

Six Ways to Raise a Child Who's NOT a Bully

Rona Renner, RN and Marisol Muñoz-Kiehne, PhD

Each week we hear horrific stories of children being victimized by bullies at school, in the neighborhood, and on the Internet. There are school programs working to change the school climate, and there are parents monitoring social networks, but we don't talk enough about the bully and what parents can do to prevent a child from becoming one.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

Understand individual behavior styles and have realistic expectations based on a child's temperament.

- When children are sensitive and slow to warm up, help them navigate friendships and school life.
- Active and impulsive kids love to be the center of attention. Have positive outlets for their energy and passion.

Spend time with children and their friends.

- Know your children's friends and pay attention to the values of their group. Is your daughter is attracted to a "troublemaker"?
- Try and understand why your child is friends with the kids who act mean.

Set limits and have consequences for unacceptable behavior.

- Don't make excuses for misbehavior. Give consequences that fit the behavior and always end with encouragement showing that you expect children will do better next time.
- Give attention for positive behaviors.
- Find a way to problem-solve without harsh punishment.

Pass on your values. Don't bully your children, and don't let them bully you.

- Your children will model your behavior, even more than listening to what you say. Make a point of having them see you help others.
- Provide opportunities for children to be of service to people less fortunate. For example, you can have them help at a food bank, or mentor a younger child.
- Think about their strengths and the ways they're competent.
- Reduce intimidation and increase respectful communication.
- Teach children appropriate ways to express their feelings, fears, and desires.

Reduce parental anger and arguing.

- When children experience violence at home, they can internalize their fear and act out their feelings.
- Have time away from children when you work out adult problems.
- If children hear fighting, have them see you make-up and talk to them about what they heard and what you hope to change in the future.

Early intervention is key for children who are impulsive, aggressive, depressed, or traumatized.

- Connect with a child's teachers and school counselors.
- Talk with your doctor and get referrals for a mental health professional.
- If you don't know where to get help, call 211.

Things happen in the lives of children that can propel them on a course you didn't expect or desire. Reach out and get support, and remember that bullies need attention and help to learn to be compassionate. We can stop them from hurting others.