

The Short Version!

**My DOs
and DON'Ts**

**for BULLY-
PROOFING
your CHILD**

MARKUS HORNER

Copyright © 2020 Markus Horner

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in printed, digital, or any other form without written permission from the author.

Contact the author at
anti.bullying0909@gmail.com

Cover and interior design
The Publishing Pro
Portland, Maine

DO distinguish between true self-confidence and false self-confidence.

True self-confidence is, without a doubt, one of the two most important traits that a child, any child, can have that will help them to avoid becoming the target of a bully, and becoming a successful and prosperous adult. True self-confidence, and self-esteem are both necessary for a child to be ready to face the world.

True self-confidence is based upon actual accomplishments. These could be based upon athletics, academics, extra-curricular activities, a hobby, or even social activities. The bottom line is that it must be something that requires extra effort to continually improve.

The other type of self-confidence is what I classify as “false self-confidence.” This comes from being told numerous times that you are “so good looking” or “so smart” or any number of other attributes that are not based upon actual accomplishments. They are not based upon putting a substantial amount of effort into improving their performance. Participation trophies are a good example of false self-confidence. All your child had to do was to show up and be breathing.

A child that has true self-confidence based upon his/her efforts is much harder to scare into putting up with a bully’s tactics. They normally do not feel the need to have to prove themselves to the bully or anyone else for that matter.

DO teach your children that being bullied is not their fault.

This is my most important rule. If your children are being bullied, you must make it clear

to them that being bullied is not their fault and that they do not have to face the problem alone. Encourage them to make friends with older children they feel they can trust. Teachers, coaches, and counselors are also good choices for allies. For that matter other adults they are comfortable with—just in case you are not available for whatever reason.

Do make a plan when necessary.

Below is a two-step strategy that you and your child can implement in the hopes of putting an end to a bullying problem. First, have a conversation with your children about bullying. Ask for their thoughts on what might help to put the bullying to an end. Between you and your children, you can come up with some ideas that both of you are comfortable with. Second, take action. Give them enough time to be able to put their plans into effect. Two weeks is long enough learn if your plans worked or not. Be sure to follow through.

DO put your child at the top of your priority list.

Many parents are not involved enough in their children's lives. If you put your child's welfare fourth on your list of priorities— behind your love life, your social life, and your professional life—guess what will happen? You will get either a bully or a victim. There is another problem. There will come a time when you will need your children more than they need you. You are going to hope that you have done your job and they now think of you instead of their love life, their professional life, or their social life. (Of course, if they are parents themselves, their own children should come first.)

DON'T become your child's best friend, but DO develop a strong relationship with your child.

I am not saying that you need to be parent of the year. I am saying that you must be your child's parent. As her parent you will have a sense of authority that a best friend will not and cannot have. There will be times when this sense of authority will be absolutely critical. If you really want your child to have a best friend, buy her a dog.

DO teach your children to pick their friends.

When my daughter was three or four, I told her that she needed to be the one to pick her friends. As a general rule, if you wait for someone to pick you as a friend, you might not get the best friend for you. They could talk you into doing things that end up with you in serious trouble. On the other hand, picking your own friends is a sign of self-confidence.

DO consider martial arts—for the right reason.

If you discover that your child is being bullied constantly, especially physically, you might have to consider helping him with a way to defend himself. Some martial arts are good at building a person's self-worth and self-confidence, which really is the number one way for your child to defend himself against a bully. I am not suggesting martial arts as a way to beat up the bully. Good martial arts teach you how to walk away from a fight instead of punching someone out.

DO teach your children about the three legged stool.

Look at the support your child needs this way. He is sitting on a three legged stool. As long as the stool has three solid legs, the stool will be strong and not have a tendency to wobble or fall over. One leg is his relationship with you. The second leg is his circle of friends and allies. The third leg is his own self-confidence. If you do not have a strong relationship with your child, his stool is down to two legs. He will have a very difficult time remaining upright. If he does not have a strong circle of friends, his stool has only one leg. Now it is not a matter of if he falls over but when. The last thing you want is for your child to be a statistic.

