

## Questions and Answers

**Finding a Mighty Heart: Acquiring the Courage to Stand Up for Oneself and Others**

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Here are my responses to questions called in during the broadcast on December 7. These wonderful questions provided me with the opportunity to clarify my thinking on a variety of issues. Keep in mind that the word “bully” is used here as a grammatical convenience. We should avoid using this label in direct reference to a child, referring instead to the behavior not the attribution. For example, instead of saying, “You are a bully,” it is much better to emphasize, “You bullied someone.” The emphasis on behavior will be more effective in changing the behavior.

I also use the phrase several times in my responses below that we “not feed the bully.” This could have served as a general additional principle on my list of ten (see Appendix 1). This phrase means not giving the bully what he or she wants. Keep in mind that refusing to satisfy the demands of a bully could lead to an increase in the bullying over the short term especially if the target has responded as a victim on previous occasions.

Feel free to contact me by email if you want to respond to any of my comments.

### ***Prevention of bullying***

What do you see as the role of social skills in the bullying process? Is social skill development part of the development of courage or is courage much easier if one has developed social skills? – Siren, MI

The socially skilled child is able to understand the goal of bullying, is able to generate options for responding (the more options the better), and then make a choice that has the best probability for defending himself or another. General social skills may not make much difference. But skills that relate to risk management and decision making under pressure certainly have a great impact on enabling targets and witnesses to respond effectively.

How do you teach a child when they can change injustice and when they cannot?

I’m not sure I agree with the choice you describe. We must always believe we can change any injustice. There is no option to believe otherwise. There are no valid excuses for turning our backs to injustice. None. Our choice is in our strategy and

how we recruit others to the response to injustice. The fact of an injustice is out of our control. But our response is a choice we make. Every child can learn to hold on to hope and weave optimism into the personal fabric of their lives. Confronting the injustice is worth the effort.

How do you build the authoritative community to help both the bully and target? – Springfield, IL

Please don't overlook the importance of the audience, the witnesses to bullying. My best advice for this important question is to study the report I mentioned in the first hour of the broadcast (see slides in Appendix 1).

How do you teach self control and instill compassion and empathy?

I am confused by the question. There is an implication that self-control (composure) is in conflict with empathy. This is definitely not the case. Take a look at Steps Four and Five in the book. I list about a dozen parent practices that focus on these two strengths.

Is overindulgence as bad as neglect or parental bullying? – Dodgeville, WI

No, I don't think so. Just keep in mind that three "bad" practices remain "bad" even though their severity can be ranked. Overindulgence creates a child tyrant, neglect engenders profound grief, and parental bullying fosters rage. All three are poisonous.

Is there a predominant parenting style that encourages or produces bullying? – Dodgeville, WI

In regards to their home environment, how are victims and bullies created? – Wauseon, OH

Yes, a hostile and cold parenting style with approval of predatory action contributes to bullying. Overprotectiveness may contribute to a victim mentality. Anything that undermines self-respect can contribute to either role. Keep in mind that any style of parenting is no guarantee that a child will turn to bullying. Nor is there any guarantee that a child raised by compassionate and loving parents will not someday become a bully or a victim. See the report on Authoritative Parenting for more guidance.

What strategies are most helpful in working with the perpetrator or bully to make positive life style changes and improve their relationships? – LaCrosse, WI

This is an important question but much too broad for a short answer. See the references in the "Bully Facts" handout for more information. Most importantly, take a look at the "Authoritative Community" publication. You can see the

description of the Authoritative Community in one of my PowerPoint slides (Appendix 1).

Should the bully also receive intervention in the 8 skills, and if so, how might this look? – Courtland County, NY

What can we do to change the hurtful behavior of bullies instead of focusing on changing the behavior of the victims? – Renton, WA

Yes indeed, the eight skills have great relevance for all three elements in bullying: the bully, the target, and the witness. I think the challenge is more difficult, though, because bullying originates in pathology. There is less fertile ground for change, probably less desire to change. The parent practices for the Eight Steps in *Raising Courageous Kids* should answer this question. As I said in the broadcast, bullies depend on victims and passive, if not admiring, audiences. Remove those two legs of the three-legged stool and bullying collapses.

How do you help a child not become a bully? – Scranton, PA

Examine the parent practices described in *Raising Courageous Kids*. Read the report on Authoritative Communities (See slides in Appendix 1).

How do you stop a bully from bullying when you only see him/her for 3 hours a day? – Mt. Morris, NY

I don't think you can in a general sense. You can (and should) stop the bullying during those three hours. You can hope that what you do during that time will have a carry-over effect to the rest of the day. As unlikely as that may be, we can hope. I certainly would not expect a teacher to "stop a bully from bullying." Three hours of family therapy every day, involving the aggressor and both of his parents, could bring about behavior change. Teachers have to focus on making a bullying free classroom and hope it contributes to a change in the bully.

