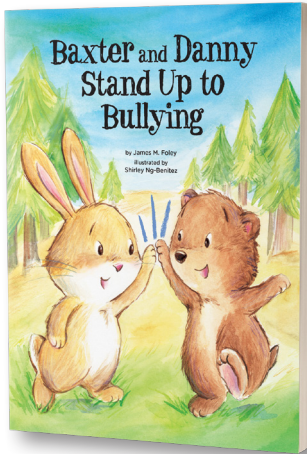




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Eight Ways to Help Your Child Stand Up to Bullying

by Dr. James Foley



Whether your child is the target of bullying or a witness, experiencing bullying is painful and can have long lasting negative effects. Dr. James Foley shares strategies from his book, *Baxter and Danny Stand Up to Bullying*, to help your young child stand up to bullying.

You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

The key to coping with bullying behavior is to help your child build self-esteem and resilience. The following strategies can help.

Identify bullying behavior

Bullying is defined as:

- aggressive behavior that occurs repeatedly over time,
- is intended to cause harm, and
- involves an imbalance in power between the perpetrator and the victim.

Identify and label problem behavior, like name-calling or enlisting others to make someone feel bad. When you see bullying behavior, in a story like *Baxter and Danny Stand Up to Bullying*, on TV, or in the real world, point it out, name it for your child, and indicate that it is unacceptable. Help your child understand the effect the behavior has on others by saying, "name-calling makes people feel bad." Then describe acceptable behavior. For example, you could say, "In our family, we want to be kind and use nice words, not call each other names."

Teach assertiveness at home

If you observe name-calling or other bullying behavior within your family, try to redirect and give a positive alternative statement or behavior. "Nobody likes it when you use mean names. If you are upset, take a deep breath and describe how you feel instead of using mean words." The family is a practice ground for life skills needed to stand up to bullies. Teaching assertiveness within the family can help.

Listen and problem solve

Within the safe space of reading time, ask specifically about your child's concerns about bullying. Initially, keep your responses neutral in order to clarify your child's concerns.

- Have you ever seen bullying at your school?
- How often does that happen?
- How did that make you feel?

If your child is developmentally ready, involve them in the problem-solving process.

- What do you think would help?
- What would stop the bullying?
- If you saw bullying, who is a good person to tell?

Parents should give specific instructions on how to solve the situation, such as, "I want you to tell me and your teacher."

Young children benefit from physical demonstrations and integrating lessons into their play. For example, you can use your child's favorite stuffed animals to act out the interactions and strategies. Model them for your child with the toys first, and then encourage your child to do the same, to demonstrate their understanding of the ideas.

Brainstorm coping strategies

Use the *Baxter and Danny Stand Up to Bullying* story to illustrate the impact of Queen Beth's song, which emphasizes the forest animals' strengths and the power the group has to stop bullying behavior. Then tell your child that they can effect change.

- In the story, the song reminds the animals of their strengths, and that they have good friends.
- What are your strengths?
- Who can you rely on to be a good friend?
- These are things that can help you feel better.

Talk about social support

Using social support is a good way to cope with the stress of bullying. Talk with your child about the positive power of their groups.

- How does it feel when your team cheers for you or you cheer for a friend?
- How does it feel when the kids in school work together and have fun or make something?

Build self-esteem

Your child needs a basic foundation of positive self-worth in order to stand up to future bullying. Point out on a regular basis all of the wonderful qualities your child possesses and all the good habits they have learned.

Encouraging your child by describing their positive actions helps them develop a true sense of self-worth. It's important to provide accurate descriptions of their abilities, not unwarranted praise. You can:

- Make a specific list, including qualities like being helpful by doing chores or being kind by caring for a sibling.
- Take pictures of your child demonstrating those qualities.
- Create an electronic or actual poster of pictures or phrase of these qualities.

Use positive affirmations

Help your child convert those positive qualities into a positive affirmation which can serve as a daily reminder of self-worth. "I am a great helper because I feed the dog!" Add the repeating or singing of the positive affirmation to your daily routine. Begin by modeling your own positive affirmation for your child.

Emphasize telling an adult

Help your child identify the adults in their life whom they trust, such as family members and teachers. Make a list of those adults with your child. Discuss scenarios in which bullying may occur, and stress seeking out a trusted adult, especially when the situation feels unsafe or teasing or insults are persistent. Remind your child that it is a sign of strength to ask for help.

To stand up to bullying, your child needs positive self-esteem, resilience, and coping strategies like seeking out social support, remembering their strengths, active problem solving, and asking an adult for help. If you suspect that bullying is occurring, cooperating with preschool, daycare, or school professionals is essential. If problems persist, consult a qualified mental health professional.

This Article's Author

James M. Foley, DEd, is a licensed psychologist who has recently retired from his private practice in Maine. He has served as a clinical director and member of a community mental health center children's service team and has extensive experience as a school psychologist and child and family therapist. He now resides in Sonoma County, CA, in close proximity to his two adult children and serves as psychological consultant to a local school district.