

8 Ways to Bully Proof Your Child



1. Talk About Bullying Early and Often

Raise the topic of bullying with your child early on. Talk to him/her about why bullying is wrong, and instill in her the importance of self-confidence and assertiveness.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, bullying is when one person hurts, scares, or harasses another person on purpose. This can be through punching, shoving, spreading rumors, exclusion, or teasing. Additionally, cyberbullying is when bullies use the Internet, mobile phones, or other type of cyber technology to harass others. This might entail sending mean or threatening texts or emails, posting nasty pictures or messages about others on blogs or websites, or using someone else's name to spread rumors.

Be sure to address the various ways bullying can take form - it's not just about stealing lunch money anymore.

As always, be a good role model. How do you behave towards other people? How do you talk to your spouse and your child when you are angry? Being a part of and witnessing respectful relationships will help her learn how she should expect to be treated.

2. Encourage Friendships

Remember the saying "strength in numbers"? It applies to bullies as well. Establishing a solid core group of friends will give your child confidence and help to keep him from being singled out. Encourage your child to invite friends over for face-to-face interactions, instead of just online communication. This will build his social skills and strengthen his friendships.

3. Know Your School's Bullying Policies

The National School Safety and Security Services strongly believe bullying should be included in school policies. Make sure you know your child's school policies on bullying. Talk to your child's teacher about how bullying is handled in your child's classroom, and voice any concerns you have.

4. Practice Using Humor

This tactic usually works best for older children. Using humor to ward off the bully's insult will often catch the bully off-guard and help diffuse the situation. Help your child practice this approach by trading witty comebacks--this will help him come up with a humorous reaction quickly and easily. However, make sure that the humor does not encourage insulting the bully back--this won't do much to teach your child that the bully's behavior is wrong.

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5. Teach Assertiveness

Having the courage to look a bully in the eye and stand up to him is a very effective anti-bullying tactic, but it's also one that takes practice. Work with your child at home to help her learn to be assertive. Practice different situations, and help her think of ways she can stand up for herself in each one.

This tactic can be very effective, but shouldn't be used in cases of severe bullying or if there is the potential for your child to get hurt.

6. Teach Him/Her to Walk Away with Confidence

There is a difference between walking away with confidence, and walking away in fear. Teach your child to disengage from the bully and to walk away with an air of self-respect. If the bully feels he can't get to your child, he'll likely give up.

Learning to walk away takes courage and isn't easy, so practicing this tactic at home is helpful. Using a line such as, "I don't care what you're saying about me, I have better things to do with my time" is a good way to help convey your message to the bully.

7. Monitor Internet or Phone Use

The anonymity of the Internet makes cyberbullying a modern day threat. To help keep your child from being bullied online, keep all computers in a common area of your house and monitor his Internet use. Tell your child not to accept any texts, instant messages or friend requests from people he doesn't know. If he does receive a harassing message or email, teach him not to reply or play into it, and to tell you right away.

Online services often have a "block" or "ban" option to keep certain people from contacting you. Talk to your phone and Internet provider for additional privacy settings.

8. Be Available

You can't fight your child's battles for her, but sometimes a situation gets out of hand and becomes more than your child can handle. In situations like this, it is essential your child knows she can come to you if the bullying becomes extreme.

If your child is afraid of "tattling," explain to her the difference between telling on someone merely to get them in trouble and telling an adult about a dangerous situation.

Don't wait until a situation arises before talking to your child about who to turn to for help. Role play what she should say to an adult if she is being bullied. Help her visualize a situation and what she would do if it happened. Practicing these tactics at home will help make her reactions to a real situation more automatic, and will make her feel more comfortable asking for help.