

What does it really mean to "bullyproof" your child?

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There are a lot of books that talk about bullyproofing kids. As parents, we want to make sure that our children are not hurt by other kids. What can we do to keep our children safe?

The latest research in bullying prevention tells us that we can keep our kids safe in three ways:

1. Make them hard to hurt.

-When kids have lots of time with their parents, they are less likely to be hurt if someone teases them. We can cook with our kids, play games with them, walk with them, talk at the dinner table, teach them carpentry, and many other things. This time that we spend with them builds them a core of love and security that makes them harder to hurt.

-When kids have hobbies or sports that they focus on and get better at, they are harder to hurt because they can spend time in their hobby or sport and feel better. In addition, kids build connections with other kids who are in that sport or who have that hobby and with a coach or teacher.

- When kids are involved in service to others, they are harder to hurt because they know that they have helped other people. That gives them real self esteem that is hard to tear down.

2. Teach them to ask for help if someone is mean to them. It is important that we get rid of the idea of "tattling" - the word or the idea don't help us. As we see it, it is never wrong for a child to ask an adult for help, and no child should ever be discouraged from asking for help if they have a problem. We also teach children to ask for help when we listen to them when they do ask, when we ask them what they have already tried, and when we are willing to take action to help them.

3. Teach kids not to blame themselves for other peoples' mean behavior. Sometimes we say to kids: "They wouldn't tease you if you didn't cry," for example. While we mean well in saying that, children often hear this as if we were blaming them for the other person's mean behavior. Kids need to learn that everywhere they go there will be a *few* mean people- and that just because someone else acts mean, that doesn't mean that what those mean people say is true. We found in our research that kids could learn to say "they are being mean to me, but what they are doing is not my fault." As kids got older this approach worked better and better- and we can teach kids not to accept others' mean statements as true or deserved.

What about telling kids to look the other kid in the eye and say stop?

What about telling them to tell the other person how they feel? What

about "pretend it doesn't bother you?" What about "just walk away?"

These are all traditional advice. 13,000 youth from all around the country said these approaches didn't work that well for them. Your child

might want to *try* any of these, and that could be OK, as long as they know that these things might not work. “Walk away” may be the best one if kids walk **toward** somebody- toward an adult who can hear what is going on, or toward other kids who will give support. If these strategies don't work, we can help kids find something else to do.

We can strengthen our kids so they are harder to hurt. We can encourage them to get help if they need it. We can make it less likely that our children will be hurt by bullying.

For more information please visit <http://www.youthvoiceproject.com>

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