

A Revolutionary Guide to Reducing Aggression between Children
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For Parents and Teachers

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Chapter One

WHAT DO WE REALLY WANT FOR OUR CHILDREN?

Are you responsible for children on a daily basis? Are you a parent or a teacher or a school aide or a principal? Then you surely encounter the problem of teasing and bullying practically every day. If the incidents continue despite everything you do to stop them, then what you are doing clearly isn't working. You may think it's working because you obtain a short period of quiet after you handle the incident. But if the incidents keep recurring with the same children, it means you haven't succeeded in teaching them how to stop being teased and bullied.

Let's stop and ask ourselves what we want for our children. Do we want them to be easily hurt by words? Do we want them to be emotionally weak and vulnerable? Do we want them to feel they need to turn to adults for help whenever they run into friction with other kids? Of course not! We want them to be tough and resilient. We want them to remain cool when others try to antagonize them. We want them to understand that offensive words are nothing to get upset about. We want them to be able to handle conflicts on their own without becoming consumed by anger. And another thing we supposedly want them to do is cherish living in a modern democratic society that values freedom of speech. So I hope you'll feel at least a little shocked to discover how you've actually been educating your children to be precisely the opposite of the way you intend them to be.

The amazing truth is that the great majority of adults handle incidents of aggression in the wrong way. And rather than helping the children, we are actually hurting them. We unwittingly teach them to be vulnerable, and force them to continue in their roles of victim and bully. I sincerely hope that when you read my explanation of what really goes on when adults try to help children, it will seem so obvious that you will wonder why you didn't realize it all along. I also hope that you will like my method of dealing with the problem so much that you will want to introduce it to all the parents, teachers, and principals you know. Perhaps together we can bring about a revolution in the way we deal with our children -- a revolution that will promote the emotional resilience and independence we want for them while freeing us from the frustrating, time consuming task of handling their endless stream of petty quarrels.

Move on to the next section to see how we've been unwittingly misguiding our children, or click on to any of the other eye-opening chapters that catch your fancy.

Chapter Two

HOW WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO BE HURT BY WORDS

WARNING: Please don't be upset about what I have to say. The typical adult procedures I will be describing here may not reflect your own approach to children. And if they do, understand that I am not being critical of you for doing the wrong thing. You've been acting with the finest of intentions, and have been following in the footsteps of your civilized ancestors. The only thing you are guilty of is trying too hard to make things better between children. Since you had no way of seeing that your actions were creating the problems you thought you were solving, there is no one to be blamed.

We don't want our children to be getting upset by words. So what do we do? We try to protect them from bad words. And that's how our problem begins. The following is the typical scenario of what happens when children come to us complaining of being upset by another child. It is the same whether the "helping" adult is a parent or a teacher or anyone else responsible for children. I will explain what happens using three characters named Bully, Victim, and Adult. The characters named Bully and Victim are indeed the bully and victim in this example, but Bully is not necessarily always the bully, and Victim is not necessarily always the victim. (I will use the male gender for all characters only as a matter of convenience of language. The sex of those involved is irrelevant.)

Step 1 – The Crime Report: Victim, sounding real hurt or angry, comes to Adult saying that Bully called him a bad name.

Step 2 – The Investigation: Adult summons Bully and does an inquiry into what happened.

Step 3 – The Judgment: Adult, using his superior intelligence, judgment, and experience, determines who the guilty party is – let's say it's Bully this time.

Step 4 – The Sentence: Adult reprimands Bully and makes him apologize to Victim. Adult punishes Bully in accordance with the severity of the injury he has inflicted on Victim.

This process leaves Adult feeling satisfied that he has done the right thing – teaching the kids that name-calling is wrong and protecting the

virtuous victims from the wicked bullies. And the more often the incident is repeated, the more often Adult gets to feel he's doing the right thing.

But what lessons have the children really learnt from adults? I'll make a list, though it may not be all-inclusive.

- 1.** Being teased must be a very painful thing to endure. After all, if teasing didn't hurt, why in the world would adults be punishing kids for doing it?
- 2.** The more upset you are by names, the harder the Adult will punish your bully. So it really pays to get upset by teasing.
- 3.** Bad words are a great way to manipulate adults. Adults obviously consider teasing more important than just about anything, because they will stop whatever else they're doing to take care of the "emergency."
- 4.** Children should not expect to be able to handle interpersonal difficulties by themselves, but need the wisdom of adults to solve their problems for them.
- 5.** Adults think it is good for children to be informants on each other.
- 6.** Freedom of speech is a mythical creature – something existing in only in textbooks and spoken about in school. Adults do not believe in it and punish those who exhibit it.

And what happens between the parties involved? Adult wants the kids to like each other better, to be nicer to each other, and to be sorry for having done anything hurtful. But is that what Adult has accomplished? No way! Here, again, is a list of what really goes on.

- 1.** Victim feels righteous indignation towards Bully for hurting him so badly that Adult had to punish him. He is very happy that he was able to defeat Bully with Adult's help. Victim will keep on the lookout for the next time Bully hurts him so he can rush to tell Adult about it and get him punished again.

- 2.** Bully is furious with Victim for getting him in trouble, and will be alert to the next opportunity to retaliate. He will either taunt him again, or devise a way to get Victim in trouble with Adult by reporting that Victim did something mean to him.
- 3.** Bully is also mad at Adult for judging against him and punishing him. This is not going to make Bully want to be nice to Adult.
- 4.** Adult is mad at Bully for being a bully, and he's doubly mad because now Bully is angry at him for disciplining him. Of course, Adult would like to be appreciated by Bully for teaching him right from wrong, but Adult can keep on wishing.

These things are true whether the fighting is between siblings at home or between students in school. It happens far more frequently at home than in school. In school, children are more scared to be caught fighting, so they try to bother each other away from the watchful eyes of adults. Most school incidents actually happen not in the classroom but during the less-structured activities of lunch and recess, when kids have more freedom of movement and are less likely to be under the direct gaze of an adult.

Usually, it is not the students' own teachers who are supervising these activities, but rather other teachers or school aides. So the victims must first report the incident to the lunch and recess overseers, who then have to report the incidents to the students' teachers. Thus, most quarrels that teachers attend to do not even occur while the kids are under their care! Matters get even more complicated when teachers report the incidents to the students' parents, expecting them to take charge of their children and make the problem stop. Sometimes the parents are, indeed, successful in getting their kids to stop fighting in school. More often, one or more of the following occur:

- 1.** Parents punish their child for bullying another child in school. Their child becomes mad at them for judging against him and punishing him. The parents get even madder at him for being mad at them. The child also gets mad at his teacher for turning his parents against him.
- 2.** Both sets of parents decide their own child is right and want to defend them. The fight between two children now

escalates into a feud between two families. Usually, the fight between the parents gets presented to the school principal.

3. The principal's job becomes a nightmare when he has to reconcile feuding sets of parents. If he is not successful at this delicate job of diplomacy, at least one set of parents will become mad at him, too. If the victim's parents feel he isn't sufficiently protecting their child, they will be mad at him. If the bully's parents feel he is unfairly siding against their child, then they will be mad at him. And if neither set of parents feels he is on their side, then they will both be mad at him.

4. Since the incident happened in school, the victim's parents may blame the teacher for allowing their child to be bullied in school. The teachers don't want to be blamed for something they feel is not their fault, so they blame the parents for doing a poor job of child rearing. Now, parents and teachers are feuding over the nonsense between children.

5. When parents and teachers feud, the principal gets in the middle. Again he has to walk a diplomatic tightrope. If he supports the teacher, the parents will be mad at him. If he supports the parents, the teacher will be mad at him. If he tries to be neutral, they will both be mad at him.

6. Since adult intervention tends to make the anger between children worse, there is a good chance that the bullying will continue. This will make the victim's parents very upset with the school. If they don't get satisfaction, they may resort to changing the child's school. If they are lucky and their child is not picked on in the new school, then all is fine. If they are unlucky, the problem repeats itself in the new school.

7. Occasionally, parents become determined to fight to the end for their victimized child and will invest great amounts of time, effort, and money to sue their school system. A few such cases over the years have reached State Supreme Courts, with parents trying to make it law that schools be held responsible for their children being teased! Fortunately, no parent so far has won, for the results

would be disastrous. Teasing is human nature, and while a school may be able to reduce the frequency of teasing, it is impossible to completely eliminate it. If schools could be held legally accountable for the teasing between children, the lawsuits would quickly force them to shut their doors. And then education would have to take place at home, where the abuse between children is likely to be much worse!

