



# 6 WAYS TO bully-proof YOUR CHILD

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*Teach your child how to respond to bullies with assertiveness and confidence*

Conflict is a normal part of life. Not all conflict is meant to be hurtful, and coping with such situations can help prepare your child for life in a positive way. Therefore, do not intervene too quickly when you observe conflict between your child and others. However, there are things that you can do right now to reduce and even eliminate the chances of your child being a victim to bullying.

So what is bullying? I want to start here because understanding bullying is an important step to helping your child. According to Allan Beane, PhD (founder of Bully Free Systems) and a well-known educator and expert, the term bullying describes a wide range of behaviour that can have an impact on a person's property, body, feelings, relationships, reputation, and social status.

Bullying is a form of overt and aggressive

behaviour that is intentional, hurtful, and persistent (repeated). Bullied children are teased, harassed, socially rejected, threatened, belittled, and assaulted or attacked (verbally, physically, and psychologically) by one or more individuals.

Technology has created a new platform for bullying, and such bullying is called cyber bullying. As a result, bullying does not have to be only in person and face to face; it can be done via a text message, tweet, a Facebook post, a photo or a video that is meant to hurt or embarrass the other person.

## **BULLY-PROOFING YOUR CHILD**

As a parent, the first thing you need to do is to talk to your child about bullying – what it is, why it happens and how it takes place. Also point out the fact that it is real and many children face it. If as a child you faced bullying, please do share that with your child. At one level, this gives your child hope that

he can stand up to bullying too, just like you did as a child.

Now that you have opened up this discussion at home, here are 6 important actions you can take right away to bully-proof your child:

## 1 Build confidence in the child

One of the most effective ways to ward off a bully is to act confident. If a bully sees that it is easy to make a person feel bad, he will keep trying because that is the result bullies want. But if your child communicates— through words, actions, and body language— that the bully can't hurt him, often the bully will back off. Demonstrate to your child the best way to communicate this confidence – by walking with his head held high and back straight! Teach them to say things like – 'It's my turn now' or 'Hey, stop that!'

I would strongly recommend that you role-play the actions and words you are teaching your child to deal with a bully. This will enhance your child's capacity to face the bully as he has already acted it out and now knows what to say and how to say it.

## 2 Encourage her to create a buddy system

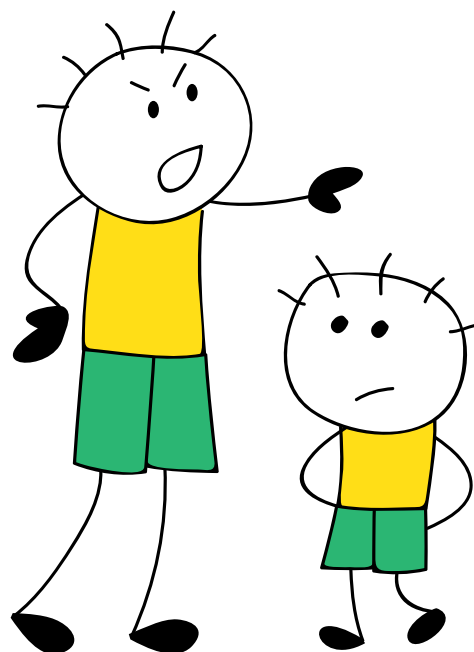
The idea is to avoid being alone in places where a bully may target your child. Finding friends to either hang out with at school, or in the bus or on the playground reduces the chances for a bully to isolate your child to torment. Creating a buddy system will give your child added protection.

## 3 Empower him to manage his emotions

Controlling a bully begins first with staying calm. If a bully sees your child upset or scared, that will only encourage him to continue because that is the reaction he wants. Teach your child to take deep breaths and

## IS YOUR CHILD BEING BULLIED?

If your child is being bullied, you will see several warning signs. Pay attention to how your child is sleeping, eating, feeling and performing at school. If you notice changes in any of these areas, or your child has told you that he is being repeatedly physically or verbally mistreated at school, then you need to step in to support your child.



say to himself 'I can handle this'. This will help prevent your child from getting angry or wanting to cry.

## 4 Teach him to be assertive

Your child has to learn to stand up for himself, without fighting. The goal is to get the bully to leave your child alone. At the same time, your child's safety is very important. In places where your child feels safe, he can practise one-liners such as 'Leave me alone' or 'Just stop it', and then calmly walk away. Getting into an insult battle or aggravating a bully is just going to make the situation worse. If need be, involve a teacher or another adult in paying attention to the situation.

## 5 Engage him in group activities

Assist your child in identifying his talents and passions. Encourage him to participate in activities with groups sharing similar interests – which can be music, sports, outdoor clubs, and more. If children spend time doing something they find rewarding, particularly with peers who appreciate them, they grow up more resilient and confident.

## 6 Provide a safe and loving home environment

The most important thing you can do to bully-proof your child is to ensure that she has a safe and loving home environment where she can take shelter, physically and emotionally. Keep the lines of communication open and start the dialogue (that shows you care for her) by asking subtle questions such as:

- Do you have any special friends at school? Who are they? Who do you hang out with?
  - Who do you sit with at lunch and on the bus?
  - Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why don't you like them? Do they ever pick on you or leave you out of things?
- Pay attention to the answers, and how they change over time. As a parent, remember – bullying is preventable and share that knowledge with your child! ☺

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