Isn't bullying criminal if a bully hits a person? – Caledonia, MN

A grade-school child who starts a fight on a playground is not going to fit the requirements for criminal prosecution (thank goodness). So age is important. Maybe we should prosecute teenagers who physically attack their peers more often. Contact your District Attorney to understand the laws related to juvenile justice in your state. Hitting is assault. Keep in mind that humiliation can also terrorize.

What if the bully is actually a clique? – Paw Paw, MI

A bullying clique is a gang with a fancy name. Of course, standing up to a gang is a challenge of much greater magnitude than going one-on-one. Predatory packs consisting of young sociopath wannabees must be countered by intelligent adults.

No young person can stand alone against a gang. This issue adds a level of complexity that deserves special treatment and cannot be addressed in any substantial way here. Gangs have to be split up. Individual members have to be held accountable for their choices.

Some literature has suggested that bullies do not suffer from low self-esteem. Could you speak on that issue? – New Albany, IN

Isn't this interesting? It seems a contradiction, but it's true, depending, of course, on how we define self-esteem. Consider the bully who threatens a classmate who then turns over his lunch money. What power! The bully gets what he wants. He wins. Everybody loves a winner, right? This bully can swagger down the hall with a puffed chest and instill fear in those who pass by with his menacing glance. He feels great about himself and his powers of control. Beware of any who stand in his way. So sure, a person can have great self-esteem in the absence of compassion. Sadly, self-esteem is paper thin, something without substance gained in this circumstance at the purchase of self-respect. I don't believe a bully has self-respect though. How can a person ever gain self-respect by preying on the weaknesses of others? I think the issue of self-respect is more important than self-esteem. You might be interested in the course "I'm Positive: Growing Up with Self-respect" at my website.

How are you able to give self-esteem to a bully who may not know why he is doing some of the things he is doing? – Scranton, PA

We have to confront bullies with the consequences of their actions, their personal responsibility for their choices and for "making things right again." This lesson has to be taken to heart though. She has to be ready to learn, to "know." Is the problem not knowing or knowing but not caring? See the previous response for my thoughts on self-esteem.

If a bully is "reformed", can or are they accepted by their peer group? – Morris, MN

The person who wants to make a change in how they relate to others is going to have to resist the attempts of the peer group to get him back into his old aggressive behavior pattern. Expectations are a powerful influence on behavior. It will take time for a group of children to begin to see another person in a different way. Think of it this way. The former bully will have to work much harder to change opinions of him than it was to establish those negative opinions in the first place. His actions will eventually prove his transformation. Until then, he will have to work hard from others trying to push him back into the "bully box."

What if the bully is extremely violent and physical, how do you handle that? – Baton Rouge, LA

The word “extreme” points out that the problem requires mental health intervention by a trained counselor. Family therapy is the best strategy if you can find a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. The problem will not take care of itself. A loving and experienced teacher may be part of the solution, but only as part of a more comprehensive treatment plan. Without knowing the child’s age or the circumstances, I can’t say any more than that.

Do you have any empirical evidence that would indicate that these Eight Steps are shown to decrease bullying behavior? – Scranton, PA

No. This perspective is offered for your consideration. I’d love to put it to the test but producing such evidence would be expensive and would take time. Skepticism for any “solution” is healthy, even with programs that claim to have such evidence. Programs do not really make the difference anyway. People do. Intelligent and compassionate teachers or parents can be effective regardless of the tools placed in their hands. Empirical evidence is important of course. Beware of any program that claims to be effective without emphasizing that those who implement the program are the real keys to success. Some of these programs can be very expensive and may give school administrators the impression that it’s designed so that anyone can use it “effectively.”

What do you do in a case when a child (victim) is also a victim of child abuse? How can they be taught to handle a bullying situation? – Orange City, NY

Being abused at home could be a risk factor for being targeted by bullies at school. The child abuse is the more serious issue and has to be stopped first. Only then can we begin to help a child manage bullying. Without knowing any details about the circumstance, I can’t comment further.

What can be done about the child and family when a child does well in school settings but has behavioral issues at home such as aggressiveness, hitting, yelling, and swearing? – Cortland, NY

See the *Responsive Discipline* course mentioned at the beginning of this Q&A.

How can we demonstrate or inspire courage, valor, or heroism when a great many adults do not exhibit the aptitude nor reasoning faculties to recognize these attributes? – Jamaica, IA

Never underestimate the power of one person. Why would the lack of these qualities in others prevent you from demonstrating them yourself? The courageous teacher is a bright light to any young person who sees little evidence of courage in others.

Can violence originate from situations outside the control of the bully? – Pontiac, MI

Excellent question and yes, violence can result from other factors. Crowding for example, or pervasive disrespect and indifference by adults can be an underlying contribution. Excessive competition does as well. Oppressive environments do as well. These factors provide a breeding ground for bullies.