What can we do to stop the insanity? The next step is to become aware of the misguided attitudes that underlie our responses to aggressive incidents between children.

Chapter Three

Our Mistaken Attitudes Towards Children's Aggression

As the years go by society is becoming increasingly confused and contradictory about aggression and violence. On the one hand, the violence in entertainment is more graphic and extreme than ever. On the other hand, statistics show life in the United States to be safer than ever before, even with the occasional mass-shootings. True, violence is a horrible thing, and it is correct to want to eliminate it as much as possible. However, the newspapers and television bringing daily accounts of violent incidents right into our homes gives us the impression that violence is an epidemic. Each new violent occurrence, especially when children are involved, makes us panic. We want to eliminate aggression at all costs so our children can grow up in safety. In the belief that such a thing is actually possible, and that doing so will lead them to become happier and healthier adults, the educational and psychological establishments of our country are working towards eliminating all aggressive behavior in children. Since the Columbine massacre, we are hearing more and more calls for "zero-tolerance" of both physical and verbal aggression between children. While these efforts have not succeeded in eliminating aggression between children, they certainly have been increasing the incidents of adult aggression (punishment) towards children who are deemed guilty of being bullies. And, as seen earlier, the typical adult interventions increase aggression between children.

There are numerous mistaken attitudes we have about aggression. These lead us to respond in a way that makes matters worse and hurts the personality development of our children. If we truly wish to reduce aggression between children, we need to change our mistaken attitudes.

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Aggression is a learned behavior.

This is the official position of the American Psychological Association, as well as other major professional organizations, and guides the mainstream thinking in the field of education. The underlying belief is that human beings are blank slates, born without instincts, and that we do only what we are conditioned to do. On this assumption, psychologists and educators are trying to figure out how to stop children from experiencing or witnessing aggression so that they can grow up to be happy, aggression-free adolescents and adults.

Since aggressiveness is not a natural trait of the human species, aggressive children are seen as pathological. This aggressive trait is normal only for animals, and people who possess it require therapy or medication to make them normal.

Additionally, we tend to blame adults—usually their parents—for having taught kids this negative, inhuman behavior.

REPLACE WITH... Aggression is a normal, genetically programmed activity.

Aggression is here to stay. It has been a part of life for the billions of years that our genetic program has been developing, or, if you prefer the Biblical account, since God created us in the Garden of Eden. There is no evidence that human beings have suddenly, mysteriously, become the only animal on the planet that is born without genetic programming for aggression.

If aggression were a learned behavior, we wouldn't have to spend so much time and effort teaching children not to be aggressive.

When children display aggression, we should understand that they are expressing genetically programmed behavior patterns. Rather than being judgmental towards aggressive children and their parents, we need to learn how to understand aggression and deal with it – our own and others' – in a manner that is conducive to civilized living.

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... We should have zero-tolerance for physical and verbal aggression.

The “zero-tolerance” movement has gained tremendous momentum due to Columbine and the other school massacres.

The belief is that aggression exists because we tolerate it. If we would only refuse to tolerate aggression, it will go away and we will end up with a peaceful society. If aggression is not tolerated, then bullying will disappear and there will be no angry victims hell-bent on revenge.

REPLACE WITH... Intolerance of aggression causes aggression to escalate.

Fights develop when one person cannot tolerate the aggressive acts of another person, and then tries to use his own power to stop the aggressor.

The Columbine killers and all the other students who committed massacres did so because they had zero-tolerance for the aggression of their peers. Had they known how to tolerate aggression, the aggression would have fizzled out, and they and their victims would still be alive today.

A policy of “zero-tolerance for aggression” is a logical absurdity, because it ultimately requires readiness to use aggression to stop aggressors.

Most sports involve physical aggression and cause injuries. Does a zero-tolerance policy require the banning of sports? While we’re at it, do we also ban humor, since it consists of verbal and/or physical aggression?

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Abuse and neglect are at the core of all psychological difficulties.

It is believed that for a person to grow up emotionally healthy and complete, he must avoid experiencing any type of abuse or neglect. By providing children with nothing but supportive and positive childhood experiences, and by meeting their needs as quickly and completely as possible, they will grow up to be emotionally resilient, optimistic, and competent to deal with all the challenges that life will throw at them.

In accordance with this thinking, a predominant movement in psychotherapy in the past couple of decades has been to uncover the sources of abuse and neglect that the patient experienced in his childhood. By becoming aware of past abuse and neglect, the patient becomes free to live a normal life.

REPLACE WITH... Experiencing difficulty and pain is essential for emotional growth.

All truly resilient people have had experience with harsh life situations and learned how to overcome them.

If we actually succeeded in raising a child who never experienced any abuse and neglect, he would grow up to be an emotional marshmallow. He would be frustrated when he doesn't get what he wants and upset whenever anyone is mean or inconsiderate towards him.

Therapy that's primarily concerned with delving into sources of abuse and neglect can actually make a person's life worse. It can increase his anger towards the people who have been close to him and legitimize his feelings of self-pity for being treated badly.

To develop emotional resilience, children need to be exposed to aggression and learn to deal with it effectively. (In civilization, learning to deal with aggression requires learning to control one's anger).

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Children should be disciplined for hitting and name-calling.

Hitting and name-calling are aggressive behaviors and children should be taught not to do them.

Children need to be reprimanded or punished whenever they do these things.

REPLACE WITH... Children should be disciplined for hurting others.

Hitting and name-calling are normal childhood activities that kids often engage in, and they rarely injure anyone.

If there was no injury, there was no crime, and no one needs to be punished.

When adults are willing to punish children for name-calling and hitting even when no one is hurt, children can effortlessly drag them in as heavy artillery in their endless series of petty squabbles.

The rule that should guide us is not "hitting and name-calling are not allowed," but rather, "hurting is not allowed." Only when there has been real damage should disciplinary action be considered.

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words hurt my feelings, and that is even worse.

This variation of the age-old slogan has become the new way of thinking, especially after Columbine.

Since it has become obvious that the children who are killing children are victims of teasing, it is no longer correct that "words can never harm me." In fact, words can hurt so badly that victims have been driven to commit mass murder as revenge.

REPLACE WITH... Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me.

This slogan was never intended as a statement of fact, since it is obvious that children often feel hurt by words. It is meant to be a remedy to being hurt by words. The jingle provides children with the secret weapon for easily defeating those who taunt them.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me" is a wonderful encapsulation of the fundamental difference between verbal and physical aggression. When a baseball bat hits us over the head, our attitude towards the bat is irrelevant – no matter what we think about the bat, it's going to hurt us. Words are another matter. The damage they do is entirely dependent upon our attitude towards them. They can only hurt us if we let them. If you insult me and I get hurt, it is not really you who hurt me. I hurt myself! So why should you get punished?

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Children need to be taught how to get along.

Social relations are very complex activities. Children can only be expected to learn successful social skills with the help of active adult instruction.

The fact that kids fight so many times a day is proof that they need us to

stop their fights and show them how to get along peacefully.

REPLACE WITH... Children learn how to get along all by themselves.

Human beings are social creatures and can only survive by caring for each other. Our ancestors have been doing it for millions of years, or since the Garden of Eden, and caring for one another is a firm part of our genetic programming.

Mother Nature guides us towards good relations by making us feel pleasure when we get along and misery when we don't. Modern civilization is governed by millions of man-made rules that essentially require us to control our natural, inborn instincts. Many of these rules contradict one another, and can cause mental confusion and emotional suffering. Children, being younger than adults, have had fewer years to be conditioned and confused by civilization, which is why they are so obviously better at getting along than adults are. Throw a random bunch of young kids together and they will play energetically for hours with little or no real aggression.

Children will be found constantly quarrelling only when there is an adult hovering over them, trying to keep the peace and teaching them how to get along.

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Adults need to judge the disputes between children.

Children are too young, inexperienced, and irresponsible to resolve their own conflicts fairly and peacefully. Because of this lack of ability, they end up fighting so much, and depend upon us to stop them.

