

Kidpower Safety Tips: Facing Bullying with Confidence

By Kidpower Executive Director/Co-Founder Irene van der Zande

Here are some skills to help children and teens deal with bullying.

1. Walking with awareness, calm, and confidence. People of any age are less likely to be bothered if they seem aware, calm, and confident. Practice holding your body tall but not tense, looking around with a relaxed face as if the world around you is interesting, and walking confidently.

2. Feeling one way and acting another. It's normal to feel scared or angry when people are bullying, but showing fear, anger, or aggression makes bullying problems bigger. Help kids imagine that they are feeling mad, sad, or scared while they practice moving with awareness and confidence so those feelings do not show.

3. Leaving in a powerful, positive way. The best self-defense tactic is called "target denial," which means "don't be there." Help children practice using their awareness to notice possible problems early and then calmly, confidently move out of reach before the problems grow.

4. Setting a boundary. Teach children to put their hands up in front of them and say in a clear, calm, firm voice, "Stop!" Coach children to hold their bodies tall, look directly at the problem with a calm face, and use a clear voice that is not whiney or aggressive.

5. Filtering hurtful words. Mean words are like trash. If we take them in our bodies, we can feel bad. Help kids imagine catching mean words so they don't go inside. We can throw the mean words away. The idea of a screen around their hearts and minds often helps older kids let in the words that help them grow, learn, and have fun while keeping out the words that break them down.

6. Speaking up for inclusion. Shunning is a serious form of bullying. Exclusion should be clearly against school and youth group rules. Kids can practice persisting in asking to join a game. They can also practice taking quick, confident action when they notice another being left out.

7. Getting help - and persisting. Children are still learning social skills. Without calm, consistent adult guidance, they will hurt each other. Teach kids to get help from adults if they are unable to stop a problem. Because adults so often say, "Solve it yourself," coach kids to practice saying, calmly and confidently, "I tried to solve it myself. The problem is getting worse. Please help."

8. Using physical self-defense as a last resort. Children need to know when they have the right to hurt someone to stop that person from hurting them. At Kidpower, we teach that physical skills are a last resort - when you are about to be harmed and you cannot leave or get help. Talk with your kids about when it is and is not okay to hit or to kick another kid. If you give kids permission to use physical bully skills, be sure to teach them age-appropriate skills that are unlikely to cause serious injury, such as a single soccer kick to the shin.