

Parents: How Not To Raise A Bully: The Ten Things You Must Know, Part Two

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If, as an adult, you have ever known a childhood bully, you have probably speculated about what is going on in that child's home. It doesn't take an expert to tell us that parents play a role when their child is a bully, however; the experts do agree. Study after study tells us that what happens at home can either foster or quell bullying. Of course, what happens in a home isn't the only effect; other factors can make a bully, including social and community influences, psychological triggers, etc.

But what is it that parents can do to raise a child who leads a healthy social life, and who has self-confidence and the respect of peers, garnered by kindness and empathy? In short, how do you not raise a bully? This is a complicated and nuanced question that we began answering in part one. In this second part of this article series, we'll review the final lessons that all good parents should know.

6. Expand their repertoire. Bullying can be a response to boredom, a simple desire to generate interaction and activity, or a way to "get something going." Too often kids are not as effective at generating positive activities to relieve boredom. Kids are rarely going to self-generate an activity that they haven't done before. Do you want your kids to pull out a board game? You probably will have to teach them to play. Do you want them to make a sculpture out of recyclables? The same holds true.

Activities that generate direct interaction foster different and likely better social skills than the side-by-side play of most video games. If your kids always run to television or videogames, they may not be bored, but it's unlikely they are building the comprehensive set of social skills you'd choose for them.

7. Help your kids manage all their relationships well. My younger son is really outgoing and social and we are proud of his leadership qualities. Over the years, he has had some wonderful friendships with quieter, less assertive children. We've talked with our son explicitly about the fact that it is incumbent on him to work harder to make sure that the quiet friend is getting what he wants—his choice of games, his activities and his decisions. A good friend, we tell our son, draws out those things even when he doesn't have to. I don't think that my son risks bullying his quiet friends, but I don't want him inadvertently to do solely what he wants without regard to others.
8. Reward empathy and kindness. In many ways, empathy and kindness are the opposites of bullying. As a starting point, have your children heard you use those words? Could they define them? When a child—your own or another—demonstrates empathy or kindness, it is worth calling it out pointblank. "I saw you ask that younger child to play with you and your friends, and that was really kind. I was proud that you did that."

Not raising a bully is about preventing some specific negative behaviors. It is also a matter of promoting certain specific good behaviors in your children. When your child is doing the right thing, make sure that you are acknowledging it.

9. With great power comes great responsibility. Sometimes bullying behavior grows from poor social skills. However, research shows, and as parents we know, that just as often, the bully is the child with more socially desirable traits. The tall, handsome, and athletic boy can use his

standing for good or for bad; the smart, attractive, and mature girl can use her role positively or negatively in the community.

Do your kids know that their talents only hold them to a higher level of behavior? With my two sons, I find myself frequently talking in terms of super-heroes and other protagonists: As Uncle Ben told Peter Parker, “With great power comes great responsibility.” “You know why Anakin turned into Darth Vader? As amazing as he was, he gave up trying to be good when it became really hard.” Your kids need to hear that they are expected to use their powers for good and then be rewarded for doing it.

10. Don't model bullying. It seems that it should go without saying, especially at the end of a list such as this. However, parents sometimes do not recognize the bullying they themselves are doing at home. Do you make fun of your child's weakness (or a spouse's weakness) and calling it “teasing?” Do your kids hear you gossiping with your friends about a peer's problems or failings?

You have every kind of superior power over your children—physical strength, mental prowess, and financial control. Any way that you use these things yourself without kindness and empathy creates a powerful example that you may well spend a lifetime overcoming.

Parents, you can not raise a bully. However, rearing a child who is compassionate and kind takes some specific attention. I hope that we've provided some basic yet essential food for thought.

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