Sometimes I have observed kids getting bullied because they have displayed unacceptable behaviors themselves, such as lying or telling tall tales. When members of their peer group discover the dishonesty they may begin bullying the child who lies. How do we help both sides come to peace? – Shawano County, WI  
Are there guidelines that separate sibling rivalry and bullying in the home setting? – Fremont, MI

Are you sure this is really bullying? The peer group will use conflict to emphasize acceptable and unacceptable behavior within the group. We have to ask ourselves whether the “bullying” is a peer group control issue or predatory. See the handout on “bullying vs. peer challenges” available on my website. Is the behavior you have seen an attempt to drive the child away from the group or to enforce the expectations of other children to keep the offender within the group? In terms of the second question, sibling rivalry is one way siblings work out a relationship. Sibling rivalry can be a challenge to excellence. If this competition becomes hateful and/or destructive then it should not be tolerated.

How do you handle a situation where the child who is being bullied and tells either gets ignored or punished for telling? – Ottawa, IL

Children should never have to suffer humiliation and degradation alone. If the problem is normal, everyday conflict between young people, then the circumstance is a very different matter. Every child needs someone to talk to, to trust in matters of true bullying. They need guidance, not indifference to their suffering. I would want to help the child choose the right person to talk to. I would also emphasize that parents should be compassionate listeners for their children.

Where does repeated rejection play into the design of a bully? – OH

Any practice that undermines self-respect and power contributes to aggression, especially if parents are responsible. Repeated rejection by someone who should love and protect creates rage.

If a young child (A) bullies another child (B) and B is acting as if it doesn't matter, should an adult intervene or look at it like: since B doesn't care, I shouldn't either. Doesn't that reinforce the bully who knows that you saw it but didn't do anything? – PA

Another excellent question! A few problems: our definition emphasizes the predatory nature of bullying. If the target does not see it as a problem, is it really bullying? But if the target is willing to be the victim shouldn't I intercede on his behalf despite his passivity. If I had to make a recommendation based on the little you tell me, I would say that if I thought the action was destructive and demeaning I would intervene. Your last sentence is a real possibility. I would also realize that I need to do some work with the victim. I would consider a child being indifferent to brutality toward her as a loud alarm bell. Not only would my passivity encourage the bully, it reinforces the worthlessness of the target.

How do you help a child who is not popular and does not have many friends because she doesn't stand up for herself when the popular kids are mean to her? Findlay, OH

I would start by recognizing that she doesn't have to be popular in general, and she doesn't have to have a large stable of friends. You didn't say she has no friends. Is she disappointed in her own response? We are probably talking about passivity because of fear. We can help by nurturing her confidence in small steps, encouraging her, and giving her manageable challenges that will build her success in developing the skill of composure. There is nothing wrong, though, with having a small circle of friends.

Where can we find the principles of bullying? – Caledonia, MN

See the slide list in Appendix 1.

### ***Developmental concerns***

How do you differentiate between a victim of bullying and a child who is just overly sensitive? – Ithaca, NY

A child who has received a lot of parental (and other adult) attention for being a "victim" will find the role comfortable (well, not actually "comfortable," but you know what I mean). As parents and teachers we have to get the facts of the circumstance as much as possible. A child who is being brutalized is not simply a whiner. A child who is truly afraid will reveal fear by how she acts and how her body responds.... nightmares, sickness in the morning, haggard face, decline in grades, rage at home. We have to have our antenna up on these signs. Normal conflict between peers does not produce these symptoms (at least in most children). The overly sensitive child needs firm encouragement. I wouldn't dwell on these fussy complaints, but I would be alert of more serious problems that might actually be present.

How do you teach a preschooler to be careful to avoid danger without scaring them?

Let's rethink the nature of the question. We don't like to be afraid and don't want to see our children be afraid. But fear is a necessary and valuable emotion, one that protects us and gives us energy in the form of adrenaline. So I would not automatically assume that scaring a child is unreasonable. For example, I think being afraid of a strange snarling dog is a wise reaction. The key is to emphasize making a reasonable judgment about what seems dangerous. We don't want to exaggerate the danger and use unreasonable fear to control a child's behavior. We don't want children to be frightened of an illusion or something that is not truly dangerous. Fear makes a wise counselor but a terrible master.

Should development stages be taken into account in how one expects a child to handle a bully? – Denison, IA

Most certainly. Fourteen-year-olds are going to have much more poise and greater problem solving skills than a four-year-old. I know this sounds obvious, but we all know of parents and teachers who have unrealistic expectations because of a child's age.

Are there individuals with certain temperaments that are more likely to become a bully or a victim? – Orange County, NY

Not sure "more likely to become" is the right way of saying it. Every temperamental feature (an inborn aspect of personality) is both a boon and a challenge. Emotionally "intense" children, those with high activity levels, and those who find it difficult to adapt to new circumstances will be challenged in some way by their own biology in how they react to stress and risk. I have a lot of admiration for the quiet, bashful child who stands up for herself and refuses to give the bully what he wants. As a parent, I have to understand this struggle and be supportive of my child's style of dealing with bullying.

