school and, in the case of physical bullying, unexplained cuts and bruises.
10. Coach your child how to deal with bullying and other life changes.

The parent coach®: the idea in brief

Parents that build strong relationships with their kids often use a coaching approach with their child if dealing with a challenging situation. A coaching parent is able to remain centered will using both their hands to coach their child.

The left hand is the receptive hand of empathy that reaches out from the heart.

- Take the time to notice how your child is feeling and suggest to them (tentatively) that you get it e.g. "I could imagine that you're feeling...Is that what is going on for you?"
- If your child is very upset, validate their feelings. Validation goes beyond empathy to let them know that you understand WHY they might be feeling that way. "I can understand why you might be angry. These kids never stop calling you names. That would make me mad too."

The right hand encourages action. It names the problem, sets limits and facilitates solutions.

- Help identify and name the problem for your child. The right hand often reframes the situation in a way that is empowering e.g. "it can be so challenging to deal with rejection" or "it seems like you need to get your power back".
- Reinforce limits if your child has done something unsafe or broken a rule.
- Brainstorm alternative actions with your child for future use. Role-play may be helpful here.
- Is your child struggling with missing skills? How you can help your child to learn these?

Coaching usually starts with the left hand and only moves to the right hand after you feel you are connecting with your child. Often you will go back and forth between the two hands.

How to coach your child beyond bullying

- Don't close your self to the possibility that our child is bullying others. Kindness and respect are learned behaviors and it is up to parents to help our kids develop these qualities.
- Explore what happened without shaming your child.
- Help your child identify their underlying feelings and what they might be gaining from the bully role (e.g. power, popularity, saving face, expression of anger).
- Empathize with your child's feelings, while helping them find alternative ways to act.

How to coach your child beyond being a target of bullying

- Raise the subject of bullying indirectly and give your child space to answer. Many children experience bullying as deeply humiliating. Show them empathy for what they are feeling.
- Don't intervene behind your child's back. Tempting though this is, you risk losing their trust.
- Don't confront the bully or their parents. More often than not, these confrontations are explosive and can make your child's situation worse.
- Be open to the possibility that your child's behavior is at some level provoking the bullying.
- Strategize with your child around solutions to get their power back. Role play what your child might do or say in the future. Enroll him/her in activities where they feel successful.
- Approach your child's school as a potential ally, not your enemy. Speak to your child's teacher. Calmly lay out the facts and try to win their support. If that does not work, make an appointment with the school administrator responsible for safety.

Resources for parents

www.commonsensemedia.org: A great resource for cyberbullying, this site is also the best place to check the suitability of movies, video games and apps for your child.

www.athinline.org: MTV's guide through the perils of sexting, cyberbullying and digital dating.

Raise your Child's Social IQ: Stepping Stones to People Skills for Kids by Cathy Cohen

Speak Up and Get Along by Scott Cooper – especially suitable for younger grades

No Bully is a US based non-profit organization that trains schools how to activate student compassion to eradicate bullying and cyberbullying. The non-punitive No Bully System® has created bully-free campuses for 140,000 students.

For more information visit nobully.org or call 415.767.0070

