

Bully-Proof Yourself

Educators have spent thousands and thousands of hours researching and looking at the bully. **Now** it is time to look at the person being bullied. The person being bullied needs to be taught **how to Bully-Proof themselves**. Then, it will not matter what the bully does!

Bullying is wrong. No one wants to be bullied. No one wants their children to be bullied. Yet bullying happens at work, at school and on the Internet. Bullying happens to children and adults alike. And, it is just not okay for anyone to be bullied.

For most people being bullied, there are basically only three responses, to become passive and absorb the blows, to freeze, or to fight back. These approaches do not work very well. So, let me suggest some techniques to bully-proof yourself and those you love.

Fighting back against the bully can be done in two ways. When the bully is being physically abusive, most people would tend to fight back if they think they have a chance of beating the bully physically. Physically besting a bully can make the bully much less interested in bullying. However, most people are not trained to physically protect themselves from bullies.

That leaves **the second way of defending yourself against the bully, verbally**. This requires first that you have confidence in yourself and have the skills of being an assertive person. Many people see themselves as victims. All victims have certain beliefs that make them victims. They see anger as bad. "Nice girls don't get angry." For these people, getting angry means that you are not a nice person. Over the years, they have lost their assertive voice. They believe they must be nice, never raise their voice, and put other people before themselves to be a nice person or lovable.

What do you believe that you have to be or do to be nice or lovable? Make a list of what you do/say to be a lovable person. There is nothing wrong with these beliefs. Just be aware that **some beliefs can make you into a victim and prevent you from being assertive**.

The main reason that bullying is so prevalent is that it works. People who are bullied react. That **reaction is the reward for the person doing the bullying.**

When my children were small, one of the bullying techniques that I observed was when two of them were sitting together and one would reach over and touch the other. Immediately I would hear, "David is touching me. Make him stop." I would respond with David, stop touching your sister. Of course, it would not stop. David was being rewarded by Tracey's reaction. This was the way David learn to get attention from his big sister. This gave him the feeling that he had some power over his sister. [*Negative attention is better than no attention at all.*]

There are two ways to approach the problem of bullying, 1) Physically or verbally attack the person doing the bullying. 2) Strengthen the person who is being bullied so that they do not feel they need to react. [Whatever happened to, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me?"]

Teaching EQ (Emotional Intelligence) to our children can give them the tools to face any bully that might try to attack them. To be able to do this, you first must know how to handle bullying when you are being bullied.

Living in homes where one of the parents is abusive, teaches children to accept being bullied! It doesn't matter what you say. Children live by the philosophy "What you do speak so loud, I cannot hear what you say."

There is another way that children learn to bully. Here's an example. It was the middle of winter in Portland, Oregon. It was too cold to be outside and there was nothing to do inside. Suddenly, Darcy hit Tracey and ran off. Not being able to get a hold of Darcy, Tracey hit David. The next thing I knew, all the kids were involved in a free-for-all. The fight would go along well until someone got hurt. Now, it was my responsibility to send everyone to their rooms. This worked fine until the next rainy day, and it all started again.

I was really getting tired of the same pattern being repeated over and over. So, it was time to do something different. The next cold rainy day when the fight broke out, I hustled everyone out onto our large front porch, without coats, with the instructions: "All of you stay here on the porch until you can

figure out how to do it differently so that you don't end up fighting." It is amazing how standing in 40° temperature without a coat can facilitate problem solving.

Each person had to take responsibility for their hand in the melee and how they could have done it differently. As soon as they could tell me that, then they got to come into the warm house. It didn't matter what the other person said or did, each one had to figure out how they could have stopped it by changing their own behavior.

One of the insights that came out of this exercise was when Tracey told me that she gets bored on rainy days. And, that is when they start fighting. "When we are fighting, I am not bored!" From there, it was an easy step for her to 1) **Become aware of when she was feeling bored.** 2) **Then, find more acceptable ways of dealing with her boredom.**

It doesn't matter how or when someone learns to be a bully. The key for all bullies that keeps it going is that bullying works. When the person being bullied reacts as a victim or runs away, the bully wins and feels powerful. **The more the bully bullies, the more powerful he/she feels.** And, the more they look for opportunities to bully!

People who allow themselves to be bullied have several characteristics in common.

- ✓ They see themselves as powerless to being bullied.
- ✓ They have a need not to be disliked or thought badly of by other people.
- ✓ They are afraid of rejection and not being included in the "group."
- ✓ They are afraid of conflict and see themselves afraid of being hurt either physically or emotionally.
- ✓ And, they have lost their voice, the ability to stand up for themselves.