It is too late to teach children courage beyond 11 years of age? – Paw Paw, MI  
At what age is a child too old to change their bullying actions or behavior? – Ithaca, NY

It's never too late to try. More difficult? Yes. Impossible? No (at least that is my choice to believe). The more the history of fearfully running away the more difficult it is to stand fast. We have to assume that with the right support of an authoritative community, human change is possible. No age is "too old."

Do kids believe that they will suffer retaliation if they intervene? Dodgeville, WI  
What should a child do when he/she intervenes and he/she ends up getting in trouble at school because of this? – Tulare, CA

To the first question, it depends on the bully and his supporters. A show of strength and integrity can be a strong deterrent. Bullies are cowards in search of a



victim. Personally, I think a person should assume retaliation will happen with any intervention, especially if the intervention takes place before the bully's lackeys. Keep in mind that Honor is the seventh Step. The primary question is, "What is the right and smart thing to do and am I willing to endure the consequences? What are the personal consequences and costs (e.g., loss of self-respect) for doing nothing?" Being cautious is smart. But being cautious is no excuse for not doing anything. With the second question, is "getting in trouble" a reason not to do the right thing and intervene when someone is being victimized? Let's say my child decides not to intervene and the victim is hit, falls, and is killed from a blow to the head. My child is likely to suffer for the rest of her life because she remained passive out of fear. So what should my child do? Feel the pride of honor. Keep in mind that the intervention should be defensive, not aggressive, a distinction we should emphasize with our children.

How do you deal with a child's behavior when the child is throwing a tantrum? – Scranton, PA

Keep the child safe from himself and ignore it (don't feed the bully!).

Pacifying an infant having a temper tantrum is like allowing that infant to "bully" you in a way, what should be done about this? – Owego, NY

Great question. Yes, even an infant can act *like* a bully. The goal of the infant is to move you to do something, though, not to intimidate or humiliate you, the purpose of a true bully. What do we do? Well, the general principle of refusing to give bullies what they want certainly holds true here. Giving in to the temper tantrum only makes our lives worse since our response "feeds the bully." The best response to a temper tantrum is to understand its origins. For example, if the child is tired, maybe it's time to leave the store so she can get some rest.

Is bullying limited to just children? What about adult bullying? – Ames, IA

See my previous response if the adult is a teacher. I think parents who are bullies are more common and is a significant contribution to bullying in children. You might be referring to bullying by one adult to another. Adult bullying may be more disguised and the intimidation more subtle. In some cases, the bullying is obvious. The same principles that apply to children for not being a target and for onlookers to intervene are relevant for adults. Don't feed the bullies! The problem becomes more complex if the bully is in a position of authority. If the bully is your boss, the consequences of standing up for yourself or another can have serious consequences on your employment. See the FireWorks course described earlier for insights about managing anger.

How do we help parents deal with sibling bullying? – Shreveport, LA

First, parents might need help recognizing that bullying is present. Keep in mind that the normal bumps and conflicts between sibling, the pokes and prods and complaints, arguing and bickering are not really bullying unless there is persistent victimization. Predatory behavior that causes enduring misery has to be immediately stopped. If this is going on, a parent might need the assistance of a trained counselor to determine the origins of the cruelty and shape a treatment plan. I'm not suggesting that everyday conflict should be ignored. As a parent, I'm going to tolerate more of this than if it escalates to bullying. All parents could use some pointers in managing the everyday conflict between siblings... but avoid using the word bullying to describe this.

Why are so many 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade girls having "mean" girl issues at such a young age? – Pontiac, MI

See *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (3rd edition) by David Elkind.

How do we impact adults who feel "kids will be kids", to realize these problems with bullying? – Andover, MN

I think we have to distinguish between true bullying and normal peer conflicts. True bullying is predatory. Share the definition (see the slides in Appendix 1) and ask them if this behavior is acceptable. Bullying is intentional cruelty, not something that is an integral part of child development. On the other hand, peer conflict is "kids being kids." We cannot stop all arguments. If we could, it would harm the development of friendships.

### ***Skills for responding to bullying***

For children who do not develop skills in self calming and other regulatory behaviors, do they have the ability to develop these skills later in life? – Jefferson, IA

The younger the age a child begins to learn self-regulation, the greater the composure (Step Four). As children grow older the challenge becomes greater, requiring more patience and strength by the parent and teacher. A child's temperament contributes significantly to composure. A teenager with an intense, high active temperament who never learned self-restraint as a younger child is going to test the capacity of the most saintly parent and teacher. Is it possible? No one can predict the future or what thread of humanity and insight can be touched inside any of us. Let's assume for a moment that it's impossible given the out-of-control background of a person. Isn't it more ennobling to act as though it is possible? Never ever, ever give up.