To learn fairness and justice, children need to come to us. By judging their disputes, we demonstrate how to tell right from wrong and how to solve problems peacefully.

Furthermore, older children have an unfair advantage over younger ones. We need to "even the playing field" by helping the weaker ones so that the stronger ones will be prevented from abusing them.

We should instruct children, "If you have a problem with each other, don't try to handle it on your own—come to me [the parent or teacher] for help."

Hopefully, when our children grow up and become parents, the wisdom we passed on to them will make them competent to judge the disputes between our grandchildren.

REPLACE WITH... Adults should never judge between children.

When we rush in to judge our children's disputes, we are actually preventing them from solving their problems on their own.

The moment we enter the scene to restore peace, they turn into screaming prosecuting attorneys against each other and become distinctly less peaceful. But even worse, whenever we judge between two people, one of them—the loser—ends up hating not only the winner, but us as well.

Instructing children to come to adults for help rather than deal with disputes on their own is absolutely the worst thing we can do. It turns them into informers against one another, guaranteeing that they will be hate-filled enemies.

Adults should refuse to get involved in children's disputes, and send them to work it out with each other instead.

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Playfighting must be forbidden.

Though playfighting may start out as fun, it always ends up turning into a real fight.

If children are permitted to playfight, they learn that violence is acceptable, they get practice in its use, and they grow up to be violent adults.

Furthermore, playfighting is a dangerous activity. If we didn't stop it, it would lead to frequent hospitalization.

REPLACE WITH... Playfighting is a wonderful activity for both children and adults.

Playfighting is not really fighting. It is playing. Children, both human and animal, are genetically programmed to playfight in order to prepare them for their adult roles as warriors and hunters.

Playfighting is such great fun because Mother Nature rewards all biologically essential activities with pleasure, and playfighting is essential for survival. The fact that civilized adults are not supposed to fight does not change the genetic programming of our children, and playfighting still gives them pleasure.

Playfighting in childhood does not lead to violence in adulthood. Real violence is painful, and all animals are biologically programmed to avoid pain. That's why, as adults, we try to avoid unnecessary violence. We are glad to live in a society that forbids violence, and happily obey the rules against it.

Having fun together makes people like each other better. Because playfighting is so much fun, it increases the love between children. Playfighting is also an excellent way for adults to bond with their children, as our ancestors have been doing for hundreds of millions of years.

Playfighting is not as dangerous as it seems. When people playfight, they are trying not to hurt each other. Sports, which are actually sublimated forms of playfighting, result in far more injuries than playfighting. Therefore, anyone who wants to forbid playfighting for safety reasons should certainly forbid sports.

The only reason playfighting turns into a real fight is that an adult gets involved. When a child in a playfight feels pain, he gives a scream, and his partner pauses until he feels better. But when an adult hears the scream and comes along to determine who the guilty party is, they both try to put the blame on the other, and that's when they really want to kill each other!

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... Violence in entertainment and games leads to a violent society.

Children should not be allowed to watch violence in TV or play with toys or games that involve aggression and violence. This will make them grow up to be aggressive and violent adults.

Violence in entertainment desensitizes children to bloodshed. The increasing violence in entertainment is a reflection of the growing epidemic of violence in the country.

The violence in entertainment is also a major cause of the violence epidemic in society.

REPLACE WITH... Violence in entertainment makes people more aware of the horror of violence.

The neighborhood crime rate does not suddenly jump up after the crowd exits from a violent movie. In fact, when people see explicit violence on the screen, it makes them more aware of how horrible it is. The graphic violence in a film like Saving Private Ryan is more likely to make people anti-war than pro-war. After seeing a horrible rape scene, a young man is more likely to be considerate towards his girlfriend.

Violent entertainment does not desensitize children to bloodshed in real life. In all the news-clips of school massacres, did you ever see students walking around indifferent to

the bloodshed? Of course not! Despite the fact that virtually all our children have seen immeasurable violence on the screen, they become hysterical when they see real people shot. Had they become desensitized to bloodshed, we wouldn't need to import truckloads of crisis counselors whenever tragedy strikes a school!

Violence in entertainment only desensitizes children to violence in entertainment. Our children are at least as horrified by real-life bloodshed as their pre-TV ancestors.

There is no epidemic of violence in the country. One act of violence plastered on a hundred million TV screens still amounts to one act of violence. Despite the acts of violence that bombard us on the news, violence in the U.S. is declining. Statistically, citizens of modern democracies are living in the safest environment in the history of the planet.

Social commentators who want to prove that society is becoming more violent usually do it by counting the violent incidents on TV. But the truth is the reverse – the more violence there is in real life, the less violence there is in entertainment. Only people who live in peace tend to enjoy violence in entertainment. People who live with real violence seek entertainment that takes their minds away from violence.

Only highly disturbed individuals will be stirred to action by violent entertainment. More murderers have attested to receiving their inspiration from the Bible – an extremely violence-filled book—than from any other source, yet few people are seriously calling for a ban of the Bible.

MISTAKEN ATTITUDE... If the media were to present more pleasant images, and the newspapers were full of good news, society would be better and individuals would be happier.

Society is in such terrible condition because of the negativity and aggression that are constantly conveyed in the media and newspapers. These negative impressions fill people's minds with unhappiness and pessimism. People would be happier if we were presented with positive images in entertainment and if our newspapers were full of good news instead of bad news.

REPLACE WITH... If the media were to present more pleasant images and the newspapers were full of good news, we would be bored and miserable.

The media are not stupid. They spend millions of dollars to learn exactly what the public wants and to provide it better than their competitors. If people really wanted pleasant stories, that's what they would get. You could be sure that the media moguls would gladly replace comedy and violence with religious and inspirational shows if that were what people really enjoyed.

If newspapers were full of "good" news, readers would become miserable. They would be wondering, "Why is life so unfair? When is it going to be my turn to win the lottery, instead of all those other shnooks?" "Bad" news makes us feel grateful that it is "them" and not "us" who are suffering.

I hope you are beginning to see aggression in a new light. You will soon be learning amazingly simple ways to apply these new attitudes in real life. But first, continue on to the next section to learn the importance of the bedrock of democracy, Freedom of Speech, for the issue of violence.

Chapter Four

THE IMPORTANCE OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH

It is impossible to do a good job of reducing violence without an appreciation of Freedom of Speech. First of all, most violence in our society, including school, is verbal violence. People get angry over words they say to each other, enemies are made, and ongoing states of war are created. This is true in practically all relationship problems, whether between husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and student, brother and sister, and child and peer. A small percentage of violence is physical, but even the great majority of physical violence begins with anger over words. It is extremely rare for someone, out of the blue, to physically attack someone else without angry words being exchanged first. But since this website is concerned with children, you should consider the fights between your children at home and at school. You will realize that virtually all fights begin with words. If kids knew how to deal with words without getting angry, there would be a lot less physical violence.

So what does this have to do with Freedom of Speech, one of the rights guaranteed by the US Constitution? Everything!

Throughout all of human history, people couldn't just say whatever they felt like. Countless people have been tortured, crucified, burned at the stake, and killed in all kinds of horrible fashions for saying things against the "official" view. Many a bloody battle has been fought over things people said. Even today, most people in the world live in countries where it is dangerous to say what they really think.

When there is no Freedom of Speech, it is legitimate to be angry with people, to punish them, and even to destroy them for the things they say. But there is a problem with such a system. Everyone thinks his own view is the truth, but different people see things differently. Who, then is to be the ultimate authority over what can be said? The answer is that the people with the most power decide. In other words, whoever instills more terror in others gets to decide. This, of course, does not make people happy. It makes them hate the people in power, and it leads to violent outbreaks when the oppressed decide to rebel against their oppressors.

An excellent attempt at solving this problem came a few thousand years ago, when wise men got the idea of using God as the ultimate

authority. After a few thousand years of experimentation with this approach, it was becoming apparent that it didn't make things any better at all, because people were continuing their zealous killing -- in the name of God's will! Even today, most wars are still fought in the name of religion.

And that's where the wisest of all came in. A couple of hundred years ago, the authors of the United States Constitution did an absolutely brilliant thing: they guaranteed Freedom of Speech. Suddenly, we all became free to say what we want, without fear that somebody would hurt us for saying it. A quarter of a billion people in this country are living in remarkable harmony because we have to accept other people's right to say what they want, just as they have to respect our right to say what we want.

