

Bullying

A lot of teens deal with bullying on a regular basis, which can make life miserable and frightening. If you are one such person, know that you are far from alone and that there are some specific skills you can learn to help you deal with bullies.

Bullying can happen in a number of contexts and situations. It can be physical - such as hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, pushing or damaging property. It can be verbal - such as name calling, hurling insults, teasing, intimidating, making homophobic or racist remarks, or using hurtful language. It can be social - such as excluding someone from group activities, damaging their reputation by talking behind their backs, or spreading rumors about them. And then there is cyber bullying, which takes place online and can be equally destructive and painful.

First, it will help you to understand the mindset of the bully. More often than not, bullies are those who lack self-esteem and who look to dominate others to increase their sense of self importance. They will typically look for easy targets that will allow them to feel big and powerful.

One simple strategy is to avoid those who bully you as much as possible. Identify when and where you are likely to cross paths, and think about how you might prevent them from having the opportunity to bully you. Of course this is not always possible, nor is it in your best interest to spend your life running away and hiding from people who may treat you unkindly.

The truth is, life includes such people, and you're going to have to learn how to deal with them. While you shouldn't blame yourself for being bullied, you should know that there are changes you can make personally that will significantly decrease the likelihood that you will experience bullying. Instead of seeing yourself as a victim, you can take responsibility for developing these qualities and abilities within yourself.

As we said, bullies look for easy targets. The most effective strategy for dealing with bullying, then, is to make yourself a harder target. This starts with building self-confidence. When a bully sees that you are self-confident, they will likely move on and look for someone who they can more easily dominate.

Becoming a more confident person, and therefore a harder target for bullies, is something that takes time, dedication, and patience with yourself. There are several things you can do right away, though you will need to keep practicing them in order to make them a permanent part of who you are.

If you happen to be someone who has in the past shown characteristics or behaviors of a bully themselves, building your self confidence is also a good place to start to begin breaking away from this unhealthy and destructive pattern. So the following tips will apply to you as well.

Here are some tips for increasing your self confidence and either repelling bullies, or discontinuing behaving as a bully:

Think positively: Negative thoughts send a signal of weakness out to the world, and bullies are good at picking up this signal and taking advantage of exploiting it. Practice becoming more aware of what you are thinking, and when you notice yourself thinking negatively, ask yourself: how can I look at this situation in a more positive way? A simple approach is to try feeling

grateful for the challenges in your life as opportunities to learn and grow as a person. See them as a necessary part of becoming the wise, resilient, experienced person you are meant to be become.

Look to make other people feel good about themselves: Give others compliments, congratulate them on their achievements, and give them the generosity of your attention. Doing so will make you feel good about yourself, as well as attract the kind of people into your life that will do the same for you.

Focus less on yourself and more on helping others: By helping others, your sense of self-worth will increase and you will see yourself emerging as a valuable member of society. You will also build strong relationships that will help you to feel less isolated and will make you more resilient in the face of bullying.

When you encounter a bully, the following will come more and more naturally as your self confidence grows:

Maintain eye contact and keep your head up: Bullies often look for the type of person that will hang their head and look at the floor. Looking them in the eye is the quickest way to show them that you're not an easy target.

Display strength through compassion: Recognize that a bully is someone who is suffering with their own issues of insecurity and a lack of self-confidence. Bring their pain into your awareness and reflect your understanding back to them. A subtle smile and direct look that says "I see you for who you are" can be very disarming. This can be very difficult, though it is one of the most powerful tools you possess against such a person. It is important to do this without projecting a sense of judgement -- simply see the person and accept them for the person that is underneath the persona they are acting from.

Stand up for yourself: A bully usually picks on someone who is likely to back down and run away with their tail between their legs. You can stand up for yourself without resorting to violence. Stand tall, speak slowly and clearly, and let them know that they aren't going to get what they're looking for from you -- which is to disempower you to make themselves feel more powerful.

Take the high road: Don't stoop to the level of those who are trying to hurt you. It may be difficult, but being the better person will always pay off in the long run. Yet there will be situations where defending yourself is appropriate and necessary. Be prepared to do so with dignity, honor and class, rather than pettiness, arrogance and haste. Whenever possible, look to disarm your opponent before a situation escalates into violence. As Sun Tzu wrote, "the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

For cyber bullying: To avoid cyber bullying, refrain from posting sensitive personal information or content online. Maintain your privacy settings carefully and limit who can see what you post. Be quick to block or unfollow anyone who is engaging with you in a disrespectful or unhealthy way.

If the situation persists, in person or online, you should reach out to an adult for support. Your guidance counselor, teacher, parent, or coach will likely be able to offer some assistance or advice that can help you. Never feel like doing so is a sign of weakness. Some bullies are deeply troubled and need professional help themselves.

It's important that if you are experiencing being bullied, you recognize that it doesn't mean there is something wrong with you. It also doesn't mean that it will be that way forever. In fact, many successful and extraordinary people in our society have shared that they were bullied in school. You can use such an experience to fuel your own growth, to develop your skills, and to become a more confident and compassionate person that will go on to achieve great things in life.

If your behavior is causing others to suffer, even if you believe it is done in a joking spirit, you may be bullying them. It may not seem like a big deal now, but you should know that your actions can have a serious impact on both others and yourself. Nobody forgets those who were unkind to them, which means you may be planting some seeds that will bear sour fruit in the future. Like the saying goes - what goes around comes around. If you haven't lived long enough to experience the truth of this, just wait - you will. Find your inner wisdom to plant seeds now that will bear sweet fruit, because no matter who you are or where you're going - you're going to need it. In other words, continuously reflect on the golden rule and ask yourself: am I treating others in a way that I would like to be treated? How would I feel in their shoes if the roles were reversed?