DO use positive reinforcement rather than negative whenever possible.

I realize that this rule might be obvious, but you would not believe how many parents I see doing things that are counterproductive in the name of discipline. Using negative language is an example. When my daughter was growing up, I always tried to use words that did not have a negative connotation to them. This may seem like a small thing—and not related to the topic of bullying—but anything you do to increase a child's self-confidence is relevant. Negative words include “don't,” “won't,” “shut up,” and “never.” Try replacing “shut up” with “stop” or “be quiet” or “stop talking.” You may be surprised at the results.

There are also a number of other actions you can take to encourage good behavior. A pat on the back. A high five. Surprising them with something they really like. It could be something like going for

ice cream. This might be especially productive if they are young. Bragging about them to someone else when you know they are listening. (This helps them to realize how proud of them you are. This is always a good thing.)

DO remember that your children watch you, listen to you, and learn from you.

It is true. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Your actions speak so loudly that I can’t hear your words!” Unfortunately, negative behavior undermines anything you do of a positive nature. You probably have heard more than once about the boy who grew up in a home where the father was physically or emotionally abusive to the mother. Guess what? He grew up to do the same. Sadly, this happens far too often. The child who becomes a bully learned how to be a bully by watching the adult members of his own family—and not just the male members of the family

DON’T engage in name-calling yourself.

Especially in front of your child. You’ve no doubt heard the playground rhyme, “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” No kid believes this. Sometimes words are actions. Do you remember a time in school when someone called you a name that embarrassed you in front of your friends? That hurt. Maybe it was a racial slur. With me it was about making fun of my Tourettes-related tics. I was constantly called “Twitch,” “Rabbit,” “Shaky,” and any other derogatory name they could think of. Children do not engage in verbal bullying without having heard it somewhere, most likely at home. Don’t think it starts at home? Surely, you have been in a car with your child in the

passenger seat when another driver did something that angered you? Did you yell at him? Did you use a racial epithet? If it was a woman driver, did you insult her for being a woman?

DON'T make promises you can't or won't keep.

How you, as parent, handle situations in your own life affects whether your child will become trustworthy. If you regularly do not do what you say you are going to do, it will not take people, including your children, long to realize that you cannot be depended on or trusted. Worse, your children are likely to imitate your bad behavior. Do you really want your child to develop the habit of not being responsible? Do you really want to have doubt about what your son just told you? Do you want to have that gnawing feeling in the pit of your stomach that something is not right when your daughter asks you to believe her when she tells you what she and her friends are planning on doing. When you threaten to do something—as long as it is legal, nonviolent, and does not itself constitute bullying—do it

DO learn to recognize the signs of a child being bullied.

If your child comes home from school with a black eye, you might have a clue that he is being bullied. But the damage done by bullies is not just physical. It is mental and emotional as well. Look for these signs that your child is possibly being bullied. The physical effects of bullying will heal in a short period of time, but the effects of mental and emotional bullying can last a lifetime. I still feel the effects of the bullying that I endured more than fifty years ago.

Look for the following: Her grades drop suddenly for no apparent reason. He frequently loses his school supplies and other belongings at school. She has no hobbies or outside interests. He complains that “he doesn’t fit in.” She seldom completes her homework. His school attendance drops suddenly. He has more absences and tardies. She doesn’t want to go to school events. He has talked about suicide. She seems depressed. Her voice has no energy. She moves slowly. He gets sick often. She can’t seem to concentrate. He comes home from school with an injury. She has few or no friends. He doesn’t like any of his classes. She can’t identify anything she is good at. He refuses to ride the school bus home, says he would rather walk.

More than half of this list can be used to describe me during my grade-school years. I was frequently in the school nurse’s office, complaining about one medical issue or another—even if there was nothing physically wrong.

DO learn to recognize emotional pain.

