



# TRANSFORMATIONAL PARENTING

*Be the change you want to see in your kids*

## BULLY PROOF VESTS...

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In addition to the processes and ideas shared in my Bully Proof Vest talk, here are my top three tips to help your kids become resilient to the inevitable pressures on the playground!

### TIP#1: MAKE SURE THAT YOUR CHILDREN ARE PARENT-ORIENTED, NOT PEER-ORIENTED

One of the greatest determinants for whether a child will become a bully or become a victim of a bully is related to their level of parent vs peer-orientation. Are your children looking to you to decide what is right or wrong, where to go, what to do and how to behave or are they looking to their friends for this guidance? If a child is peer-oriented they are at a much greater risk for bullying and you are also less likely to find out about it. Peer-oriented kids try desperately to fit in and be liked and are therefore vulnerable to peer pressure. This does not only apply to teenagers, as even pre-school children can be peer-oriented.

Children are more likely to be peer-oriented if they spend long hours at school and/or at play dates or extra murals where they are not properly supervised or where they do not have a good connection with the adult/s in charge. They are more likely to be peer oriented if you, as the parents, do not have a good relationship with their caregivers or are not involved with the school. They are also more susceptible if their parents do not understand or respect their values.

This does not mean that aftercare is out, but that you need to make a concerted effort to connect with your children deeply in the time that you do have with them – find things in common, speak to them with respect, be present for them on the weekends, etc. The more your children feel connected to you, the more resilient they are to bullying.

When a child becomes peer-oriented, then you become a competing connection – this means they will try to be as little like you as possible, will reject your values and ideals, and will not turn to you for nurturing, help, advice or to fulfill their needs. This makes them extremely vulnerable to being taken advantage of by a peer group who are not mature enough yet to meet their needs, and many of these relationships become destructive.

### What to do with your kids:

- Work on the relationship rather than punishment. Punishment can break the bond between parents and kids. If you understand the reasons for misbehavior then you'll see that very often it is simply a cry for attention.
- Spend friendly time together, doing things that your children enjoy doing.
- Limit playdates. Kids get enough peer-time at school. Make after school and weekend time family time as much as possible.
- NB to spend quality time with your child (PRESENCE). It's not about how much time you spend but rather the quality of that time. Switch off your phone, laptop, etc, bring your mind into the moment, and really connect.



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- Hugs, kisses and closeness. No matter what age, children need physical closeness with you.
- Link your values and find what you have in common. Find out what your kids love and what you love and make connections between the two so that you can find your common ground.
- Always have an open and safe channel of communication (non-judgement).
- Invite dependence. We're always pushing kids to be independent, but true independence is born from the safety and security of first knowing that you have someone you can depend on and rely on.
- Be familiar with their world. Know their friends, their friend's parents, what is going on at school, online, when they're out and about. Familiarise yourself with what they love and what they're up to.
- Forge relationships with their other caregivers (be involved with school etc.). Anyone that your child spends time with should be an extension of you. They need to see you have a good relationship with their teacher, after care staff, au pair, or nanny. They should ideally spend most of their social time with the children of your friends. Anyone that they see as an extension of you will not become a competing connection.
- Family holidays, rituals and activities are key (eat dinner together!!!).

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### TIP #2: BUILD YOUR CHILD'S SELF WORTH

Self-worth is the sense that no matter what you do or don't do you are worthy of love. Self-worth is a natural buffer to the stresses of the world, and yet most children's sense of self-worth is eroded dramatically as they go through school. Having a high sense of self-worth gives a child the confidence, inner peace, adaptability to change and ability to resist peer-pressure that are essential elements of a bully-proof vest.

#### Here are the top ten rules for nurturing self-worth...

- 1 **HAVE IT YOURSELF!** Love and appreciate yourself exactly as you are. You need to be a model of self-love that your children can emulate. Watch how you talk to and about yourself, particularly in front of your kids. If you're filled with self-loathing or cannot see your worth, get help.
- 2 **SHOW UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.** Make a distinction between who kids are and their behavior. Love them just for their very being and not because they've done something to deserve love. Concentrate on their internal qualities rather than their external achievements. Tell them you love them at random moments unrelated to anything they've done. Remember to express your love even when they've done something you don't approve of. Love is not dependent on them being 'good'.