Most of us have come to take Freedom of Speech for granted, like the air we breathe and the water we drink. The truth, though, is that Freedom of Speech is little more than a slogan for most people. We have never practiced it at home and in school. We continue to get mad at children and punish them for the things they say, not only to us, but to each other as well. And this freedom is being whittled away on a national level as well. It is becoming increasingly illegal to say what we want because others may be offended, and people in the public eye are having their careers destroyed because of jokes they made. We are supposed to develop a national character that gives us the strength to tolerate the words that others supposedly have the freedom to say. Instead, we are becoming a nation of crybabies who want the government to protect us from bad words, the same way children expect parents and teachers to protect them from name-callers.

Why is this happening, despite over two hundred years of having Freedom of Speech? Because our citizens have never been given a complete education as to what Freedom of Speech means. It is not enough to tell us we have Freedom of Speech. This does nothing to make us stop our biological reaction of getting scared, angry, and hateful towards people who say mean things to us. Why do we get scared, angry and hateful over words? Because it is a biological reaction that has developed over billions of years in conditions of Nature, where life is very dangerous, and animals eat each other for food and fight each other for dominance. Granting us Freedom of Speech a couple of hundred years ago has not changed our genetic program that tells us that others who threaten us are a real danger.

But now we live in Civilization, and we no longer have to fear each other the way we did in the lawless conditions of Nature. People are not allowed to hurt us, no matter how threatening they sound. To realize the full benefit of Freedom of Speech, we need to be taught not only that it is perfectly OK for people to say what they want. There is also no reason to get mad at people for what they say, since they are not allowed to hurt us! It is not the mean words people say that is a problem; it is the anger that is the real problem. Anger is the emotion behind violence. It is the desire to destroy or defeat an opponent. Our anger not only makes us become enemies, it escalates the problem and makes others continue doing exactly what we don't want them to do!

It is time for us to start teaching our children, from the earliest ages, what Freedom of Speech really is. This means we have to solve our routine conflicts with our family members, our colleagues, and our students, without getting angry over the words they say. This is the only way they will grow up learning not to get mad over words.

How about "dirty" words? All I've said so far may sound like good ideas to you, but you may be wondering if it also applies to curse words. This is where most adults have difficulty with free speech. Should we not get mad at people, especially the children in our care, when they use dirty words? How can we not get mad when they say the "f" word? Don't they need to be punished for that?

The answer is "No!"

Why not?

Because it is stupid to get mad at people for saying such words. It is a big mistake. The purpose of using "bad" words is to get us mad! If we get mad, we fall into a trap. We don't enjoy being mad; it is a negative feeling. When kids can get us mad with these words, they have defeated us, even if we punish them. They have turned us from calm, happy people, into miserable, angry people. Furthermore, the hallmark of civilized people is that they control their anger. People who get angry look like idiots. So when our kids get us into a rage, they have succeeded in turning us into fools, and they can no longer respect us.

If we punish them for saying bad words, that does not solve any problem. It only makes the situation worse. They become mad at us

and feel that we deserve to have these words said to us. And they will look to get back at us, probably by saying these words again.

Another thing that happens when we punish kids for using bad words is that we are teaching them that these words are very powerful and hurtful. So they themselves will get upset by these words. The cycle will be complete when they grow up and have children of their own, and will get mad at them and punish them when they say these words. And this is how the problem has been passed down from generation to generation.

Now, this is not to say that you shouldn't do anything at all when children say bad words. You can say things like, "We don't use words like that in our family (or school)" or "I don't like it when you talk like that." This will hopefully embarrass them so they won't want to use them again. But this has to be said without any anger.

Before you continue on to the next Lessons, I sincerely hope I have given you an increased appreciation for democracy's precious right to Freedom of Speech. In a sense, Freedom of Speech is the purpose of this website: to free people from oppression by teaching them to stop getting angry over words and other nonsense. My instructions in the coming Lessons will teach you how to apply the principles of Freedom of Speech in real-life situations. If you aren't already aware of it, this website also contains detailed [instructions for victims of teasing and bullying](#). (Frankly, I would recommend you read it, too. You may be surprised how much it can help you in your own relationships.)

Chapter Five

THE MAGIC RESPONSES, PART 1

And now for the best part of all. I will be teaching you how to respond when children are teased and bullied. If you strictly follow my simple advice, most of you will experience quick and dramatic reduction in the aggressive incidents between the kids. However, I would like to warn you that you might have trouble believing that the improvement is really due to your new approach. Why? Because we've heard the illogical slogan, "There are no easy solutions," so often that we have come to believe it. Therefore, you may think the improvement is only coincidence: the kids "just happened" to grow up and decide to stop fighting at the same time you read this website. Or you may think that it was due to a more tangible reason, like they had finals to study for and had no time left to fight. And there's a strong third possibility: when things get better between your kids, you may quickly forget that they ever had an aggression problem and that you did something wonderfully effective about it. That's because as we get busy with life's new problems, we tend to forget the old ones that went away.

Well, what's so terrible about that, as long as the problem was solved? There are three things that are wrong with it:

- 1.** If you do not realize that what you are doing really works, it is only a matter of time before you fall back into your old ways. Then the teasing and bullying between the kids will return as badly as ever, and you will be convinced that this approach doesn't work.
- 2.** There are many other adults who need help in dealing with children's aggression. If you do not appreciate the effectiveness of the approach you are learning here, you will not refer other parents and teachers to this website, and many people who could use the help will continue suffering needlessly.
- 3.** I am only human, and I have an ego. I have invested a great deal of time and effort, as well as some money, into creating and running this website that provides you, free of charge, with solutions that are priceless. Is it too much to hope that you give me some credit for making your lives better? The only way that can happen, of course, is if you recognize that my remarkably simple instructions are what made the difference.

It's important, then, that you properly evaluate the results. Start by making a realistic assessment of your current situation. Estimate the average time per day you are engaged handling problems between your kids (whether your children or your students). Commit the amount to memory or, better yet, write it down. One week from now, again estimate the amount of time you are spending on the problem.

Then compare the two amounts. If you have been following my instructions precisely, you should find that you are spending at least 80 or 90% less time on your children's interpersonal problems. And don't think it just means they stopped bringing you their problems. They will actually be having fewer problems. They will actually be getting along better. They will actually be building resilience. They will actually be learning to handle problems independently. And they will actually be happier. You will, too.

So please! If you do see the great results I promise, don't attribute them to anything else. After years of doing it your way, if the problem suddenly gets better, take my word for it -- it's not a coincidence. It really is because of you, because of your new approach. Appreciate that a simple change in your attitude can make dramatic changes in the behavior of those around you. And if you like what happens, please send all the educators and parents you know to this website. Let's get the revolution rolling!

SITUATIONS AND RESPONSES

There are four basic kinds of situations of aggression between children that you commonly encounter:

- 1.** Kids complain to you of being called names.
- 2.** Kids complain to you of being hit.
- 3.** You witness kids calling names.
- 4.** You witness kids hitting.

How to deal with them will also depend upon whether you are a parent or a teacher. This Lesson and the following three will each deal with one of these situations.

A general note about school: Before we begin with the details, I would like you to consider the proper place of school in the education of the child.

Every minute spent in school handling interpersonal problems is a minute taken away from education. Students are all-too-eager to get away from academics. When they discover their teacher is willing to stop what he's doing to deal with social problems, it is child's play to fill up the school day with problems.

How can this be prevented? By having teachers make it their official policy that class time is for academics. And by having parents support teachers' efforts to minimize time spent on children's interpersonal problems. (The instructions on this webpage will make that possible).

A general note about bullies: The word "bully" has negative connotations. The general attitude of adults is that the bullies are bad and must be made to stop their bullying. I, though, am not judging the bullies. I refer to kids as being bullies only in the sense that they apparently have the upper hand in the bully/victim interactions. We are to consider them as being no better and no worse than victims. In fact, we are to consider them as necessary for the learning of social skills. Childhood is a time when children practice the skills they will need in their adult lives. If they don't learn how to deal with aggression in their formative years, how in the world are they going to know how to do it when they are adults? It is more useful to see bullies as the social sparring partners of our children. Bullies give our children the opportunity to learn to deal with aggression, an essential life skill, and we are to be grateful to them rather than angry. Our job is not to protect the victims from the bullies, but to teach the victims how to defeat the bullies – by not getting upset.

