

Anti-Bullying Skills and Techniques for Children

Bullying is a big problem in our schools today. However, bullying has always been a problem. The main differences between bullying today from the past are the nature of the bullying and the violence that occurs in the aftermath. Cyberbullying is becoming a popular and more destructive form of bullying than traditional bullying. More children today are bringing guns to school to seek revenge on others. Bullying has been around and will probably remain for years to come. Not only was I bullied as a child, but I continue to get bullied today as an adult. I do not believe that we have the power to rid the world of bullying. I believe the answer to the issue of bullying rests with all of us, especially the victims of bullying. I am not suggesting that victims of bullying are responsible for bullying. On the contrary, what I am suggesting is that victims of bullying have the power in themselves to think, behave, and react in ways that limits or eradicates bullying. As a society, we spend too much of our energy identifying and punishing the bully that we fail to spend enough time empowering the victims of bullying. We should spend more of our energy on the things that we can control rather than the things we have limited or no control over. We need to teach children about the power that they already possess. Let me elaborate on a few issues that parents should teach their children regarding the issue of bullying.

Let's first talk about the characteristics of bullying. Typically, bullies and their victims share the same characteristic - low self-esteem. It just depends on whether they internalize or externalize their feelings that will determine if they will become a bully or a victim of bullying. Typically, negative situations and events in the child's life can trigger low self-esteem. Externalizing feelings can cause some children to become bullies as they attempt to control their environment to compensate for their lack of control in their family. For instance, if a child's parents are divorcing and the child is very upset about the divorce, he or she might feel powerless in their ability to keep their parents together. As a result, the child might take out his or her rage on others for purposes of seeking control to compensate for his or her lack of control over their parents' impending divorce.

Given the same scenario (parental divorce), some children internalize their feelings by not talking or acting out how they feel. Instead, they become depressed and withdrawn feeling like a failure. Often, they develop a negative image of themselves and their physical appearance. They look at others and the world around them with shaded lens. When a bully validates this child's feelings about themselves, this child often reacts negatively to the validation because he or she feels the bully is correct in their interpretation.

Often times, children with high self-esteem do not respond negatively to bullies because they already know that whatever the bully says negatively about them is untrue and therefore they do not feel the need to defend themselves against the foolishness of others.

As human beings, our behavior, thoughts, and feelings are never dictated or controlled by others, situations, and events unless we allow this to occur. Simply said, others, situations, and events can trigger a reaction based on what we are thinking. In other words, if I really didn't want to go to work today and my car has a flat tire, I might experience happiness because I didn't want to go to work. On the other hand given the same event (flat tire), I might want to go to work today to take care of some undone business. Because the flat tire might delay or eliminate my chances of getting to work, this situation might cause me anger. How could the same event in both situations cause two different feelings? It wasn't the event at all that triggered the feelings. It was what I was thinking about the event that triggered my feelings. Therefore, manipulating the way we think can alter how we feel. We all have the ability to take ownership and control over our thoughts. We however have limited or no control over specific events, situations, and the behavior of others. Sometimes, we attempt to control events, situations, and others but become frustrated when our attempts fail.

Now, how does the paragraph above apply to the issue of bullying? The main goal of bullies is to attempt to get their victims to experience fear, anger, or sadness. Once their victim demonstrates signs of these emotions via the words he or she uses and/or their body language, the bully has complete and total control over them. The bully will continue to bully their victim until the victim no longer verbally and/or physically displays fear, anger, or sadness in response to the bullying. The bullying will end once the victim responds the opposite of what the bully expects.

How do we get children to react the opposite of what the bully expects? This is where role-playing comes in handy. Parents should regularly sit down with their children helping them learn to react the opposite of what bullies expect. Often times, this task is much easier when the parent knows what hurtful words or phrases bullies say that makes their children feel fearful, angry, or sad. Using these hurtful words and/or phrases in role-plays will emotionally prepare children when they are approached by bullies.

It is also important to teach children that they have the power to change or affect the agenda of bullies by the words they use. For instance, if a bully calls a child 'stupid', the child could defuse the bullying by stating to the bully, "That's nice," "How about that," "Oh, well," and so forth. The worst thing that the child could do is respond by telling the bully that he or she is stupid or make any other negative statement. A negative response will only inflame the situation encouraging further bullying.

In addition, parents should teach and role-play with their children specified forms of body language that reflects a child with high self-esteem from a child with low self-esteem. Body language communicates feelings more so than spoken words. If a child yells at a bully that he or she is not bothered

by their behavior, the bully knows that the child is bothered because of the yelling. Lack of eye contact, looking down, slouched posture, lack of hygiene, and low tone of voice can be viewed as symptoms of low self-esteem.

Parents need to teach their children that bullies rarely get angry with them. Bullies are typically angry at themselves and/or events that are or have occurred in their own life for which they have limited or no control. Bullies indirectly take out their anger on the ones they could easily control.

Parents should never teach their children to physically fight back when approached by a bully. The problem with fighting back is that children will get themselves into trouble for engaging in physically assaultive behavior. Think of it this way - bullies rarely ever throw the first punch. They always entice their victim into throwing the first punch. This way, when they are asked who started the fight, the bully could easily and truthfully state that their victim started it. In addition, there are significant legal ramifications that can arise as a result of physically assaultive behavior.

It is important to remember that physical violence typically occurs after a negative verbal interaction. Violence typically is provoked and rarely unprovoked. Therefore to avoid violence, the conflict can and should be defused during the verbal exchange. This is why the words victims say and their body language are so significant and detrimental to the outcome of bullying. Recent school shootings suggest that the shooters were bullied by their classmates. The bullying subsequently provoked the school violence.

Parents should be cautious when teaching their children to ignore bullies. The problem with ignoring is that the bully knows that their behavior is irritating, annoying, and controlling their victim. Therefore, the bullying will continue.

Parents should be cautious when teaching their children to constantly report bullying to an adult. Parents should encourage their children to first attempt to resolve the bullying on their own with the skills taught above. If their children are unsuccessful resolving these issues on their own, they should be encouraged to report the bullying. If their children automatically report the bullying without attempting to defuse the situation on their own, they will be perceived and labeled as a tattler which will encourage more bullying.

Parents need to teach their children the correct definition of the word 'tattling'. Some children feel that reporting misbehavior to adults is considered tattling. Parents need to teach their children that reporting on others just to see them get into trouble is considered tattling. A child that reports to his or her parents that their brother is picking his nose is tattling. Children always need to report to an adult if they were physically, sexually, or verbally harmed by others or if they witnessed others engaging in destructive or illegal behaviors.

It is very easy to feel sorry and sympathy toward victims of bullying. However, it would be more helpful to the victim if we are more empathic to their needs by empowering them to diffuse bullying on their own. As a result, their ability to defuse the bullying would ultimately raise their level of self-esteem and self-worth.

If you would like additional bullying prevention skills and techniques or if you would like to attend an online educational seminar, please feel free to log onto the Building Strong Families National Seminar's website.

About the Author

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