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- 3 **BE PRESENT.** Spend quality time with your kids without distractions. Spend time doing what they love. Get onto their level and really connect.
- 4 **RESPECT AND NURTURE THEIR VALUES.** Everyone wants to feel loved, heard and understood exactly as they are. Find out what your kids love and then communicate with them in a way that respects this. Stop judging your children based on what is important to you, and find out what is important to them.
- 5 **PROVIDE CERTAINTY.** Have realistic routines, boundaries and expectations. Have consistent rules and consequences. Allow kids to be involved in the creation of rules and consequences.
- 6 **ASSUME COOPERATION.** Children are naturally cooperative. If they're not, find out what has gone wrong. Search for the cause rather than punishing the symptom. Focus on the positive. Catch them doing things right!
- 7 **ALLOW MISTAKES.** Failure is the quickest route to success. Allow your kids the opportunity to sort out their own problems, to make mistakes and to take reasonable risks. Admit your own mistakes and stop trying to be perfect – perfectionism kills creativity and self-worth. Celebrate your children trying rather than celebrating their successes. Remind them that report cards are a measure of how well they were taught and understood work and NOT a measure of who they are.
- 8 **DON'T COMPARE.** Don't compare siblings to siblings, don't compare your kids to their friends, to milestones or to themselves on another day or at a different age. Your child is a unique individual, different from everyone else and from themselves yesterday, and they are growing and learning at their own pace. Even positive comparisons can be damaging to self-worth.
- 9 **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SIGNIFICANCE & CONTRIBUTION.** Point out each child's specific traits and contributions and honour their values. Spend one-on-one time with each child individually. Always accept their gifts (yes, even the soggy bit of fruit!). Ask them for help. Get them involved in family meetings, decisions and rule-making. Let them do things for themselves – offer encouragement rather than doing things for them. Give kids of all ages choices and control.
- 10 **ASSIST IN EMOTIONAL PROCESSING.** Learn how to cope with your own emotions and then help your kids to process theirs. Remember that all emotions are acceptable, and you are not your emotions. Never negate the emotion (e.g. never say, "don't feel scared/ angry / upset"). Stop and listen. Reflect the emotion back to them. Empathise – explain how you also feel like that sometimes. Let them see you experience strong emotions and come out the other side. Brainstorm with them ways to express their emotions safely. Make sure that they know that nobody is responsible for another person's emotions.

There are so many ways that you can help your children to maintain and build their self-worth in the course of your daily life. Correct them (and yourself) when you catch them saying negative things about themselves. Write positive self-affirming messages on your mirrors. Keep a photo of them in your wallet and on your desk. Write love notes in their lunchbox. Be creative. If their self-worth is intact, then they will handle anything that comes their way!



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### TIP #3: MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS ARE BEING MET

Children are more vulnerable to bullying, misbehavior, and stress when their needs are not being met, particularly in times of change such as starting a new school. If their needs are not being fulfilled in positive ways, they may unconsciously look to fulfill these in negative ways, which can include attracting bullies into their lives. Speak to your children often about how they are feeling, what their concerns are, and please take them seriously when they are feeling unhappy in a new situation and help them to find ways to alleviate this distress.

### Here are the predominant psychological needs that your child has and how to help them fulfill these...

#### 1 CERTAINTY

This is the need for routine, stability, predictability and security. The need to know what is going to happen next and that everything will be ok. Help your kids with this by developing realistic routines that they can rely on. In times of upheaval, make sure that their routine is solid, and they will still feel that the world has something predictable that they can count on. Have family rituals, like how you spend birthdays or having a Sunday lunch, that remain intact even when things are changing. Have consistent rules and consequences.

#### 2 VARIETY

This is the need to have some spice in life, some change, some excitement, some challenges. Make sure that your child's life does not consist entirely of mundane routine and that they also get to have some fun, do something spontaneous, churn things up a bit. This can be as simple as having a sleepover at grandma, having a stinky Friday (not bathing one day of the week to break routine), having a playdate, going on an outing, or having a day off school.

#### 3 SIGNIFICANCE

We all have a need to stand out, to be noticed, important, unique and needed. Point out to your child what makes them different and special, explain to them how they have a unique place in the world that nobody else can fill. Help them to find those areas where they excel. Spend time with each child individually doing what they enjoy.

#### 4 LOVE AND CONNECTION

This is the need to belong, to feel included and cared for and a part of something bigger than oneself. Tell children you love them, show them, hug and kiss them, spend quality time with them. Explain to them how they are connected to the greater whole. Help them to find groups where they belong, such as at school, church or extra murals. Show them their connection to their ancestors. Remember that every child has a unique love language based on their values. If a child loves stories they will feel loved when you read to them, if they love computer games they'll feel loved when you play with them, if they love food they'll feel loved when you make them their favourite dish. Find out what makes them tick and express your love in a way that they will understand.



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### 5 GROWTH

It is a basic human drive to want to grow, expand and develop yourself in all areas – physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally. Give your kids opportunities to try many things, to try new things, to stretch themselves, to take some risks. We need both support and challenge to grow, so help your kids to push themselves in areas that interest them, to go beyond their current capabilities. Help them to set meaningful goals and to work towards these.

### 6 CONTRIBUTION

Even the smallest child wants to know that they are contributing to their world, that they are giving back and making a difference. Invite your kids to help out around the house, with the groceries, to be involved in family decisions, to give you hugs when you are crying. Children love to be of service in the area of their highest value, so if your child loves food get them to help out in the kitchen, if they love being outside, enlist their help in the garden, if they love books get them to organize the bookshelves. Find ways that they can help that they will actually enjoy and avoid fights about 'chores'.

Playgrounds can be an intense experience with many life lessons to be learned. There is simply no way we can guarantee our children a bully-free schooling experience. But, by being involved in our children's lives, being open to honest non-judgemental communication, by helping them to fulfill their needs and develop a healthy sense of self we can at least give them bully-proof vests!

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