

5 Ways Parents Can Help A Bullied Child



Have you heard the saying: “When you turn that frown upside down, you get a smile”? Or maybe you heard, “When you have lemons, make lemonade.” Or perhaps this: “You must play your best with the deck of cards you’ve been dealt.” They talk about making the most out of your resources, to transform a negative into a positive, and to choose to see things in a different, more powerful light. We can all turn a perceived weakness into a strength – and we must teach our children this skill.

I encourage my children – twin grade-school boys and a pre-school girl -- to take the very trait or thing that people choose to criticize and turn against them, and to instead appreciate, treasure and value those features. Whatever kids criticize, isolate, or ridicule them for should instead be converted into an asset.

Bullies can never win.

Our children need to know they are loved, special, and terrific just as they are.

One way for young kids to see themselves in a positive, empowered light is for them to find positive role models. Ack, a special character I created in my book, can be that model.

In *Ack! The Nantucket Duckling*, a little yellow duck is made to feel ashamed for being born with a beak that doesn’t look and sound exactly like all of the other ducks. He is made to feel like something is wrong with himself. He is led to believe he is deficient or not enough. He failed

to meet the expectations others put upon him about something he can't even change. No such standard of perfection should ever exist.

Ack eventually becomes more comfortable with who he is and comes to love himself for who he is. In fact, what seemed like a deficit turns out to be an asset, as his unusual beak comes to save the day. He goes from being ostracized to a popular hero.

So, how can a child handle being bullied, ridiculed, or unfairly criticized?

First, children should be encouraged to confide in an adult – teacher, parent, clergy – when they feel mistreated or hurt. Only then can adults step in with support, guidance, and help. But as a parent, you should not assume everything is perfect for your child. In fact, assume something could be wrong and make a daily effort to check in with your child. Ask questions about how their day was, how they feel, and what they are thinking about. Ask for details and examples. Don't interrogate, but don't just assume all is perfect.

Second, impress upon your child that whatever is being ridiculed really has nothing to do with them, but more about the mindset of the bully. It is not a problem for your child – it is a problem for those who don't understand or really know your child.

Third, always hug, praise, and smile at your child. Applaud what they do well. Be encouraging and supportive. Just be present and shower them with love. You can never go wrong with this approach, no matter what your child is experiencing or feeling.

Fourth, don't let your child feel discouraged or get down on him or herself. Instead, show them how what is different or unique about them is something that they can embrace rather than run from. If it is something within their power to change and they want to change it for the right reasons, that's fine too. If it is something they can't change or shouldn't feel a need to, support them to remain as is. Some things are simply out of a child's control – being an immigrant, being very tall, living in a poor household, belonging to a specific religion – and they need to be encouraged to value their roots and family. They are who they are – without apology or guilt.

Fifth, many things that kids are ridiculed about are temporary – funny haircuts, wearing braces or glasses, having acne, being a little overweight. They just need to understand they won't always be that way but to still not feel they did anything wrong or that they, as a human being, are any less valuable than anyone else.

Just because someone makes fun of a child or treats them poorly, simply because that child is a little different, does not mean that the bully is right or justified. The key is not to let your child's spirit get broken.

When Ack cries to his mom, "I have a useless, embarrassing beak. What's the point?" she strongly responds with words of encouragement: "Ack, it's true that your beak has a different shape, but it gives you a strong distinctive quack, and that's a wonderful gift for a young duck."

Help your child discover his or her uniqueness. It's their gift, not a curse. It's their Ack!

A.K. Spurway, certified in Positive Parenting, is a mom of three young children. She is the founder and CEO of www.Nanducket.com, an empowering children's lifestyle company, and the best-selling author of ***Ack! The Nantucket Duckling***. Her mission is to help the newest generation to embrace tolerance, see differences as advantages, feel happy with who they are, and to adopt a mindset of self-love as they are.