What should be done in a case when a child is a victim of child abuse? How can they be taught to handle this bully situation? – Orange County, NY

I don't believe any child can "handle" child abuse on his or her own. As they grow older, a loving person can help them understand and learn eventually to forgive. We must first help them realize (not just in their heads but in their bodies) that they are not to blame for their victimization. Second they can begin to realize that the person who inflicts the pain is mentally ill. You don't mention if the abuser is a parent. This, of course, would make a great difference. A child suffering abuse from a parent has to manage the feeling of betrayal by someone who is supposed to love and protect. Difficult question to answer in a short paragraph.

### **Self defense**

Is it realistic to expect young children (under 10) to stand up to bullying or should they be taught to report it? – Denison, IA

I would not encourage a child less than ten years of age to "stand up to" older children. The greater the power or strength difference the greater the risk. Confronting bullying can mean more than a test of strength though. An intelligent child can learn "defensive scripts" that rely more on wit (talking her way out of the conflict, using humor, making a simple but firm request). This is only possible if a child can remain composed (Step Four). All "true" bullying should be reported to teachers and parents no matter what the outcome.

We talked about targets having to gain courage to stand up against the bully. How can a target stand up for themselves against emotional bullying, such as verbal abuse? - Ames, IA

In regards to verbal bullying/abuse, what should children do when their attempts of confronting the bully fails? – Keene, NH

Good questions. In some ways, emotional bullying, an attack on self-worth, can be as vicious as a physical assault. It can certainly be more difficult to heal from the pain of an emotional battering. Like any response to bullying, the age and relative levels of power are going to be important. Integrity and honor (Steps Six and Seven) are critical here. Integrity gives a child the words to tell herself during the assault (the accusation of the bully is unfair and untrue; I respect and accept myself; I am loved by the most important people in my life) while honor enables the child to keep her head up despite the humiliation. Willpower (Step One) gives her the strength to NOT fight back and escalate the conflict (which feeds the bully).

What are some examples of when you should stand up and fight and when you should run?

Excellent question. Responding to bullying is essentially a risk-management challenge, something I examine when discussing Valor (Step Eight) in the book. Here are a few elements to consider. Is my life in danger? Does the aggressor have a weapon? What is the probability of a successful escape? Are onlookers present who might be able to help (become witnesses capable of intervening)? Do I know the person bullying (more predictable)? I would encourage fleeing if the probability of serious harm exists, the probability of successful escape is high, and the probability of intervention by witnesses is low. We have to keep in mind that fleeing feeds the bully, though, and may make a child a more attractive target and potential victim. The risk management by onlookers is in some ways even more complicated.

Talk about some practical ways a victim can stick up for one's self without retaliating physically. – Lincoln, NE

Determine what the bully wants and deprive her of it. If she wants to make the target afraid, then act fearless. If she wants the toy, refuse to give it to her. If she wants to tear down the target's self-worth through humiliation, then refuse to accept her claims as truth and keep one's head up. Don't feed the bullies (and don't retaliate!).

Are we wrong to teach preschool age children to "use their words" and not hit back? – Belvedere, IL

Great question. I think teachers and parents must emphasize nonviolent strength. But.... think for a moment... is hitting ALWAYS bad? If a child is attacked physically and is unable to retreat, would we expect the child to remain completely passive? To allow a predator unbridled violence against our child? The answer might be "yes" if your religious beliefs dictate such a response. And I respect such beliefs. If you believed in total passivity, though, how would I feel if your child witnessed my child being beat up or humiliated? Could I accept your child's indifference to my child's suffering? I have my doubts. In my view, the important message is "stop the violence in a smart way" instead of "never hit." Stopping the violence (whether physical or emotional) nonviolently is always the smart way. Sadly, there may come a time when the bully will not cooperate. In those rare moments when all other alternatives will not work, then the very last option is physical defense. Gandhi and King depended on the basic humanity of their opponents to make nonviolence work. If Gandhi lived in Nazi Germany he would not have survived a single protest.

What are specific actions a child can take to protect themselves other than running away or getting help from adults? – Tama, IA

Show firmness of resolve by word and body posture (don't feed the bully!) Go "turtle" to protect oneself from physical blows (lying down in such away to protect head and chest with arms). Fight back. Everything depends on the child's age and power in relation to the bully. Ask bystanders for help if they are available. Ignore words of humiliation while sub-vocally repeating some mantra of personal encouragement. Use humor (as long as it does not enrage the bully and escalate the aggression).

How do you help a child develop the courage to either stand up to a bully him/herself or to defend another peer? – Indiana, PA

See the book *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* and examine the resources at my website: <http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com>. I spent more than two years trying to answer this question. Although the book is not specifically on bullying, its focus on courage certainly applies.

