

Assertiveness For Kids

The older your child gets, the more that freedom and independence will become important to them. There are some situations that warrant letting your child deal with them on their own. Things like teasing or small issues with other children are within the realm of your child's capability. We have prepared a handout for you to help your child remember and practice being assertive.

Our definition of 'assertive' is 'standing up for yourself while not hurting anyone else in the process.' It doesn't mean that you let the bullying continue, but at the same time, you don't return violence as a response to violence. So how does a kid act assertively?

1. **Stay Calm.** Bullying makes everybody upset. Remembering to take a deep breath (or two, or three) before you respond can assure that your child will not act out solely out of their heightened emotional state. Brainstorm with your kid, things they can do to stay calm in a tense moment. Practice those things together, so they become routine.
2. **Ignore.** We stress that a child should not be passive about receiving physical violence, but ignoring teasing, or walking away from a potentially dangerous situation can, and is, perfectly OK. Role play a bullying situation with your child in which they can practice ignoring.
3. **Stand Up.** What are some non-violent ways your child can stand up to a bully? Saying 'stop it' or 'that's not ok.' 'If you continue, I am going to let the teacher know.' If bullying continues, then getting a teacher, or telling a parent would be an appropriate assertive response.
4. **Tell Someone.** When the bullying is too serious, or it will not stop after following the other steps, your child should tell someone. Brainstorm with your child who they could tell at school, or role play with them how they might tell someone about the bullying.

Really listen to your child and hear what he/she has to say about even minor incidences. This will increase the chances that your child will open up to you when something big happens. It's perfectly OK to ask more in-depth questions about your child's social life.

When Should Parents Step In?

When your child is in a scary or dangerous situation, or if the bullying gets worse and becomes more frequent, especially if it has started to change your child's behavior, it is time for you to step in and talk to the school.

How To Handle Anger

Anger is an emotion and an emotion that tells us that something is going wrong. Anger can be very powerful when used in the right manner, but destructive when used in the wrong way. Children are especially vulnerable to their emotions.

Parents can help their children handle their emotions by modeling how to release anger in a healthy manner that doesn't hurt themselves or anyone else. Besides modeling healthy emotions, there are a few other suggestions parents can try in order to help their children learn to handle this strong feeling.

How to help. **Do:**

1. **Take a time out for yourself before talking to your child, if you need to.** Anger is contagious and when it comes to helping children move past their emotions, the calmer you, the parent, are the better.
2. **Acknowledge your child's feelings.** Empathize with them about what they are feeling and be present when listening to them, this can soften the emotion when they know they are being heard.
3. **Have rules set in place for what is acceptable behavior and what isn't.** Though children should feel validated when they have strong emotions, validation is NOT permission to be mean or hurtful. No kicking, hitting, pushing, shoving, breaking things, or being disrespectful.
4. **Brainstorm with your child some calm-down ideas.** You can make it into an art project, or keep it conversation-based. Brainstorm healthy ideas to replace unhealthy ways of expressing anger.
5. **A "time-in" instead of a "time-out."** Sit with them during their emotion and practice calming techniques with them (example: breathing in and out, ask them questions about their feelings, etc.). Let them know they can rely on you to help with their emotional experiences.
6. **Develop an awareness of your child's "anger" warning signs.** Let your child know that we all have little things our bodies do that let us know when we are getting angry. Help the child recognize and explore what his/her signs are.

However, when helping your child out of anger, or other strong emotions...**Don't:**

1. **Try to manage your child's feelings for them.** It is important to value what your child is feeling. Saying "stop crying" to a child can sometimes make them target that anger and anxiety on you instead. Validation lets them know you are their ally and will hear what they have to say no matter what; you are showing them and telling them that you are there for them.
2. **Go "down" to your child's level.** Parents that return anger with anger sometimes frighten children and this can make the episode worse. Being in a calm state of mind during your child's episode helps them to feel secure.



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