The signs of emotional pain can be very hard to detect, particularly if your child is not the kind to open up about how she is feeling. But let me reassure you that it is worth all of the effort that you put into it. Bullying is not a human invention. You can find it all over the animal world, but humans are the only ones who seem to derive a perverse sense of enjoyment from bullying others, even when they know that it is wrong.

Bullies seemed to enjoy the hell out of torturing me. I don’t understand it. I don’t see how someone could enjoy pushing someone to the point where he becomes willing to take his own life just to make the pain stop. I got to that point more

than once. Physical pain tends to disappear rather quickly. It seems like emotional pain goes on forever, and it can sometimes require the help of a trained professional to alleviate it.

DO teach your child verbal self-defense.

The good news is that the verbal arts can be used to defend yourself instead of getting into a physical confrontation with another person. If your child shows a talent for the verbal arts, even if the talent is misused to abuse another, chances are you can train him or her to fend off bullies with a little verbal judo, a term that has been popularized by Dr. George Thompson (www.verbaljudo.com). Most discussion seems aimed at law enforcement, but the tools can be appropriated by other adults and children. Tools include:

- **Humor.** This is particularly effective when it is self-deprecating.
- **Distraction** or **changing the subject.**-
- **Withdrawing.** This is choosing to disengage from the conflict. Your child might say, "I'd love to talk more about this, but right now I have to get to class."
- **Impersonal response.** In this case, the target responds to the attacker by acknowledging what is said but in an impersonal way. For example, the attacker might say, "You gays are ruining this school." Instead of saying, "I'm not gay," or "You're a big homophobe," your son might say, "Some people think gays are ruining this school"

One last way to fight back is to not fight back. You just look at the bully without saying anything or even responding. If he tries to taunt you into

saying something that could potentially inflame the situation just say, “I have nothing to say.”

DO have regular family meals.

As my daughter was growing up, I insisted on this rule. If possible, all three of us ate supper together. If this was not possible because of work schedules or some other unavoidable appointments, we tried to eat together at one of the other meals of the day. Life in modern culture is hectic, so it's important to have a time to slow down and check in with each other. Getting together for a meal served this purpose for us. It strengthened our bonds with one another. It gave us time to share our lives with each other. It was a time for my daughter and wife to let me know about any problems they were having, which gave me a cue to help alleviate their stress.

DO teach your children to avoid behaviors likely to make them a target for bullying.

Below is a list of the most common traits that attract the attention of a bully.

-
- She is unable to defend herself.
- He has few if any friends.
- She is uninvolved in extracurricular activities.
- He is a low achiever in academics or sports.
- She is ignored or disliked by adults in the school.
- He has weak social skills.
- She has difficulty communicating, especially in stressful situations.
- He is not assertive and tries to avoid being

noticed.

- She intentionally tries to annoy or provoke others.
- He hangs out with a rough crowd in an attempt to be accepted.

DO teach your children to make and value real friends.

This can be very important when it comes to preventing your child from becoming a target of bullies. Children and teens are less likely to target someone they know who has a group of friends willing to come to his or her defense if necessary. Your child also needs to know that this is a two-way street. If they expect someone to stand up for them, they need to be willing to do the same for their friends.

DO give your children a clear set of guidelines.

Bullying is not a natural or normal part of growing up. It is not something that will just go away by itself. It is a learned behavior. Bullies are not born; they are made. You will contribute to this unfortunate reality if you allow your children to do as they please or by not holding them accountable for their actions.

DON'T ignore statements like “I don’t fit in.”

Take it from me: If your child says he doesn’t fit in, *pay attention*. Don’t even wait for him to say it again. If he doesn’t have friends, participate in extracurricular activities, or have a decent

attendance record at school, he's telling you without expressing it verbally that he doesn't feel like he fits it. This is an indication that he is possibly being targeted by bullies. I know. I was there. I felt this way all of my school life and well into adulthood.

DO make sure your child has something she enjoys doing.

Even if she's not particularly good at the activity, don't worry about it. If she enjoys it and gets a sense of accomplishment from it, that's what really counts.

DON'T bribe your children to do what you want.

