

How to Prevent Bullying

In my last column, I discussed how to tell if your child is being bullied. Bullying is a very real and destructive phenomenon that happens every day and at every school grade level. Bullying is when one person, or a group of persons, targets another with repeated direct or indirect negative actions which are harmful to the target either emotionally or physically. Examples of bullying may be hitting, shoving, kicking, name calling, playing dirty tricks, leaving out a child, spreading rumors or doing other mean things.

Again, it's important to remember that not all taunting, teasing and fighting among school kids constitutes bullying. Two persons of approximately the same size or strength (physical or psychological) is considered fighting or quarreling and is not bullying. Rather, bullying involves repeated acts by someone perceived as physically or psychologically more powerful.

In this column, I'd like to go over ways to prevent bullying in the first place. One of the most important things your child can do to avoid being targeted by a bully is to appear confident! Bullies don't pick on kids who are confident. They are like predators looking for easy targets who will not defend themselves.

In my Bully Buster class, the kids are asked to walk around the room as they would in school or on the playground. I look for signs of insecurity. Are their arms stiff? Do they avoid



ON THE DEFENSIVE

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eye contact? Do they use nervous laughter or walk too fast? I let my student know that it is alright to feel nervous or frightened, but they need to try not to show it with their body language. There are studies that show that your physiology can impact your psychology. Simply put, if kids walk with confidence, they will begin to feel more confident.

Other tactics that have been shown to reduce being a target for a bully include:

HANG OUT WITH FRIENDS. Bullies pick on kids who are alone.

JOIN GROUPS. Children who find friends who like the same things they do are generally not targeted by bullies.

LOOK AROUND SCHOOL. There are probably other kids being bullied. I advise my students to make friends with other kids who are alone. That way they can work together to help prevent bullying.

WALK TO SCHOOL WITH SOMEONE. Kids should always walk to school with their siblings, trusted neighbors, or friends.

AVOID BULLIES. If your child knows a kid who doesn't like him or her, the best defense is to stay away from him or her.

AVOID PLACES WHERE BULLIES ARE. One strategy is to walk to school earlier or later than the bully, or take different paths to school to keep away from the bully. I tell students to avoid being alone in the hallways, restrooms, empty classrooms, or playgrounds.

STAY WITHIN SIGHT OF TEACHERS AND GROWNUPS. If adults can see the child, they can help.

SIT NEAR THE SCHOOL BUS DRIVER. It's much safer to sit up front near the driver, than to sit in the back -- possibly near a bully.

DON'T BRING EXPENSIVE STUFF OR LOTS OF MONEY TO SCHOOL. Bullies pick on kids who bring things they can take. It's not worth getting hurt. Things can be replaced but your child can't!

TELL A GROWN UP RIGHT AWAY IF THERE IS TROUBLE. It's important for kids to understand that there is a difference between 'tattling' and 'telling'. Tattling is when a student tells an adult what another student did simply to get him or her into trouble (which can invite bullying). Telling is when a student tells an adult because another student's actions were unsafe or harmful. When a bully is involved, it is always appropriate to tell a grown up.

Finally, other students or bystanders can play an important role in bullying prevention if they have the right guidance and support. Teachers, parents and

coaches need to make all students aware that their own behavior can either encourage or discourage a bully. In addition, all students should be held accountable for their behavior in bullying situations and be responsible for helping to prevent bullying. Here are some things a bystander can do to be pro-active 'bully prevention' agents:

- Tell a trusted adult.
- Speak out against the bullying act. Tell the bully to leave the victim alone if they are comfortable to do so.
- Refuse to join in.
- Don't give the bully an audience.
- Show kindness to the target. Try to include that person in the group.

While prevention is the first line of defense, students should also learn how to prepare for the possibility of bullying. In my next column, I'll offer more tips and advice for how your child can bamboozle a bully.

About the author: Rick Alford is the Founder and Head Instructor of Defensive Edge Martial Arts Academy located in Wakefield, Mass. He has been training in the Martial Arts for over 24 years and holds black belts in 3 disciplines including a 3rd Degree black belt in Small Circle Jujitsu. He is also a purple belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, is training in Kali/Escrima/Arnis and is a certified instructor in Fierce Israeli Guerilla Hand-to-Hand Tactics. Rick teaches regular Bully Buster classes. For more information, email rick@modernjujitsu.com or call 781-245-0250.