



BULLY-PROOF YOURSELF!

10 tips for victims of bullying

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM, EDD

MEAN BEHAVIOR AND BULLYING ARE NOT SYNONYMOUS! Both come from a wounded heart and soul. A person who intentionally tries to hurt another needs intervention and healing. When we feel good about ourselves and experience love and legitimate personal power, we do no harm to others.

Bullying is more than meanness. It is the *deliberate and repeated attempt* to intimidate, embarrass, or harm another person. If you or a companion are targeted victims of a bully, apply the following tips:

1. Seek help. Share with your parents, principal, teacher, or counselor. Talk about your feelings. Develop positive ways to release tension and stress and redirect the misbehavior. Brainstorm solutions. Do not confuse self-advocacy with tattling. Tattling intends to cause trouble; self-advocacy seeks solutions.
2. Do not fight back. Focus on ways to avoid violence: Change the topic, walk away, call out to a friend, or say something like, “What will it take to improve our relationship?”
3. Do not trade insults. Ignore them, or agree with the teaser with responses such as “You’re on the mark! I can’t deny that I weigh more than I wish.” Or “It’s a family trait. We’re all short, and we all have straight hair.”
4. Avoid embarrassing the bully.
5. Preplan how to talk to the bully.

“Why would you want to tell me something that might hurt my feelings?”

6. Preplan to compliment the bully with honest affirmation. “I think you are clever. You definitely have a quick wit.”
7. Use humor (not sarcasm) to relax a tense situation. Make fun of the teasing. For instance, if the bully called you fat, you might reply, “Now you sound like my brother!” or “You have no idea how hard I try to practice self-control,” or “Unfortunately, this is not the first time that I’ve heard that criticism.”
8. Agree with the bully. “You’re right! Grades are important to me.” If the bully makes an accusation, apologize for the misunderstanding. “It was not my intention to hurt you. I apologize for the misunderstanding.”
9. Be proactive. Before trouble occurs, practice ways to respond to a bully. Role-play with a parent or trusted person.
10. Be assertive, calm, and confident — but not arrogant. Stand tall, make eye contact, address the bully by name, and express your

position calmly and respectfully (“It is mean of you to make fun of me”). Use brief “I want” statements (“I want you to stop teasing me”). Then walk away. **T**

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BULLY-PROOF YOUR FAMILY

6 insights to support your efforts

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1. Mean behavior and bullying are two separate issues! Bullying is the deliberate and often repeated attempt to intimidate, embarrass, or harm another person. At its core, it involves the abuse of power.

2. Bullies pick on others physically or through verbal threats, insults, name-calling, mean emails, cyberspace disrespect, or systematically ignoring someone. Usually bullies suffer from poor self-esteem or have

been mistreated themselves, so they retaliate against

innocent victims out of anger or frustration, or in an attempt to command the respect that they do not receive naturally.

3. Personal power, self-control, and self-respect are God-given needs planted in our souls. As early as the “terrible twos,” children show the desire to be self-reliant. When self-reliance is developed, children grow independent and cooperative and are able to appreciate others and let others be different from them. If autonomy is not fostered, children either accept powerlessness or grow angry and frustrated, often trying to hurt others the way they themselves have been hurt. Their anger gets directed at innocent others.

4. Bullies make targets of children who are smaller, weaker, or shy, or they pick on students who receive recognition for their grades, looks, or achievements. In other words, a bully’s anger, negative self-esteem, and self-hatred does not discriminate. Victims may vary.

5. *Bullies* and *victims* are two of three kinds of students who are hurt by bullying behaviors. *Bystanders* are also hurt. They end up aiding the bully by omitting the good that they know to do, committing the bad that the bully initiates, standing

by, looking away or overlooking, actively encouraging the bully, or ignoring injustice. Instead, children should be formed in the ways of discipleship — a countercultural exercise! A *disciple* hears the voice of Jesus, understands his message of love, and puts love into action in the particular circumstances of the moment. A disciple is an active witness who stands up for peers, speaks out against injustice and cruel acts, and does not condone or tolerate cruel behavior. Defending the defenseless is countercultural.

6. Practices that foster a healthy sense of autonomy and activate self-reliance include doing nothing for children that they are capable of doing independently; emphasizing effort more than results; supervising without intrusion; expecting accountability for choices and consequences; providing age-appropriate choices and responsible independence; encouraging respectful assertiveness; modeling self-control; focusing on Jesus and his Gospel of justice, redemption, and second chances; and de-escalating family tensions by applying patience and humor. **T**

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