Another serious mistake you might be tempted to make is bribing your offspring to get them to do what you want them to do. This is counterproductive. What you need to do is build your children's confidence by steering them into activities they enjoy and can succeed at. Bribery can succeed in the short run, but you might end up bribing them to take a wrong turn into an activity they don't enjoy and won't be particularly good at. It doesn't respect their talents and interests. Unfortunately, this is a common mistake.

DO keep a bullied child in the same school for as long as you can.

There is one way to reduce the odds that your child will be bullied over time, especially if he or she is learning disabled. The mother of a child with Downs Syndrome, who also happens to be a registered nurse, suggested this: "Keep your child in

the same school and in the same school district for as long as you can.” As it turns out, children pick on their classmates less and less the longer they know them. This is especially true with respect to disabled children.

DON'T accept bullying as “normal behavior.”

Some people have this attitude: “It is just a normal phase for boys or girls to bully each other.” Or, “It’s just boys being boys.” I hate to rain on their parade, but bullying is not normal. It is a learned behavior.

DO encourage your children to report bullying behavior to trusted adults.

Make sure that your children know that it is okay to tell a teacher or a parent or even a trusted older friend that they are being bullied. If someone is doing or saying things that make them feel uncomfortable or afraid, they need to get some help. If someone is hurting them physically, then this is all the more important. It is up to you to make sure they understand that this does not make them a snitch. They are just doing what they have to do to take care of themselves.

DO teach your child that fighting back is the last alternative.

Instead, work with your child to identify alternative ways of confronting and disarming bullies. Some people think that fighting back in a physical sense is never a solution. I don’t agree with this. If someone is beating on you, you may need

to defend yourself. With that being said, too many parents (fathers usually) think that a child (a boy usually) needs to prove himself by getting into a fist fight with someone. Not every boy is capable of defending himself in a fistfight. This can be trouble. You don't want to raise a child who is spoiling for a fight—ever. You do want to raise a child who is confident—so confident that chances are good he will never need to prove himself.

DO teach your child to develop a thick skin.

One of the methods I endorse is teaching children to completely ignore a bully's attempts to get under their skin. I realize how difficult this is, if for no other reason than that it requires a level of maturity that is not natural to children. In other words, such maturity needs to be taught and developed by you. On the other hand, that is one of your roles as a parent. If you are successful, your child will be much the better for it.

DO protect your child from cyberbullies.

In some ways, cyberbullying is just a species of social bullying, but the internet enables anonymous messages to spread more quickly than person-to-person gossip. If anything, it is more difficult—even impossible—to stop once started. The damage can be irreparable.

DO teach your children to be upstanders instead of bystanders.

In a bullying situation, there is a bully, a victim or target, and a bystander. There is now a

fourth person who can be involved—an upstander, a term borrowed from the circus and referring to the acrobats who support a formation of acrobats, such as a human pyramid. In this case, the upstanders are those who step in and support the victims of bullying. They are there to try to stop the bullying that is taking place. An upstander tries to do the right thing.

DO make sure your child's school has an anti-bullying program in place.

Because the majority of bullying takes place on school grounds, schools have been drawn into this issue. Unfortunately, the majority of teachers have no idea what to look for. It's easy for them to see when one student is physically bullying another student, but physical bullying is not the only type of bullying. Here is even worse news. One study conducted by the National Association of School Psychologists concluded that 25 percent of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying, and only 4 percent of the time does a teacher intervene.

DO introduce your child to role models—successful adults who once were bullied.

Your child needs role models. These are adults who were bullied as children and teens but found success as adults. They had a lot to give, but this did not become obvious until they grew up. They are living, breathing proof that you can make it if you really want to. It is up to you, the parent, to make sure that your child never forgets that he has a long future ahead.

DO prepare your child for the last resort.

One thing I would stress is prevention. The more well-trained in a martial art your children are the more confidence they will have. This is the key to avoiding a fight. Bullies do not normally pick on children who appear to be really confident. They aren't easy prey. This alone can stop most attacks.