Situation Number One: "Johnny called me a x@z#\$%*!"

Magic Response (for both parents and teachers): "Do you believe it?"

This is probably the most common situation of all. One child comes to you complaining that another child insulted him. What he wants you to do is get mad at the bully and hopefully punish him. If you do this, things will only get worse. The best response in the world is the four magic words, "Do you believe it?" It goes like this:

Child: Johnny called me a x@z#\$%*!

Adult: Do you believe it?

Child: No!

Adult: Good!

And that's all there is to it! The child has nothing more to say, and the incident is over in record time.

This response accomplishes a number of things:

1. It places responsibility directly upon the shoulders of the victim, where it should be. Whether or not he is upset is entirely up to him, not the bully. When he says he doesn't believe it, he becomes aware that there is really no problem.
2. When you say, "Good," that he doesn't believe it, you are letting him know you are happy he is doing the right thing.
3. Since you are not punishing the bully, the bully does not become mad at his victim or at you, so there is less chance of escalation or retaliation.
4. It shows the kids that since you don't think the name-calling is a big deal, neither should they.

There is, of course, the possibility that the child will say, "Yes," when you ask if he believes the insult. Then you should handle it this way:

Child: Johnny called me a x@z#\$%*!

Adult: Do you believe it?

Child: Yes!

Adult (With sound of amazement): You mean you believe you're a x@z#\$%*!?

Child: No!

Adult: Good!

What if the insult is something true, like having freckles? Then handle it like this:

Child: Johnny called me a freckle-face.

Adult: Do you believe it?

Child: Yes!

Adult: So what's the problem?

At this, the child will probably have nothing to say, and just walk away. There is a chance, though, that he may ask you to tell his bully to stop. Don't fall into the trap of helping him. Answer like this:

Child: Johnny called me a freckle-face!

Adult: Do you believe it?

Child: Yes!

Adult: So what's the problem?

Child: Tell him not to say it!

Adult: If it bothers you, you should tell him!

What the child really wants is for you to do the dirty work for him. When you tell him to talk to the bully, don't be surprised if he just forgets about it and does nothing. After you respond in the above manner a few times, he will realize that he can't get you to fight for him, and the incidents will become history.

If you have a particularly persistent child who seems determined to get you to do something against the bully, then you should handle it in a way that makes it clear to him why it would be a mistake for you to do what he wants. It goes like this:

Child: Johnny called me a "freckle-face!"

Adult: Do you believe it?

Child: Yes!

Adult: So what's the problem?

Child: Tell him not to say it!

Adult: If it bothers you, you should tell him!

Child: I keep telling him, but he doesn't listen.

Adult: If I tell Johnny to leave you alone, is that going to make him like you more, or hate you more?

Child: Hate me more.

Adult: And if he hates you more, will he be nicer to you, or meaner to you?

Child: Meaner.

Adult: And will it make him like me, or hate me?

Child: Hate you.

Adult: So is it going to do any good if I tell him?

Child: No.

Adult: That's right!

Child: So what should I do?

Adult: When Johnny calls you names and you get mad, does that make him happy or sad?

Child: Happy.

Adult: That's right. Do you want to make him happy when he calls you names?

Child: No.

Adult: So stop getting mad. If he calls you names and you don't care, will he feel smart or stupid?

Child: Stupid.

Adult: That's right! So let him call you names all he wants. After a while, he'll get tired and stop.

Point to remember: Your moral upbringing may make it hard for you to accept the idea that you shouldn't do anything to the bully. Our

guiding principle should be that it is not permitted to hurt people. When a victim feels hurt by names, it is not really the bully who hurt him. It is the victim who hurt himself. Therefore, it is never appropriate to punish the bully when a victim tells on him for name-calling.

Chapter Six

THE MAGIC RESPONSES, PART 2

Situation Number Two: "Johnny hit me!"

Magic Response: "Are you hurt?"

The vast majority of hitting incidents between children do not really hurt, and many, if not most, are not observed by any adult. So you are likely to be faced with a child coming for help with an incident you didn't see and in which no one is hurt. Like in Situation Number One, what the child really wants is to win by getting you to reprimand and punish the other child. Again, if you do this, matters will only get worse. The best way to respond is with the three magic words, "Are you hurt?" It goes like this:

Child: Johnny hit me!

Adult: Are you hurt?

Child: No.

Adult: Good.

This leaves the child with nothing more to say, and he scurries off. Aside from having ended the incident in a matter of seconds, you will have accomplished the following:

- 1.** When you ask if the child is hurt, he feels your genuine concern for his welfare.

2. When the child acknowledges he is not hurt, he realizes there is no problem.

3. When you say, "Good," you are continuing your sympathetic manner, letting him know that you are happy he is not hurt.

4. Since you are not doing anything against the bully, he does not become mad at his victim or at you, so there is less chance of escalation or retaliation.

5. When the kids see you don't consider the hitting (which didn't hurt anyone) anything to be concerned about, they probably won't, either.

If the child persists in trying to get you to reprimand the bully, handle it exactly in the manner prescribed above for name-calling, but adjusted for hitting. It goes like this:

Child: Johnny hit me!

Adult: Are you hurt?

Child: No.

Adult: Good.

Child: Tell him to stop hitting me!

Adult: If it bothers you, you should tell him!

Child: I keep telling him, but he doesn't listen.

Adult: If I tell Johnny to stop hitting you, is that going to make him like you more, or hate you more?

Child: Hate me more.

Adult: And if he hates you more, will he be nicer to you, or meaner to you?

Child: Meaner.

Adult: And will it make him like me, or hate me?

Child: Hate you.

Adult: So is it going to do any good if I tell him?

Child: No.

Adult: That's right!

Child: So what should I do?

Adult: When Johnny hits you, is he trying to hurt you, or is he trying to get you mad?

Child: He's trying to get me mad.

Adult: That's right. And when you get mad, does he feel happy or sad?

Child: Happy.

Adult: Do you want to make him happy when he hits you?

Child: No.

Adult: So stop getting mad. Let him hit you all he wants. After a while, he'll get tired and stop.

If the child answers that he is hurt, then it needs to be dealt with differently. Here is how I suggest doing it.

Child: Johnny hit me!

Adult: Are you hurt?

Child: Yes!

Adult: Show me where.

The child then shows you. Inspect the area of injury, and if it requires first aid or medical attention, make sure the child gets it. Your immediate concern is to take care of the injury so that the child can heal as well as possible. This is more urgent at the moment than disciplining the bully.

When you are done taking care of the injury, then you can deal with the bully. However, what you should do is very different depending on whether you are the children's teacher or parent.

For Parents: If one of your children hurt another, do not discipline him! This may sound crazy to you. How can a parent not discipline a child for hurting his sibling?! Let me explain.

It's important to realize that your children do not really want to kill each other, no matter how much you see them fighting. They want to defeat their sibling, but they don't enjoy drawing blood or breaking bones. So please relax.

Have you noticed that they seem to fight over nonsense? Do you wonder why they are willing to get themselves hurt and upset over such inconsequential matters?

Well, they're not really fighting over inconsequential matters.

So what are they really fighting about? I'll tell you.

When your children are having a fight over insults, TV shows, toys, dirty looks, etc, they are fighting over things that are not terribly important. But they know what's probably going to happen because you do it most of the time. When they fight, they expect you to come over as usual to stop the fight and administer justice. As soon as you are there, the situation facing them completely changes. Before you came along, their concern was the insults, TV shows, toys, dirty looks, etc. These things are really not worth it for them to fight about. You, on the other hand, are worth fighting about. You are their parent, the most important person in the world to both of them. The last thing in the world they want is for you to take their brother's side against them. Whichever one you decide against will be very hurt and upset. So they are now fighting over the most important person in the world (you), and they are practically willing to kill! They become prosecuting attorneys trying to get each other in trouble with you, and this doesn't exactly enhance their mutual love. But being a good parent, you will hear them out and use your superior intelligence, judgment, and experience to make a decision. Whichever way you decide, the kids will continue being mad at each other because they didn't work the problem out between themselves. The "guilty" one will now also be mad at you, and he'll be even madder at his brother for getting you against him. And he's going to try to even up the score by finding something else to fight about and hopefully get you on his side.