At what developmental age/stage would you recommend self defense training? – Fremont, MI

Great question! Even preschool and young grade school children can learn a few fundamentals of self-defense from parents. Giving an age for formal instruction can be difficult because maturation rates can vary tremendously. I would wait for formal instruction until my child understood the principles of nonviolent resistance. If pressed for an age, I would consider ten years of age a good time to start. Possibly younger if the teacher was exceptional. A good (no a great) teacher is absolutely necessary. Never send a child to a school of self-defense that does not emphasize compassion and spirituality. Meet with the teacher and make sure he or she does the instruction. Nearly every shopping center seems to have a karate school. Some are staffed by excellent teachers. Others (maybe even most, but I have no research on this) are motivated by power and money. Do a search on "aikido" on the web. (see the FAQ at <http://www.aikidofaq.com/>) I love the approach, but qualified instructors are rare.

When encouraging parents to teach their children self-defense skills, aren't we ignoring the legalities of using such defense? – Spencer, IA

I just talked with a n experienced, retired police officer about this. Every person has the right to self-defense. Claiming that a counterattack is self-defense is a problem. If someone hits me (notice who starts the attack), I should be allowed to defend myself. If I knock the aggressor down in my self-defense and then begin to kick him, or if I pursue the original attacker once he flees, or use a weapon that escalates the conflict, I may find myself accused of assault. No self-defense skill should EVER be used to initiate attack. That's why good teachers are so

important. Sadly, good teachers are rare. There should be a philosophy of nonviolence as a basis for the self-defense. Visit with the District Attorney in your county for any further clarification.

What would cause a child to be willing to stand up for others, but unwilling to stand up for him or herself? What can be done to change this? – WI

Isn't this perplexing? My first reaction is that being a target of the bullying creates more emotionality in the child and something neurophysiologists call *emotional hijacking* occurs. The child feels out of control and panic sets in. When someone else is the target, the child feels more in control and has more presence of mind in taking action. Composure (Step Four) is the key. I think we are likely to be successful in helping this child stand up for herself because she is already showing us a level of composure in responding to the needs of another target.

Given zero tolerance, is fighting back justified? – Paw Paw, MI

“Zero tolerance” should mean “no predatory behavior, whether physical or emotional. I just heard from a police officer friend about a high school athlete who did not defend himself from being brutally beaten by a bully because his school’s “zero tolerance” for fighting meant that any physical defense would get him kicked off the football team. This concept is a perverse twisting of the intent of zero tolerance. There must be recognition of the legitimacy of self-defense. Young people must also have the composure to know when they cross the line from defense to attack. We don’t allow declawed cats to remain outside. Why would we want our child to be passive in the face of unrelenting assault? Allowing for defense does give the bully a strategy for provoking the attack of his target. A student advisory board involving faculty should be available to provide administration with guidance on this. I think schools establish a “zero tolerance” for any hitting whatsoever because it’s easier to enforce. Although the use of “minimum adequate and reasonable force” may be reasonable, it may be against school policy. I think such a policy serves the intention of physically aggressive bullies who know their more lawful victim will be hobbled by the rule. I don’t want to give the impression that fighting is the answer. A physical defense is only legitimate if other alternatives have been unsuccessful (not the first response), stop when no longer necessary for defense, and involve a minimum use of force commensurate with the nature of the original attack (e.g., hitting a child who laughs at you is not an example of “minimum adequate and reasonable force.”

## **Schools**

Some schools train peers to be conflict managers on the playground. Is this useful in combating bullying?

I like the use of the peer group to manage conflict problems informally. I would not make these peers “official” and I would certainly want to train them in effective conflict negotiation and in the principles of nonviolence. Most

importantly, I would not want these peers to become officially sanctioned bullies themselves. Better that every child learns these skills and takes responsibility for stopping predatory behavior among their peers. I think some children can be especially effective in this role and should be used to “seed” the peer group informally.

Having been made aware of harassment in the classroom, how do we best help the harassed student and the bully? – Andover, MN

Make the intervention of the harassment the responsibility of every child. This means very clear and firm expectations about the behavior of onlookers. There should be zero tolerance of any kind of terrorism in the school while recognizing that everyday conflict and emotional wrangling is a part (maybe a necessary part) of peer relationships. This means we have to help all children understand when a conflict is predatory.

Are there preschool experiences that teachers can observe and respond to, so those tendencies do not continue on into later years? – Wayne County, IA

Are there certain behaviors or traits in preschoolers that can develop into bullying behavior, and if so, how can those behaviors be identified and addressed? – Marion, IA

There are two major red flags for me. First, a pattern of aggressiveness to get what they want would be alarming. Does a child regularly depend on intimidation to achieve a goal? Second, any sign of experiencing pleasure in witnessing and/or causing misery would be even more troubling. Any absence in the first several skills that emerge in the first five Steps (willpower, caring, vigilance, composure, and empathy) would get my attention. Most of the book’s more than 260 milestones focus on the preschool child.