Hazing done by many fraternities is nothing more than bullying. The newbies need to be accepted into the group can be so strong that for some, it can cost them their lives. In junior high school, and high school instead of having fraternities, we now have "cliques." Not being able to gain acceptance into a popular "clique" can drastically affect a child's self-image to the point that suicide becomes an option.

When someone stands up to the bully or does not react to being bullied, the person doing the bullying loses their power.

So, how do you bully-proof someone?

- You can start with not bullying your children. Spanking when you are angry is just one of the ways that you bully your children. When you spank a child, what you are saying is you are powerless and have no other way to control your child. Getting into a power struggle with the child is a lose-lose game. One of the best cartoons I ever saw was of a father spanking his child and saying, “That will teach you not to hit someone.”
- Learn to be an actor not a reactor. If you must spank your child, let it be their decision. “What will help you remember not to hit your sister? What should be your consequence for hitting another child?” Make sure your child gives you their solution. Then if it happens again, you can respond with, “I accept your decision that you want me to _____.”
- Learn that words have no meaning other than what you choose to attach to them. It is true. When it comes to **sticks and stones, words cannot hurt you----- unless you choose to give them power over you.**

Words do have definitions that you can find in the dictionary. In fact, you will probably find several different definitions for the same word. But, you will never find the meaning of a word in the dictionary. So, what can somebody say or do that will trigger an anger response in you? Here are some “trues” we have known for thousands of years. Unfortunately, like with “sticks and stones,” we seem to have forgotten these:

- ✓ **“If you are pained by external things, it is not they that disturb you, but your own judgment of them.”** Marcus Aurelius.
- ✓ **“You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this and you will find strength.”** Marcus Aurelius 121 AD Roman Emperor.
- ✓ **“Men are disturbed not by things, but by the view they take of them.”** Epictetus, 55 AD, Roman slave. The concept that nobody can make you angry or upset has been around for thousands of years.

✓ **“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”** Psalms 23:7.

If someone calls you a racist, misogynist, sexist pig and you get angry or upset, then it is because you, at least in part, believe what they said is true. If someone called you a three headed alien, would you run to the mirror and check? Of course not! There is not a single part of you that believes that you have three heads. Whenever you become a reactor, be aware that it is you that is doing it to you. And, it is in your power to wipe that judgment out.

So, where did you learn to blame others? “You hurt my feelings.” **“You make me angry.” Not possible!** No wonder you and your child become susceptible to bullying. If somebody can make you angry, or happy, then who has the power? And, who is the victim?

- **Learn to deal with physical bullying.** Let me give you two examples. When my son Darren was about 10 years old, he and I went to the boardwalk at Santa Cruz. There were not many people around that day. A young man a little taller and a little heavier than me came up to us and started bullying us. It was obvious that he was looking to start a fight.

A fight is probably something I could not have won with that man and there was no place for the two of us to run. My response was to turn and face him. Staring straight into his eyes, and with all the coldness that I could muster, I said, **“You really don’t want to do that.”** He blustered a bit and I said again, **“You really don’t want to do that.”** With that he turned with his buddies and they left us alone.

What I did not tell him, but I told myself, was if he hit me, I would probably bleed all over him. Yes, it was a bluff and I had no intention of fighting physically with him because I probably would have lost big time. The option that I was willing to accept was that he could pummel me, but I would not fight back.

A second example: Since the second grade, Darren had taken martial art classes. Then, when Darren was in middle school, the school happened to have many gang “want-to-be” children attending. One day, when he was in line after recess, the kid behind him hit him so hard in the back that it knocked him to the ground. Darren came straight up from the ground and hit the kid in the face, breaking his

nose. The silver lining was that after that, no gang member would mess with him.

- **Learn to deal with emotional bullying.** *Change the meaning of the words that are triggering you.* During the Vietnam War, many protesters would try and bully the police by calling them “Pigs.” One of the ways that the police handled this bullying, was that they started proudly wearing little gold pig pins. *For the police*, the pins stood for Pride, Integrity, and Guts! It did not matter what “pig” meant to others, being a pig was now something to be proud of!

What is the **correct way to handle a bully**? **There is none.** What we do know is that bullies will keep being bullies until it no longer works for them.

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Myron Doc Downing PhD

Specializing in Relationships, Depression,
Anger Management & Anxiety Disorders.

Email: DocDowning103@gmail.com

Website: DocDPhD.com