Meanwhile, you keep yourself busy trying to stop the never-ending, insignificant battles, never realizing that you are actually what they are fighting about! You're trying to stop the fights, but you are really making the fights happen! Therefore, the worst thing parents can do is to get involved in the conflicts between their children.

How about just stopping the fights, without taking sides? What's wrong with that?

When you stop a fight without taking sides, you think you are creating a tie; there is no winner and no loser. But this is not true. The weaker one is automatically the winner because there is no way he should be able to have a tie against a stronger opponent. With your help, the weaker one knows he can do anything he wants to his stronger sibling, and you will prevent him from getting clobbered. He's going to love this, and the stronger one will hate it, and the fighting will continue.

So if one of your children hurts the other, do absolutely nothing to him! Do not tell him to apologize. Do not lecture him. Do not punish him. Do not even give him a dirty look. And do not even be mad at him. If you are mad at him, he will become mad at both you and his brother. You will also be making the victim happy, so he will continue to provoke his brother to hurt him so that you'll get mad at him again.

The only person who should be mad at the hitter is the victim himself. If the victim wants to tell him he's hurt, that's up to him. Then the hitter will probably feel sorry for hurting his sibling and will apologize on his own. But if you tell the hitter to feel sorry and apologize, he will get busy defending himself and arguing that it's not his fault.

Warnings: I want you to succeed with this new approach. To make sure you do, and to avoid calamity, I must give you the following warnings:

- 1.** The fighting will get worse before it gets better. Your children have known for years that you try to stop their fights, which is exactly what they want. When they see you are no longer concerned with their fights, they will think something is very wrong with you. They know the fights are supposed to bother you, so they will fight even harder to make you do something. But they will see you're not doing anything. After a while, they will get tired of hurting and upsetting each other. The next day, they will try again, figuring you went back to normal. Again, they will see you don't care. By the third day, they will hardly even try, and things will get much better. So when you see the

fighting getting worse in the beginning, don't think, "Oh, no! This isn't working! The fighting is only getting worse! I have to make it stop!" It is working. It's just that it often gets worse before it gets better.

2. You must follow this advice 100% of the time. 90% won't work. If your kids see that you usually do nothing to stop them, but sometimes you do, they will know the fighting really does bother you; they just have to try harder and more often to get you involved. Therefore, they must see that you never care about their fighting, and then it will get and stay better.

3. Don't let them go to the hospital just because you are following my advice. You are still responsible for your children's well-being, and if you see the possibility of serious injury requiring medical attention, don't let it happen just so they can learn a lesson. Don't worry about punches or kicks or scratches or pulled hair. The kids will heal from these by themselves. However, if a child is about to use a weapon, or throw a sibling down the stairs, you must stop him. But you don't care who started and what it's about, and you aren't even mad at anyone. Just take away the weapon, or move them away from the stairs, and tell them as lovingly as possible, "I'm sorry, but I can't let you go to the hospital." And then walk away.

4. The fighting will get 80, 90, or even 95% better, but it won't get 100% better. Only dead people don't fight. People who are alive and live in the same house fight and argue sometimes. No matter how precisely you follow my instructions, you can't expect your children to never, ever fight again. So when you see them fighting once in a while, don't think, "Oh, no! This isn't working! They're still fighting! I have to make them stop!" It is working. It's just that they are still alive and living together.

Note: Sibling rivalry is a very serious and widespread problem. In almost every family in the world with more than one child, the kids fight every day. I cannot provide a comprehensive explanation of sibling rivalry in this website. I have been writing a full-length book tentatively called *Mother Nature's Simple Solution to Sibling Rivalry*, which I hope to have published in the not-too-distant future. (If you are in the publishing business and want to help me with this, please feel free to contact me). In my humble, self-centered opinion, it will be the most useful book available on the subject. I will keep you posted when it is in print. Until then, please accept the concise explanations and instructions I am providing here. Also, if your fighting children are old enough to understand it, have them read Lesson Ten of my

INSTRUCTIONS to victims of teasing on this website. Or you may order my audio self-help tape, *How to Stop Being Teased and Bullied Without Really Trying*, and have them listen to it.

For Teachers: As a teacher, you are in a more sensitive position regarding students hurting each other than parents are with their own children. Parents are best off leaving it to their children to confront a sibling who hurts them. Schools, though, are responsible for the care of other people's children, and must take some disciplinary action when one child hurts another. Therefore, if you have determined that the victim is indeed hurt, you can't just do nothing. Students must know they are not permitted to hurt each other. The best thing you can do is put the victim and aggressor together so they can work out the problem between themselves. It is important that the victim show the bully that he is hurt, not that he is angry. If necessary, coach the victim to express his hurt without sounding angry. If he sounds hurt, the bully is likely to feel sorry for what he did. However, if he sounds angry, the bully will be angry in return, and the conflict will escalate.

If the bully sincerely tells the victim he is sorry, and the victim accepts it, that should be enough. However, if the situation cannot be resolved so nicely, and the bully does not show remorse, then further disciplinary action is in order. The bully must be taught that he cannot hurt other children without facing consequences. I will refrain from telling you exactly how to do this, as your school's current policy should do fine, and you should follow that policy.

Warnings:

1. Do not be mad at the bully. It is quite natural to feel anger towards a student who intentionally hurts another child. However, it is a big mistake to do so. Your relationship with him should not be damaged just because he is having a problem with another one of your students. If you are mad at him, he will become mad at you, and this will not help him learn from you. All you should convey is sorrow over the pain he caused, and how he should try never to do it again. The victim is the one who has the right to be angry with him, not you.

2. Tell his parents not to punish him. Teachers often believe that parents should discipline children for things they do in school. While this may sound reasonable, it is a terrible thing to do. Countless relationships between children and parents are destroyed because the parents punish them for their behavior in school. The child committed his act in school, and it has nothing to do with his parents. If his

parents punish him for what he did in school, he becomes angry with both the teacher and the parents. He's angry with the parents for punishing him for something that has nothing to do with them, and he's angry with the teacher for getting him punished at home. This anger is far more likely to make him continue acting aggressively than to become a content, compliant student. Children are far more afraid of their teachers and principals than they are of their parents. Have you ever stopped to realize that one teacher can get thirty students to work for six hours more easily than two parents can get one child to work for five minutes? Understand, then, that children take discipline by school authorities far more seriously by than they take discipline by parents. So if you need to report the incident to the child's parents, and you don't want to destroy families, make it clear to them that they may compassionately discuss the incident with their child, but that the school alone will administer the consequences.

Point to Remember: The goal is to reduce conflict as much as possible. It is not reasonable to expect children to never, ever hurt each other, and I am not providing you with much new instruction about what to do when there is real injury. However, the simple instructions I am giving will cut out all the phony incidents, which is what the great majority of them really are. What do I mean by "phony" incidents? Those are the incidents in which no one is really hurt. They are happening only for the purpose of getting each other in trouble with you. These phony incidents will disappear when you follow my instructions, and, without exaggeration, you should see at least an 80 or 90% reduction in conflicts. This will leave you with much more time to teach, and your time in school will be more enjoyable. The only time you will have to do something is on that rare occasion when someone really is hurt.

Chapter Seven THE MAGIC RESPONSES, PART 3

Situation Number Three: You hear children calling names

Magic Response for Parents: Nothing.

Magic Response for Teachers: It depends.

For Parents: That's right. Don't do anything. It's the easiest thing in the world. Take the attitude that it's perfectly OK to call names, and name-calling won't become a problem. If you pay close attention, you will often see that when they are calling each other names, they aren't getting upset, but are actually enjoying themselves. However, if you step in to stop them, you are sure to see a fight immediately erupt.

Don't worry that by permitting name-calling, it will happen more often. Just the opposite – by allowing it, it will lose its attraction and it will happen less, without any effort on your part.

Are you worried that if you allow them to call bad names at home, they will do it in other places, too? Give your children more credit than that. They are not so stupid! Children are excellent at discovering what is acceptable behavior in different settings. You may have already noticed that they treat their teachers with much greater respect than they treat you. They would never dare talk to them the way they talk to you. Have you also noticed that while they can be such monsters at home, they behave so nicely at other peoples' houses? So you see, you don't have to worry that they will use these names indiscriminately.