What is the best approach to use with bullying on the school buses, where there are children of all age levels and only one supervisor? – Oconto, WS

If I was a bus driver, I would have two goals. First, I would want to increase my interpersonal leverage by treating each child with respect and friendliness. Second, I would be 100% intolerant of any form of bullying. At the very first sign of bullying, I would find a safe place to pull over. I would tell the children that my bus would be a safe place for all children to ride and that I would not tolerate anything that conflicts with that purpose (something I should have done right from the beginning). I would make my expectations very explicit (not just the “do not do’s” but the “to do’s” as well). On the second violation I would report the child or children to the administration and no longer allow the offenders to get on the bus. Now there may be school policy that forbid this response. If so, I would not be a driver. Any sign of weakness in resolve leads to fear and disrespect. The bus driver’s word must be law and the consequences must be credible. Note that I have never been a bus driver, nor have I ridden on a school bus (I took the city bus to school).

When students stand up for themselves and face the same consequences (as the bully) from teachers, how should parents help their child? – Freeport, IL

Show pride in the child's willingness to suffer for acting with integrity. Keep in mind that "standing up for oneself" should not be an excuse for violent bullying of one's own (whether name calling or physical violence). If a child did the right and reasonable thing, they should endure the unreasonable punishment with pride. Isn't this an important lesson, that not all good intentions and actions out of integrity have good consequences?

What should parents do when teachers ignore a bullying situation in their classroom? – Mt. Vernon, IL

Meet with the teacher to discuss the matter. Understand his perspective of the problem. If you are not satisfied, schedule a meeting with the teacher and the principal. Work your way up the chain of command from there. True bullying should never be ignored. Consult with your child about your discussions with her teachers and school administrators. Give her some say in how you should proceed.

How do we, as educators, help students who are bullies? – Newton, IA

Keep in mind that bullying is a cover-up for a feeling of powerlessness. A swaggering bully who seems to be in control has a need for the trappings of power because his own sense of true personal power is weak. What motivates cruelty? What is the payoff and is the payoff satisfying? Because the power achieved by bullying is illusory, it is never satisfying. So the bully will repeat the effort in a continuing cycle. We reduce the need to bully by building self respect. In addition, there has to be a zero-tolerance that is backed up by fair but credible consequences to any form of cruelty in the school. The most powerful inhibitors to bullying is primarily targets who refuse to be victims and witnesses who refuse to be bystanders.

What happens when the parents of the bully do not get involved or support teachers in helping "fix" the problem? – Ames, IA

Bringing about a positive change in a child who bullies is going to be difficult if not impossible without the support of parents. Clear expectations and fair and credible consequences will have to be established. This is another reason why the targets and witnesses to bullying have to have a role. If the bully is not fed, then the frequency of bullying will decline.



Do you have a model school district policy against bullying and would a school policy help? – Outagamie City, WI

No, I don't have a model school district policy. Several of the books in my bibliography in "Bullying Facts" may point to such resources. I'd love to work with a school district on such a policy, especially if it included an emphasis on the courage of targets and witnesses.

What specific techniques can teachers and care providers use to teach children how to regulate their behavior? – Jefferson, IA

Huge question and a satisfying response is not really possible in this short format. My best advice is to take a look at the "Composure" chapter in *Raising Courageous Kids* (Step Four) and read the publications identified in the endnotes. There are several excellent professional resources on the issue of self-regulation. Keep in mind that none of us can "teach" self-regulation. The child has to do the work. The school program that emphasized "Stop and Think" identified in the video shown during the first broadcast is one way to promote self-regulation.

How do parents, teachers, and peers know when to intervene in a bullying situation? – Jefferson, IA

Intervene when the child no longer has the capacity to defend herself. No one can stand idly by and allow predatory behavior. We should have common sense to know when something has "gone too far." A child might begin by standing up to bullying that could escalate to the point of going out of control. When events turn vicious, we must intervene. Intervention is always necessary if the power differential is great (e.g., older child picking on a younger child).

What if the teacher is bullying the child and when confronted by parents increases bullying behavior towards the child? – Baton Rouge, LA

School administrators are paid to intervene with staff who become cruel. We first have to reflect on the circumstances to be certain the teacher is really bullying. Using frequent shame is certainly an example of this. If I am certain that this is true, I would schedule a meeting with the teacher and the principal to discuss my concern. Then I would proceed up the chain of command from there. Bullies who hide behind the trappings of authority are particularly repugnant. As I said in a previous response, I would continuously seek the counsel of my child.

What organizational or advisory structures would you recommend to parents interested in raising community consciousness about bullying and raising courageous kids? – Owego, NY

I would hope the school district would have a parental advisory board that would serve as a vehicle for discussing bullying across the system. This board could be

composed of parents from each of the schools. If I was a school administrator, I would not want more than one such board.

