

Helping your child deal with bullying

By Bobbi DePorter
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One of the major problems among students who are bullied is that they are humiliated and embarrassed to the point where they keep it to themselves. Parents can help by building a closer connection with their kids, so if they become the victims of bullying, they'll turn to their parents for help.

At SuperCamp, we call this strategy "building a home court advantage."

We hear of a home court advantage in sports, where the home team enjoys an edge as it feeds off the support of its fans. In families, the home court advantage helps kids reduce stress, cope with challenges, and feel comfortable sharing personal issues with their parents.

Building a home court advantage is not a quick fix. The trust and the connection must grow over time. Here are four key steps in how to do it.

1. Listen More/Talk Less

If there is a lack of communication in your home, the situation won't improve by trying to force it. In general, be ready with your ears when your child does decide to open up, even if it's to share simple news.

One great place to engage your child is when you're driving in the car together. When you are sitting beside each other in the front seat of the car, you're facing forward. With both of you looking straight ahead, you've created a non-confrontational setting, in which a conversation can start and flow more easily.

Also, whether it's in the car or somewhere else, when your child is sharing some news, it helps to encourage more dialogue by saying, "Tell me more." This simple request gives your child an indication that you're interested in what they're saying. At the same time, it's completely non-judgmental; you're not offering an opinion on what was just said.

2. Ask...Don't Tell

Do you like to talk with people who don't understand you? Of course you don't. Kids are the same way. Often when parents attempt to provide heartfelt advice, even with the best of intentions, kids will perceive it as a "lecture" and automatically shut down the communication process.

Asking a question, on the other hand, will generate a response and lead to a dialogue. A question, particularly one that requires more than a yes or no answer, engages the brain. It's a classic technique in sales that is used to learn more about the prospective buyer and to build rapport. And it's something that works well in families, as well.

Asking more and telling less also gives parents a better opportunity to learn what pressures their kids may be under. Whether it's bullying, relationships, grades, or something else, the information more likely will come to light by asking simple, non-probing questions.

3. Share Your Values; Discover Your Child's

It's easy for parents to think that their kids know what values the family stands for. After all, they're part of the family. But it's best not to assume that they're either focused or clear on your family's values.

So have a casual conversation, perhaps at the dinner table, where you discuss what values your family stands for. Ask your kids what their values are. If they need time to think about it, suggest revisiting the topic at dinner in a day or two.

Once you've had this conversation, encourage your kids to seek out others in school with like values. By being part of a group, a child is less susceptible to being bullied. And by being part of a group of likeminded kids who share common values and interests, an individual is less likely to be ostracized.

4. Build Authentic Bridges to Your Child

The prime directive in our summer enrichment programs is "Theirs to Ours, Ours to Theirs." What this means is in order for our staff to teach the students who attend SuperCamp, first they must enter the kids' world. In other words, our staff must connect with the kids, which gives them permission to teach.

This strategy applies to building a home court advantage, as well. Parents can begin to build a bridge by showing a sincere interest in their kids' hobbies or passions. It doesn't matter if it's a sport, in the arts, or creating video game software; if there is interest on the parents' part, the child feels good.

Parents can further strengthen this bridge by participating in the hobby/activity with their kids, as appropriate. Finally, a third level in building the bridge using this strategy is to let the child become the "teacher" by showing the parent how to do something that the he or she is good at.

Creating a meaningful connection with your child takes time. But it's an excellent investment on your part. It will ensure that a sufficient level of trust is present, so that if your child faces a personal crisis, such as being bullied, he or she will want to come to you for advice and support.

About the Author:

Bobbi DePorter, teen motivation and accelerated learning expert, has changed the lives of over five million kids through her SuperCamp and Quantum Learning school programs. SuperCamp is a learning and life skills summer program with more than 66,000 graduates in the U.S., Europe, Asia and Latin America. Quantum Learning is an accelerated learning-based teaching and learning methodology that has helped improve thousands of schools and districts across the nation. Bobbi is the author of more than a dozen books, including *The Seven Biggest Teen Problems and how to turn them into Strengths (An Insider's Look at What Works with Teens)*. For more information, visit <http://www.SuperCamp.com> and <http://www.QLN.com>. Contact Bobbi at bdeporter@qln.com.