If you try to stop your kids from calling each other names, you will be teaching them that words are something they should get upset about. Do you really want to handicap your kids in this way? Just because the majority of parents do this to their children, it doesn't mean you should, too.

What if you still feel it's important to actively teach your children that it is not proper to use certain words? How can you do it without

getting angry and punitive? It's really very simple. There are two basic steps:

- 1.** Instead of thinking that kids have no right to use bad language, tell yourself, "They have every right in the world to talk badly, and I am not going to take this right away from them."
- 2.** Without getting mad, say something like, "We don't use words like that in our family."

Do not sound angry at all when you do this, because you shouldn't even be angry. You are talking to people you love and care about, and love and care are the only emotions you should convey when you guide them in the proper way to talk. If you talk to them with love, they will probably feel embarrassed and may apologize for having used those words. If they nevertheless continue to say them, just ignore them. Don't get mad at them and don't punish them no matter how ugly their speech is. If you get mad at them, you will not be making them stop. You will be making them continue, because the purpose of bad words is to get us mad. Only talk to them when they are talking to you in a manner that you feel is respectful. Realize that you are the boss, and that your kids need you more than you need them. Don't answer them when they are rude, and they will have no choice but to talk to you respectfully. Most important, you should realize that in the long run, when children grow up to be independent adults, they end up behaving remarkably similar to their parents. The best way to teach our children to talk nicely is by talking nicely ourselves. If we don't use bad language, they will grow up not using it either.

For those of you who are brave, I would like to go even one step further. When you hear your kids calling each other names, join in! Call them names! Call your spouse names! You will discover that rather than everyone getting upset by this, they will laugh their heads off. You will be having great fun. And they won't hate you for it. They will love you for it. This is what comedy is really about – people making fun of each other. As long as you are not mad at people when you make fun of them, they will enjoy it. Why should humor be a form of pornography, something that we can only enjoy by watching paid actors doing it on TV? Reclaim it for your own lives, and let your family enjoy. It is the best way to teach your children not to get upset by names, and you will increase their emotional health. After all, what is an emotionally healthy person? Is it someone who takes himself so seriously that he gets upset when he is made fun of? Or is it someone who knows he's not perfect, and can take a joke and make a joke?

Obviously, it's the latter one. So foster health in your children, and join in the fun-making!

For Teachers: First of all, you should read the instructions for parents, just above. The basic principles are no different for teachers than they are for parents. However, the school situation is not as simple as the home. How you should respond when you hear children in school calling each other names depends primarily on the reality of your school situation.

As a teacher in a school building, you do not have the same liberty that parents have within their own homes. You have to take into account your school policies, administration, fellow teachers, and parents. The way you handle matters between children can bring repercussions from school administrators, from other teachers, from parents, and from any combination of the above. Plus, in a learning institution, behavior has to be more proper and controlled than it generally is within the home. So you must take these factors into consideration.

In an ideal school (in my view), school policy would allow total freedom of speech, and you wouldn't have to stop children from calling each other names. But this is probably not your situation. If you overhear children calling each other names, but they are doing it quietly and no one seems to be getting upset, I would recommend that you make believe you didn't hear it, as long as there is no chance you will get in trouble for this.

However, if the name-calling is more blatant, it is proper to stop them. You must do this, though, without any anger. Anger begets anger, and you will never really help children by getting angry with them when you are trying to educate them. Furthermore, when you get angry with them for the words they use, you let them know that these words are effective emotional weapons against you. So tell them as calmly as possible, "I'm sorry, but language like that is not appropriate in school." Most children will immediately stop when spoken to this way. If they nevertheless continue, let them know what the consequences will be. Again, say with concern, "I'm sorry, but if you continue to use those words, we will have to...[state the consequences]." I can't stress enough how important it is to say this without being angry. It should be clear to the child that you really don't want to have to carry out the consequences, and that you have nothing personal against the child. If the child still continues with his

unacceptable speech, then you must carry out the consequences, again, with remorse but no anger.

When you intervene in this way, it is important to refuse to play judge between the quarreling parties, even if one child seems very hurt by the insults. You are to show no interest in how the argument started, who started it, or what it's about. The victim will be trying very hard to get you to take his side against the bully, but as I have stressed so much before, this would be a terrible mistake and make the problem worse.

The use of words that are forbidden in school is the only thing to be punished, not the hurting of feelings. It is not the bully's fault that the victim is upset by words, and it is wrong to punish the bully when the victim really hurt himself. However, the victim should be given help to overcome his vulnerability to words, especially if this is a recurring problem for him. If you can help him on your own with the techniques you have been learning here, fine. If not, refer him to a counselor who knows how to help teasing victims. If you do not know such a person (and there is a strong possibility you don't), refer him to the [INSTRUCTIONS](#) for teasing victims on this website, or better yet, give him a copy of my audio self-help tape, [How to Stop Being Teased and Bullied Without Really Trying](#).

Chapter Eight THE MAGIC RESPONSES, PART 4

Situation Number Four: You see your children fighting.

Magic Response for Parents: Nothing.

Magic Response for Teachers: It depends.

For Parents: Incredible as it may sound in this anti-violence era, (with a few exceptions) you should do nothing when you see your children fighting with each other. Try to stop them, and it will only get worse. Walk around with a smile on your face, take care of your own business, and fighting will be kept to a minimum.

The instructions for you in this Situation (Number Four), seeing your children fighting, are essentially the same as for Situation Number Two ("Johnny hit me!"). If you haven't read them yet, read them now. And pay attention to the Warnings! ([Click here to get there quickly.](#))

In addition to the instructions in Situation Number Two, you need an explanation of playfighting. As discussed in one of the boxes in the previous section, [Our Mistaken Attitudes About Children's Aggression](#), playfighting is not fighting; it is playing. It is an essential biological need and is programmed into our genes. I don't know of any research on this matter, but I am absolutely certain that children who are prevented from playfighting are deprived in both their physical and emotional development. Because playfighting is so important, Mother Nature rewards it with pleasure, and it is, in fact, about the most enjoyable thing that kids can do. Playfighting not only makes kids love each other, it is also a great way for parents to bond with their children. When people playfight, they are trying not to hurt each other, and it is probably a lot less dangerous than most sports.

I would estimate that at least 50% of the problem of sibling rivalry is caused by parents' not understanding playfighting. They see their kids engaged in this aggressive, dangerous, "negative" activity, and try to stop them. Even when parents recognize that it seems to start out as fun, they complain that it always ends up as a real fight. But that is an illusion. The reason it ends up as a real fight is that the parent gets involved. If no parent is around, when one child gets hurt, he screams, and his brother stops and waits till he is feeling better to continue. But when a parent hears the scream and comes along to see what

happened and who is to blame, they both try to blame the other, and then they really hate each other!

Therefore, when you see your children playfighting, be happy that they are involved in such a wonderful activity, and join in whenever you have the opportunity. Stop them only when they are doing it in the wrong place or time. Don't let them playfight at the dinner table, in restaurants, or near sharp furniture or stairs where they can get seriously hurt. Don't tell them not to playfight; just tell them to do it somewhere else, like the basement or outdoors.

For Teachers: If you are a teacher, chances are that you are or will be a parent someday. So please read the instructions above for parents. The principles are important to understand, and will help you with your own children at home. They will also help you understand children in general.

At home, parents should let siblings fight, with the exceptions mentioned above. If you witness fighting between children in school, though, you must treat it a little differently for a few reasons:

1. Close blood relatives are biologically programmed to love and support each other, which is why you will see human siblings, as well as animal siblings, help each other against external enemies. Therefore, when siblings fight, there is little danger that they will really try to hurt each other (as long as parents follow a strict policy, outlined above, of non-involvement). However, fights in school are generally not between siblings, and the combatants have no familial loyalty. When they have real, angry fights (as opposed to a play fight), they may, indeed, be trying to injure one another, and this must be prevented.

2. Schools are responsible for other people's children, and must be particularly careful not to let them get injured. Otherwise, parents will be afraid to send their children off to school. And while parents will not sue themselves if their children get hurt at home, they may sue the school if their kids get hurt there. To schools' credit, they do a great job at preventing injury, despite the occasional mishap. Statistics show that school grounds are the safest place for children to be, and there are far less injuries there than in either the home or neighborhood.