Do programs in school show kids how it feels on both sides, bully and victim? – Douglas Co., NE

Sorry if I seem harsh, but I would not do or say anything that lends any form of justification for the acts of the bully. Your use of the word “sides” implies a sort of equality or the option to “take sides.” In my mind, there is no debate in matters of cruelty. Cruelty is wrong and should be opposed. Every human being should stand on the side of the victim. On the other hand, by now it should be clear that I am opposed to “bullying the bullied.” So if you mean “understanding” the root causes of bullying in a child’s life and using that insight in a compassionate response, then I would agree of its importance. We should also keep in mind that a bully in one circumstance is frequently a victim in another. Also, keep in mind that witnesses play a critical role in reducing bullying. Your question only mentions two of the three legs of the bullying stool.

What should a high school student do after confronting the bully and the bully persists in various abuses, even showing up at the student's home? – Manchester, IA

This is a very serious matter. The picture I have in my mind is one of escalated intimidation. I would report this matter to the police. I would have a written summary of my child’s experience to submit. Keep records of everything the bully does and says. More detail, the better. I would also let the school administration know if any of the bullying took place on school grounds. Of course you don’t want to make things worse. But this intimidation and threat may be a criminal matter. You might want to visit the District Attorney’s office for your county to consider your options. With every step you take, seek the advice and opinion of your child.

What do we do when bullying extends to other social activities beyond school and then the parent of the bully becomes involved and bullies too? – Creston, IA

Now we have a gang. Careful thought has to be extended to develop a strategy of deescalating the conflict. If a child and parents choose to respond to aggression with aggression, then we have an increasing spiral of aggression that can go out of control. The best solution is mediation. All parties need to come together to work on the problem. As always, seek the counsel of the child. The question implies that the parent of the bully is also bullying the child. Adult on child bullying is 100% intolerable.

## **Appendix 1: Slide Titles**

### **Definition**

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberately hostile (but not criminal) activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror.

(adapted from Coloroso, *The bully, the bullied, and the bystander* (2003).

### **List of handouts**

- Bully facts
- Bullying and the recipe for terror
- Bullying and peer challenges
- Experiences and consequences
- Applying the eight steps to practical heroism and predatory bullying

### **Bullying principle 1**

The exercise of control and the establishment of influence are a normal part of human relationships at all ages.

### **Bullying principle 2**

Healthy peer groups are not always peaceful. Not all challenges are predatory.

### **Bullying principle 3**

The primary goal in true bullying is to isolate the target from the connection to community while increasing one's own power and status.

### **Bullying Triangle**

what the bully wants (the three elements of bullying graphic)

### **Bullying principle 4**

Bullying is a test, a call to valor for both the target and the witness.

### **Bullying Triangle**

what the target wants (the three elements of bullying graphic)

### **Bullying principle 5**

Any effort to address the problem of bullying must consider where inequities of power exist between the three elements in the triangle.

(The most relevant aspects of power are physical strength, self-control and intelligence.)

### **Bullying principle 6**

Any effort to address the problem of bullying requires a transformation in the human spirit among all elements that affect the bullying triangle: bully, target, witnesses, parents, teachers.

### **Bullying principle 7**

The transformation of the human spirit depends on the creation of Authoritative Communities for children.

### **Authoritative Communities**

- A social institution that includes children and youth
- Treats children as ends in themselves
- Warm and nurturing
- Establishes clear limits and expectations

- The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists
- Long-term focus
- Multigenerational
- Reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person
- Encourages spiritual and religious development
- Philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor

The publication: *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*  
<http://www.americanvalues.org>

### **Bullying principle 8**

The courage to face and overcome bullying evolves over eight steps.

See *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2004).

### **Courage**

Persevering in the face of fear.

### **Heroism**

Courage in service to nobility.

### **Step one: Willpower**

Bullying principle 9

Violence originates in powerlessness.

By 2½ years...

- Phoebe occasionally resists authority by asserting her desires
- She talks about what she wants and how she feels

### **Step two: Caring**

Bullying principle 10

Self-respect is a birthright not a matter of status.

By 3 years...

Phoebe uses words or gestures to communicate a desire for closeness (e.g., says “hug” or gestures to sit on your lap to allow for hugging)

### **Step three: Vigilance**

By 4 years...

Phoebe can distinguish between appearance and reality (e.g., she knows a stone can look like an egg and that clouds are really white when seeing them with sunglasses)

### **Step four: Composure**

By 5 years...

Phoebe tunes displays of anger appropriately to social situations (not at the mercy of her impulses)

### **Step five: Empathy**

By 8 years...

- Phoebe understands that communicating her feelings can make someone feel better
- She attributes her feelings to another’s feelings or situation (e.g., “I feel sad because someone was mean to her.”)

### **Step six: Integrity**

By 8 years...

Phoebe uses altruistic principles for moral decisions (e.g., stops a fight to prevent someone from getting hurt)

**Step seven: Honor**

By 8 years...

Phoebe experiences guilt for not fulfilling an obligation (e.g., she feels awful for not stopping the harassment of a classmate)

**Step eight: Valor**

By 11 years...

Phoebe can assist in emergencies with a greater sense of personal responsibility

See the following website:

<http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com>