

6 Bullyproof Secrets Every Parent & Teacher Must Know

– By Tom Thelen, Author of *Victimproof*

1. Teach Your Kids the Difference Between Bullying and Teasing

Bullying is all about power. Two kids teasing each other might be bad behavior, but it's not necessarily bullying unless one tries to take power over the other. This could be physical power, but it could also be verbal or social power, even social-media power. So teach your kids the national definition of bullying from StopBullying.gov: *Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems (source: www.stopbullying.gov).*

2. Model How to Stay Calm Under Pressure

As a parent or teacher, how do you initially react to stress and anxiety? Do you fly off the handle and yell at your kids? My wife and I have four children, so we know what it's like to be stressed out (what can I say – we're real people). The biggest bullyproof secret I've ever learned is to find healthy ways of dealing with stress and anxiety. I'll go for a walk, listen to some music, or give myself a five-minute break, so I can ultimately calm down and talk it out rationally. When we model self-control to our kids, it teaches them how to stay under control... even when other people go out of control (ie: bullying). When kids refuse to give the bully a negative reaction (which is exactly what they're looking for), then the bully will simply move on to an easier target. It's a small change, but it makes a huge difference!

3. Empower Them to Speak Up to Bullying

If bullying is all about taking power, then the solution needs to be about keeping your power. As adults, we need to **empower kids** to speak up or stand up in a way that fits with their personality. The reality is: if a kid's only solution is to "Run and tell on the bullies" every single time, then it's not a very empowering solution. And if we're not careful, we can accidentally communicate that they're not powerful enough to speak up (when many times they are). Work with your child and roleplay some bullying situations and responses. Take turns playing the part of the bully, the victim, and the bystander. Then step back and ask questions like: *How did that make you feel? How do you think the other person felt?*

4. Teach Them How and When to Get Help

When your child tells you they were bullied, you need to investigate it, and in most cases you need to report it to the school. If the bullying is physical, sexual, or repeated in any way, *you definitely need to report it*. Contact the school and ask if they have a Bullying Incident Form you can fill out. Ask the teacher, principal, and school counselor to contact you if your child is ever bullied, so you can talk through it at home. Remind your child that telling is not tattling. When they talk with a trusted adult, the power of bullying is broken.

5. Stay Connected to Your Kids' Hearts – Be Their Trusted Adult

Kids can be hard to read, especially if they're going through bullying. As adults we have to dig deeper into their hearts and minds, and we have to learn to listen. I have to remind myself that they don't always need more advice – sometimes they just need to be heard. Sometimes they need to be played with or laughed with. So join your kids in their interests. Don't make them join you on your turf. Go find them and participate in what they're already doing. It means the world to them. Spending quality time (and quantity time) with our kids creates a foundation of trust that bullying cannot destroy.

6. Use Technology to Prevent Social Media Addiction & Cyberbullying

My favorite home internet safety product is called Circle with Disney. (*Don't get distracted by the Disney part – they were recently purchased by Disney because they have such an awesome product.*) Circle is a little white box that connects to your home internet connection. Once activated it allows parents to manage the entire wifi network with a very simple and intuitive app (right now only for iPhone or iPad, but they're promising a droid version soon). The box costs \$99 and covers your wifi only, no subscription required. So what about when your kids use their data plan or someone else's wifi? You can then subscribe to Circle-Go for \$10 per month to have Circle control up to 10 of your devices no matter what network they use. Very, very cool. (And no, I'm not affiliated with them!)



Hi, I'm Tom Thelen, author of *Victimproof*. I speak at schools and conferences all across America, but my biggest accomplishment is raising four great kids! Our kids are still in elementary school, and when one of them comes home after being bullied,

it brings back so many memories. That's right, I used to be bullied. Thankfully one teacher stepped in and taught me how to break the cycle. Today I want to give you my top six secrets to empower your child to do the same! Learn more at www.Victimproof.com.