

Face Bullying With Confidence *Skills Kids Can Use Right Away*

Kidpower is an educational charitable organization that, since 1989, has brought "People Safety" education to over 1.2 million children, teenagers, and adults, including those with special needs, from many different cultures - close to home and around the world. For publications, free articles, podcasts and e-newsletter; and information about our services and locations, please visit www.kidpower.org.

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Bullying prevention skills are best learned through hands-on practice. The Kidpower approach is to use People Safety skills to help our students rehearse how to handle different problems such as bullying. The key is to coach students in a positive step-by-step fashion rather than making this a test. Here are some practices you can work on with the young people in your life.

1. Walking with Awareness, Calm and Confidence

People are less likely to be picked on if they walk and sit with awareness, calm and confidence.. Awareness, calm and confidence means keeping one's head up, back straight, taking assertive steps, looking around, having a peaceful face and body, and moving away from people who might cause trouble.

Show your child the difference between being passive, aggressive and assertive in body language, tone of voice and choice of words. Have your child walk across the floor, coaching her or him to be successful, by saying for example; "That's great!" "Now take bigger steps", "Look around you" "Straighten your back." etc.

2. Leaving in a Powerful Positive Way

The best self-defense tactic is called "target denial," which means "don't be there." Act out a scenario where maybe your child is walking in the school corridor (or any other place where he or she might be bullied). You can pretend to be a bully standing by the wall saying mean things. Ask your child what these mean things might be because what is considered insulting or upsetting is different for different people, times, and places.

Coach your child to veer around the bully in order to move out of reach. Remind your child to leave with awareness, calm and confidence, glancing back to see where the bully is. Let your child practice saying something neutral in a normal tone of voice like "See you later!" or "Have a nice day!" while calmly and confidently moving away. Point out that stepping out of line or changing seats is often the safest choice.

3. Setting a Boundary

If a bully is following or threatening your child in a situation where she or he cannot just leave, your child needs to be able to set a clear boundary.

Pretend to poke your child in the back (do this very gently; the idea is not to be hurtful). Coach your child to turn, stand up tall, put his or her hands up in front of the body like a fence, palms out and open, and say "Stop!"

Coach your child to have a calm but clear voice and polite firm words- not whiney and not aggressive. Show how to do it and praise your child for trying -even though she or he does not get it right to begin with. Realize that this might be very hard and triggering for your child (and maybe for you too).

Children need support to learn these skills. The idea is that your child takes charge of his or her space by moving away and, if need be, setting boundaries as soon as a problem is about to start - so that your child doesn't wait until the bullying is already happening.

4. Using Your Voice

If your child does get into a situation where somebody is trying to push or hit or knuckle her or his head, you could practice by holding your child gently and acting as if you are going to do the action gently. Coach your child to pull away and yell NO! really loudly. Coach him or her to say "STOP! I don't like that!" Coach your child to look the bully in the eyes and speak in a firm voice with both hands up and in front like a fence. Teach your child to leave and go to an adult for help.

5. Protecting Your Feelings From Name-Calling

Schools, youth groups, and families should create harassment-free zones just as workplaces should. However, you can teach children how to protect themselves from insults. Tell your child that saying something mean back makes the problem bigger, not better.

One way to take the power out of hurting words by is saying them out loud and imagining throwing them away. Doing this physically and out loud at home will help a child to do this in his or her imagination at school.

Help your child practice throwing the mean things that other people are saying into a trash can. Have your child then say something positive out loud to himself or herself to take in. For example, if someone says, "I don't like you," you can throw those words away and say, "I like myself." If someone says, "You are stupid" you can throw those words away and say, "I'm smart." If someone says, "I don't want to play with you" then you can throw those words away and say, "I will find another friend."

6. Speaking Up for Inclusion

Being left out is a major form of bullying. Exclusion should be clearly against the rules at school. A child can practice persisting in asking to join a game.

Pretend to be a bully who wants to exclude.

Have your child walk up and say, "I want to play." Coach your child to sound and look positive and friendly, not whiny or aggressive.

Ask your child the reasons that kids give for excluding him or her. Use those reasons so your child can practice persisting. For example, if the reason is, "You're not good enough" your child can practice saying "I'll get better if I practice!" If the reason is, "There are too many already," your child might practice saying, "There's always room for one more." If the reason is, "You cheated last time," your child might practice saying, "I did not understand the rules. Let's make sure we agree on the rules this time."

7. Being Persistent in Getting Help

Children who are being bullied need to be able to tell teachers, parents, and other adults in charge what is happening in the moment clearly and calmly and persistently even if these adults are very distracted or rude - and even if asking for help has not worked before. Learning how to have polite firm words, body language and tone of voice even under pressure and to not give up when asking for help is a life-long skill.

We have found that practice is helpful for both children and adults in learning how to persist and get help when you need it. Here is one you can do with your child.

Pretend to be a teacher or someone else who your child might expect help and support from. Tell your child who you are pretending to be and where you might be at school. Have your child start saying in a clear calm voice, "Excuse me I have a safety problem".

You pretend to be busy and just ignore your child! Coach him or her to keep going and say: "Excuse me, I really need your help".

Act irritated and impatient and say, "Yes. what is it now?" and keep being busy.

Coach your child to say something specific like, "The girls over there are calling me names and not letting me play with them. I have told them I don't like being called names and that I want to play but they won't listen." or "Those boys keep coming up and pushing me. I have tried to stay away from them but they keep coming up to me and won't leave me alone." At school, teachers want children to try to solve their problems first. However, adult intervention is needed if this does not work.

You say: "that's nice!" as if you heard but did not actually listen. This is very common for busy adults.

Coach your child to touch your arm and keep going "Please, to listen to me this is important". Now you get irritated and say "Can't you see I'm busy!"

Tell your child that sometimes adults get angry and don't understand but not to give up in asking for help and to say the specific problem again: "I do not feel safe here because (state specific problem again) _____."

You minimize and say: "What's the big deal? Just stay away from them."

Coach your child to persistent and say again, "Having this happen is making me feel bad about going to school. Please, I really need you to listen".

Now change your demeanor so that your child can see you are listening and understanding and say "Oh! I am sorry I yelled at you and I am glad you are telling me. Tell me more and we will figure out what to do."

Remind your child that, if the adult still does not listen, it is not his or her fault, but to keep asking until

someone does something to fix the problem. Tell your child to please always tell you whenever she or he has a problem with anyone anywhere anytime. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of adults to create safe environments for the children in their lives and to be good role-models for our children by acting as their advocates in powerful respectful ways.

8. Using Physical Self-Defense As a Last Resort

Children need to know when they have the right to hurt someone to stop that person from hurting them. At Kidpower, we teach that fighting is a last resort - when you are about to be harmed and you cannot leave or get help.

However, bullying problems are often not as clear-cut as other personal safety issues. Families have different rules about where they draw the line. Schools will often punish a child who fights back unless parents warn the school in writing ahead of time that, since the school has not protected their children, they will back their children up if they have to fight.

Learning physical self defense helps most children become more confident, even if they never have to use these skills in a real-life situation. Just being more confident helps children to avoid being chosen as a victim most of the time. There are different self defense techniques for bullying than for more dangerous situations -- let your child practice a self defense move like kicking someone in the shins, pinching someone's leg or upper arm, or hitting someone in the chest. You can practice in the air or by holding a sofa cushion. Consider sending your child to a class like Kidpower.