

BULLYING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-DEFENSE



Our youth programs focus on how children can defend themselves from physical harm in order to get away and get safe. However, when it comes to self-defense against bullies it is important to keep in mind that the emotional damage is often times much greater than any physical harm. Teaching children “psychological self defense” can be just as important, if not more important, than teaching them how to physically defend themselves.

This packet includes information about:

- *the the signs and the effect of bullying*
- *How to get your child to open up about bullying*
- *Building resiliency*
- *Talking to the school*



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The effects of bullying can include:

- Anxiety
- Academic- struggle to focus on school work, avoiding school, eventually wanting to drop out of school
- Struggle to maintain healthy friendships- avoidance, difficulty trusting others, dominating or submissive in relationships
- Low self-esteem
- Intense negative emotions such as anger, bitterness, frustration, loneliness, and isolation that can lead to depression and thoughts of suicide
- Aggressive responses to stress
- Substance abuse
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Eating disorders
- Becoming a bully

Signs of Bullying

Most bullying occurs away from adults and children will not always tell an adult that they are being bullied for fear of retaliation from the bully, embarrassment, feelings of hopelessness, threats from the bully, etc. Because of this it is important to recognize some potential warning signs of bullying. Keep in mind, there may be no warning signs at all.

Frequent physical complaints

Sudden difficulty or trouble at school

Worried, angry, moody, lashing out, quiet

Withdraw and self-isolation

Obsession about a trait or characteristic

Risky or uncharacteristic behavior

WHILE SOME OF THESE CONSEQUENCES MAY SEEM EXTREME IN REGARDS TO YOUNG CHILDREN, REMEMBER EACH CHILD RESPONDS DIFFERENTLY TO STRESS AND THE EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD SHAPE THE ADULTS THEY WILL BECOME. BULLYING PEAKS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS AND RESEARCHERS HAVE FOUND THAT VICTIMS OF BULLIES AND BULLIES THEMSELVES ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE PSYCHIATRIC PROBLEMS IN ADULthood AS A RESULT OF THE EMOTIONAL DAMAGE CAUSED DURING CHILDHOOD.



HOW TO GET YOUR CHILD TO OPEN UP ABOUT BULLYING

Build alone time into your routine

- Lunch once a month, craft once a week, nightly chats before bed- be available for your child to connect with you every day. Kids often wait for these routine times to bring up issues that are bothering them. They know they have your focus and what they have to say is important to you.

Ask open-ended questions about their day

- Avoid questions that require a “yes”, “no”, or “fine” response such as “Did you have a good day at school?”
- Try asking things like “What was the best thing about school today?” “What made you laugh today?” “What was the most frustrating part of your day?” “What are you looking forward to tomorrow?” “What would have made today a better day?”

Be quiet and listen

- When your child starts to open up, avoid filling silences with interrogating questions. Silence can be more encouraging for a child to share information than questions that may cause them to shut down or only reveal information that is prompted by you. If you need to stimulate more conversation try saying “tell me more about that” or validate their feelings to show you understand.

Avoid giving advice or offering solutions

- Allow time to vent and problem solve. Help them brainstorm ideas.
- Shows your child you believe in their ability to handle the situation, helps to build self-confidence and take control of a situation that they felt was beyond their control

Master your own emotions

- When your child sees that something they said has made you upset, they may be less willing to engage in conversation about it.

Facilitate alternative modes of expression

- Some children may have difficulty expressing things verbally; especially younger children, shy children, or when an event is emotionally charged.
- Sit and draw pictures together about things you are happy about and things you wish you could change at your work/their school
- Let them act out what is bothering them with stuffed animals



Equipping children with a solid foundation of emotional resilience is one of the best ways to help kids persevere when being bullied and when facing other difficulties. Emotional pain and sadness are common when kids have been bullied. It's how they deal with that emotional pain that matters. When kids are resilient, they will cope with bullying much more effectively than those who are not resilient.

BUILDING RESILIENCY

Nurture a positive self view.

Help them to focus on their strengths and understand that bullying is not a reflection of who they are, but instead is a reflection of who is bullying them. Correct any self-blaming behaviors and teach them to periodically stop throughout the day and examine what they are thinking. The goal is that they would learn how to recognize when their thoughts are heading down a negative or destructive path and be able to take that thought captive and think about something positive instead. It may help to give them some positive statements they can say like "I am a good person," "I am smart and capable," or "I can do this."

Encourage positive emotions.

