

## Article 6 – Taking Control: How you can help your child

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt others were taking control and you were helpless to change what was happening? This is the feeling victims of bullying have to deal with day after day. And it's an awful feeling.

Taking control of their thinking, their actions, and their decisions helps children to feel less vulnerable and helps them overcome their fear.

One of the really important things we can do to help children is to tell them the fact they are being bullied is **not their fault**. No one **deserves** to be bullied.

On the contrary, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child declares that **every child has the right to feel safe**. In fact the declaration concludes 'in the enactment of laws (to protect children), the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration'.

Sadly we can't be there to protect our children every minute of every day (as much as we wish we could) but we can help them in taking control, and we can assist them to develop strategies to make them feel stronger and better able to cope.

There are at least three things we recommend for taking control:

### 1. Taking control of emotions - Positive self talk

The power of the mind is greater than any power that bullies have. No one can make your child feel inferior without his or her consent. Sound simple? Of course, it's not. As adults we know how hard it is to control our minds. We all remember moments of helplessness, times when taking control was just too hard and incidents when we were completely embarrassed. And we know these moments make us feel awful.

We can, however, reduce the power of these things to hurt by taking control of our thinking. Here's how...

Positive thinking and positive self-talk really do work, provided you use them consistently. Positive thinking is a mental attitude that expects good things to happen. When people think positively they expect to be happy and successful and, even when things go wrong, they don't blame themselves – or others. They are able to accept mistakes or bad things and decide to move on.

For example, some students who do badly on a test at school will blame the teacher, or the fact they were not feeling well that day, or they will say to themselves, 'I'm dumb. Everyone else is smarter than me.' **This is negative thinking.**

On the other hand, some students who do badly on a test will say, 'Okay, I messed up. I probably didn't study hard enough and I didn't really understand the question. I can fix this. What can I do about it?' **This is positive thinking.**

What's the difference? Positive thinkers don't look for people to blame, either themselves or others. They look at **actions**. They realize they could have studied harder, or they should have asked the teacher when they didn't understand. The great thing about realizing this is **it puts the positive thinker in control**. Instead of feeling unhappy or resentful or stupid, the positive thinker can see actions to be taken that will make things better next time.

Positive thinkers learn to control their thoughts so they **expect** good things to happen to them. They know that it is not what happens to them that counts, but how they respond inside.

This is why **positive self-talk** is such an important part of thinking positively. By controlling inner dialogue - your thoughts and the things you say to yourself, you can control how you feel and how you present yourself to the world.

When you see things positively, look for the good in each situation and look for the good in each person, a strange thing happens. You naturally begin to feel positive and optimistic about life.

## 2. Taking control of actions - Assertiveness Training

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings, opinions, beliefs and needs directly, openly and honestly, without intentionally hurting anyone's feelings. 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.

Remember, the whole point of being assertive and thinking positively is we want the **victim** of bullying to feel **in control**.

Being assertive means you control your actions in order to feel stronger and to show the bully that you won't allow him or her to make you feel bad about yourself or to control what you do. An assertive person is **in control**.

So how do you make this happen?

Being assertive is all about body language, using assertive language and keeping cool. An assertive person looks confident (even if he or she is quaking inside). An assertiveness person lets the other person know what they want without making them aggressive or defensive.

When you accuse people or say things like 'you're a bully' or 'you're stupid' you make them defensive and likely to hit back. This not what you want! The secret of assertive language is that you criticize the person's behaviour, not the person – and you do this by explaining how that behaviour makes you feel or what it is you want.

## 3. Taking control of decisions

Taking control of decisions is really a combination of positive thinking and assertiveness. In some ways, we can **choose** to be a victim - not because we want to be, or because it is our fault, but because our attitudes, body language and what we say all make the bully know we are not in control.

Of course, making the decision 'I'm not going to be bullied anymore' or 'I'm going to make sure my child is never bullied again' is not going to stop the bully. If only it was that simple!

However, we believe the sooner you think positively, act assertively and manage decisions, the sooner you take the steps towards being in control.

So let's talk more about taking control of decisions.

Often the first reaction to bullying is to become upset, sometimes closely followed by anger. These are common reactions. At this stage you want the bully **punished**.

This is where taking control of decisions is important. You want to control what happens next. You can decide to go to the school and demand punishment, you can sympathize with the victims and make it clear you will fight their battles for them, you can demand the bully is expelled from school, you can confront the parents of the bully, you can confront the bully - or you can do all of these.

Before you do anything, however, we suggest you ask yourself one important question -

'What do I want to happen?' If you are the victim of bullying or the parent of a child being bullied the answer is the same.

### **You want the bullying to stop.**

If you can agree that this is what you want, then you can start taking control of decisions and controlling what happens next.

If you decide what you want is for the bully to be punished, you, of course, have the right to make this decision but **it is something you cannot control.**

If, instead, you decide that you want the bullying to stop, then you can take steps to make this happen.

### **Tips to help in solving bullying problems**

Solving bullying problems is not easy and sometimes it can take time and persistence before you reach a solution that is long lasting. If you believe your child is being bullied the first thing you will want to do is talk about it.

No matter how bad you feel or how upset your child is, it is important not to over-react – no matter how strong the temptation! Children are quick to pick up your emotions and are likely to become even more upset when they see your unhappiness.

If your reaction is anger, there are dangers in this also. You may want to confront your child's teacher or the school principal or the bully. If you do this while you are angry you may display aggressive behaviour similar to bullying and, by implication, suggest this kind of behaviour is okay.

If you lay all the blame on the bully (even though this is perfectly reasonable) it may encourage your child to feel powerless; and if you brush your child's concern aside, you imply that bullying is not important.

The first thing to do is stay calm so that you and your child can deal with this in a matter-of-fact way, which does not lay blame. The important thing is to let children know that **you are on their side** and that **together you are going to work out a solution.**

So...if your child is being bullied, what action do you take?

Different types of bullying require different responses. If the bullying is a one-off incident, or involves mainly name-calling, children may be able to handle it themselves.

However, if the bullying is serious or is widespread in a particular school, club or on the bus, help from someone in authority will be needed.

The 'formula' for dealing with bullying involves three steps. Sometimes you will not use all steps or you will combine more than one step. On the whole, however, dealing with bullying involves the following:

1. Write down details of the bullying
2. Ignore the bullying if possible
3. Make a decision about action to take if ignoring is not possible.

Our e-book on bullying works through each step of this process to help you and your child combat bullying (please see our products page).