

Article 4 – Improving Confidence and Self-esteem to Combat Bullying

No matter how much we try we can't always keep our children safe or ensure that they will be happy. We can, however, increase their chances of coping with difficulties by building their confidence and self-esteem. People with high self-esteem can usually shrug off bullying. They know what the bully is trying to do and either walk away, ignore them or can quieten the bully with a few well-chosen words. (The last tactic does require high self-esteem and some quick thinking.)

If the bully is not getting the reaction they want from the victim, they will usually persist for a little while and then give up.

So how do you build self-esteem?

When we are being picked on, it is easy to feel worthless and forget all the wonderful things about ourselves.

Often, victims are really nice people, people who will grow into caring, gentle adults, be successful in their jobs and make great parents. If you are a victim or the parent of a victim, remember this. It helps!

The main thing we want to happen is bullying to stop and for the victim of bullying to feel they have some control. Here are some things you can try:

- Tell your child that life might be tough at the moment, but, if you take some steps to improve your self-esteem and confidence, it will get better;
- Teach your children to give to themselves and to listen to positive feedback;
- Teach your children to give to others by showing care and concern. It is amazing how thinking about the needs of others makes us aware of how lucky we are, and helps us to make friends;
- Develop their communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal. Show them how they use their eyes, face and body can show interest, neutrality, confidence and fear. We know that children who project confidence in their voices and body language are less likely to be bullied;
- Teach them the words for communicating; I think, I feel, I would like;
- Help them develop a support network, including a bunch of 3 to 5 friends and teachers/older students/ other adults who your child can count on. If a child has a group of friends outside of the school, any lack of support at school is less likely to impact on them long term;
- Encourage them to participate in drama, sport, team activities, music, church groups, and other activities – research suggests that these activities help children gain confidence and reduce their chances of being bullied;
- Investigate leadership building activities such as Scouts and Guides, Future Problem Solving, Tournament Of Minds, Outward Bound and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards;
- Research activities you and your child can do together;
- Try to give your child something to look forward to, to relieve the pressure of school.

Another important skill to help children grow in confidence is to teach them how to be assertive. Once again, the aim is to make young people feel they have more control so that stop seeing themselves as victims.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings, opinions, beliefs and needs directly, openly and honestly, without intentionally hurting the feelings of others. Assertiveness does not mean being aggressive or stopping others expressing their own feelings, opinions and beliefs in a similar manner.

One way of thinking about assertiveness is that it is between being passive and being aggressive. Being aggressive is bullying. It is destructive to relationships and often makes the

aggressor feel bad. Being passive may help avoid conflict but in time the person feels helpless and not in control.

Assertive children are more likely to stand up for their rights and less likely to be bullied.

When children are assertive they:

- Let people know their needs and wants
- Do not hurt the feelings of others
- Feel respected and heard (and make sure the other person is also)
- Strengthen the relationship between the two parties
- Feel in control
- Experience fewer conflicts and arguments
- Feel more confidence and have higher self-esteem
- Have a better chance of getting what they want.

Like any other skill, assertiveness is something that must be learned, and it may take time. Begin by modelling assertiveness in your own interactions with your child, as well as explicitly teaching your child how to be assertive. Explain the difference between assertiveness, aggressiveness and passivity. Role-play typical bullying situations where they can practise being assertive. Notice when they handle a situation assertively and compliment them.