If your child magnifies the negative aspects of a situation and filters out anything that is positive, address this issue. Help them understand that even through hard life experiences, there is joy and demonstrate this in your daily life as well. If you had a hard day at work, share it and then let them see you laugh!

Teach feelings management.

Kids need to learn how to calm down when they feel like they are falling apart emotionally or when they are feeling aggressive and angry. Help kids learn to recognize and name their feelings and reactions. Give them ideas on how then to manage those feelings in positive ways.

Promote problem solving skills.

One way to instill problem solving skills is to show kids how to be flexible in their responses. When your child faces a challenge sit down with them and go over the different options for resolving the problem. Together, talk about the pros and cons of each option. And, then allow your child to choose the best course of action. They need to know that you trust their decisions so that they can learn to solve problems without fear of failure.

CONTINUE



Turn them towards the future.

This too shall pass. Help them identify goals and encourage them to focus on accomplishing them.

Discourage avoidant behaviors.

When we encourage kids to talk about bad things that happened to them, we help them make sense out of those experiences and let them know that it is alright to talk about it and that it is a necessary step in order to solving the problem.

Reframe negative experiences.

Try to help them learn to view the bullying as a learning experience rather than allowing it to define how they feel about themselves. This leads to self-discovery opportunities. Your child may find that they have a lot of self-control or that situations are easier to navigate when they ask for help. Help your children turn the negative situation of bullying into an opportunity to learn something about who they are.

Be a good role model.





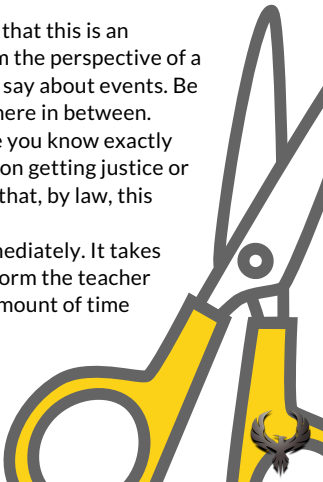
Telling our kids what to do or how to behave in certain situations rarely has as much impact as leading by example. Let your child hear you talk- "I'm frustrated about ____ but I know I'm ____." "Today was a hard day at work but I realized ____." "____ made me feel ____ but I told myself ____ instead." "I can do this!"

*All forms of bullying are unacceptable.
While these tips may help a child build resiliency that
will serve them throughout their life,
it is NOT the victim's responsibility to change.*





TALKING TO THE SCHOOL

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- Discuss the bullying face to face with the teacher and/or principal and follow up with an email. Initial concerns should be discussed face to face to avoid misinterpretation and it helps them understand that the situation is concerning enough to have their full attention. Following up with an email that thanks them for their time and outlines the major issues and what was said will be done about the issue holds them accountable for taking action.
 - Treat them as your ally. Even if there is disagreement, try to forge a partnership with the teacher or principal. This helps promote open communication about the situation so it can be addressed more effectively
 - Avoid clouding the current events with events from your past. Sharing the impact of how being bullied as a child affected you distracts from your child's situation and can give the impression that you are projecting your own traumas and escalating the problem to be greater than it is
 - Make notes prior to the meeting. Having a meeting with a teacher and/or principal about your child can be overwhelming and emotional so bring notes on the key factors you would like to discuss so you can stay on track and ensure all of your concerns are addressed.
 - Explain what you are seeing/hearing and how it is affecting your child. Record and date everything you have seen and heard: conversations with your child, instances of your child wanting to avoid school, witness accounts, conversations between your child and others or between you and others.
 - Respectfully listen to other perspectives. Remember that this is an emotionally charged topic and you are viewing it from the perspective of a concerned parent. Listen to what others may have to say about events. Be open to the possibility that the truth may lay somewhere in between.
 - Ask about the next steps. When you leave, make sure you know exactly what will be done to protect your child. Do not focus on getting justice or what will happen to the bully (especially considering that, by law, this information may need to remain confidential).
 - Set a time to follow up. The bullying may not end immediately. It takes time to investigate and implement consequences. Inform the teacher and/or principal that you will follow up within a set amount of time
 - Don't forget the follow up email!
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RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING



*All kids deserve
to be treated
with dignity and
respect.*

- www.stopbullying.gov
- www.stopbullying.gov/laws/arizona/index.html
- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/226235.pdf
- <https://cyberbullying.org/>
- www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol6/613-beane.aspx



If you would like to learn more about our programs or support the efforts of Tucson's Rising Phoenix and our 501(c)(3) in helping Tucson's youth overcome bullying, please visit our website www.TucsonSelfDefenseAndFitness.com or call (520) 838-1592