3. Schools have hundreds or even thousands of students, and keeping them in order takes far more effort than controlling a few siblings in the home. Therefore, to perform their educational role properly,

schools require highly structured behavior. If fighting is permitted in school, chaos can erupt at any time, and education will be very difficult.

You have already learned what to do when kids complain to you about hitting you didn't see. When you observe hitting, though, you probably have to do something.

The first thing you need to determine is whether the children are having a playfight or a real fight.

If it is a playfight, do not panic. They are playing, not fighting, and there is no real aggression. The chance of injury is low. Walk over and calmly tell them that this activity is not permitted in school and they must stop. When they see you in front of them, they may try to blame each other for the fighting. Let them know you are not interested and no one is getting punished. They just need to stop because roughhousing is not permitted in school.

If the fight is a real fight, then it needs to be stopped as quickly as possible. If it is not something you can handle yourself, call the security people. Once the fight is over, do not become an interrogator and judge. It is not important why they are fighting, and you are not looking to take sides. All that matters is that children were hurting one another, and this is forbidden. Whoever is guilty of hurting another child should be disciplined, and the motive is irrelevant.

I will not tell you how to discipline. Follow school policy as long as it is reasonable.

Much more important than disciplining the children for fighting is teaching them how to control their anger. Anger is the source of all relationship problems. When a child is constantly getting involved in real fights, the problem is not really the fighting. It's not that he is having involuntary muscle spasms causing him to lash out at other children. The reason he is fighting is that he is not controlling his anger. Therefore, children who get into frequent fights should be referred for training in anger management. If your school has someone qualified to do this, that's great. If not, don't despair. The [INSTRUCTIONS](#) for teasing victims on this website should serve fine for teaching anger control. Or better yet, have him listen to a copy of my [audio self-help tape, How to Stop Being Teased and Bullied Without Really Trying](#). If you think these materials may not be appropriate for a child who is a bully, you are probably wrong. Most

bullies do not see how their anger is causing their problems, just as victims don't. Many bullies, in fact, see themselves as innocent victims trying to get back at their tormentors (the "victims" and their adult accomplices).

Hints For Teachers: When students bring up matters that divert you from your lesson, such as a problem with another student, politely ask, "Is this important enough for me to stop the lesson?" If they say, "No," invite them to bring it up after class. You will be amazed at how often they just forget about it, because it really is not important to them. If they say, "Yes," let them talk. If you see it is not an emergency, tell them you'll deal with it after class. It won't take long for the kids to learn that there is no point in raising matters unrelated to academics unless there is true urgency.

Parents may confront you for not helping their children in their fights with other children. Explain to them how you would only be making matters worse by interrogating and judging, because they will end up fighting over you, and that your policy is to enable children to work out their own differences with others. Explain that you are there to teach academics, and that you trust the home, neighborhood, and church to do the job of social education. They will probably be grateful to you and respect you for this.

Chapter Nine

AN INSTANT COURSE IN HUMOR

The last lesson of this manual is about humor. And that is fitting, because the sense of humor is the ultimate antidote to suffering from teasing. I would also like you to appreciate that this "course" is not repeated from some other source. It is largely an original analysis, based on what I have come to learn from years of working with teasing victims and the thinking they have generated within me.

The mystery of laughter, the best medicine

We all know the expression, "Laughter is the best medicine." Science has been proving that this is more than a cute slogan. Experiments have been showing that when we laugh, our body actually produces chemicals that help us heal. Articles on humor have been appearing more and more frequently in magazines and newspapers, and people are being increasingly encouraged to use humor to improve their lives and relationships.

Humor is a mysterious subject. We all know when something is funny, but what makes something funny is not nearly so obvious. Being funny seems to be a gift; some people have it and some people don't. The advisers telling us to be funny have great intentions, but they rarely tell us how to do it other than by putting a big red nose on our face or a silly hat on our heads.

Why don't we get advice on how to be funny? Because few people, even the experts on human nature, are aware of what humor is all about. And with our current anti-violence social atmosphere, if it were clear what humor is really about, there is the danger that it would have to be outlawed. Allow me to explain.

Humor is violence

There are a number of different kinds of things that make us laugh. Among them are wordplays, children doing adult-like behaviors, and animals performing human-like behaviors. These things, though, rarely make us more than chuckle, and they comprise only a small part of the humor we enjoy in real life. The great majority of what we laugh at

is people being stupid, clumsy, or miserable! And the worse they look, they harder we laugh!

Yes, all these years that we've been laughing, we've really been enjoying other people being wretched! We just haven't realized it. Would you like to prove this to yourself? Then let me present you with a challenge: Tell me a good joke that doesn't make anyone look bad. Don't rush. Think about it over the next couple of days. Like everyone else, you should be surprised to discover that you can't do it. Also, start opening your eyes and ears. Pay attention to what makes you laugh, whether it's on TV, in a magazine, or in real life. You will come to the conclusion that we never laugh when people look smart, or generous, or capable, or brave. We only laugh when they look stupid, clumsy, or miserable.

The victim determines if the violence is comedy or tragedy

When you realize that humor involves either emotional or physical violence, don't become depressed, thinking, "Oh, no! I just discovered I'm a sadist!" You are not a sadist. If someone really got hurt and you enjoyed it, then you might qualify as a sadist. But an essential ingredient of humor is that no one is really injured by the violent words or actions. The target of the insult does not get mad or upset, so no one's feelings were hurt. The clown falls down, but he bounces right up again, and we know he's OK. However, if the clown falls down and it turns out he really had an accident and needs to be taken to the hospital, we stop laughing and feel terrible. The important thing for us to understand regarding the subject of teasing victims is that it is the victim who determines whether or not he is hurt. If you make fun of someone and he gets upset, he turns the incident into a tragedy. If he laughs, then it's a comedy.

The gap in the experts' knowledge

Now, you aren't the only one who hasn't known that humor involves the enjoyment of violence. The experts on human behavior, those who shape the national policies on society and education, don't know it either. Pick up any education or psychology textbook and look up the words "laughter," "comedy," and "humor" in the index. Chances are that you will find little or nothing on the subjects. If aliens came to Earth and tried to learn about human beings from our professional textbooks, they would never guess that we have a sense of humor. Yet humor is one of the most important things in the psychology of people and in our daily lives. We love humor and can't get enough of it.

Without it, life would be absolutely miserable – we would be able to tolerate neither others nor ourselves. Humor is a major factor in resilience. It helps us to heal from illness and to face the most difficult life situations. A person without a sense of humor is either autistic, depressed, or suffering from some other serious illness.

Another subject our professional educators and psychologists don't understand well is teasing. Again, look this word up in the textbooks, and you will find almost nothing. Even though it is a major cause of children's emotional suffering, most of the experts charged with educating and counseling our children don't understand teasing. Few know what to do about it other than to punish the bullies.

This lack of professional knowledge about humor and teasing is also why you will be told to use humor without being given any instructions. Because to have you be truly funny, and not just making corny wordplays, you will have to be verbally violent! But it is taboo to be verbally violent today, especially after Columbine. So you're being told to be funny, but you stand to be in deep doo-doo if you actually say something worthy of a good laugh. In the past year or so, in fact, a number of people in the public eye have had their careers seriously damaged for making jokes that didn't even hurt anyone's feelings. My supervisor at my New York City Board of Education job has an excellent sense of humor. Once upon a time ago, he used to tell jokes that would have us rolling in laughter. Now, he tells lame jokes that elicit groans. (Allan, if you're reading this, don't be mad. You really do have a great sense of humor, and I love you).

Humor requires courage

If you know any people who are truly funny, you will sense that they are people who have guts. They do what the rest of us are afraid to do. What gutsy thing do they do? They make fun of people! But the thing is, they don't hurt people. They make people feel good! Have you ever gone to a comedy club? The comedians stand there making fun of people in the audience, and the audience loves it. Customers who get overlooked by the comedian probably feel cheated! Also, the best teachers are the ones who use humor. The students love them and listen to them with rapt attention because they don't want to miss any of the jokes. The truth is that humor has always been a wonderful thing and still is; it's just become more dangerous to use it because of the increasingly anti-violence climate of the country.

Why humor feels good

Mother Nature rewards creatures with pleasure when they do things that are biologically necessary. Since laughing is so enjoyable and healthy, it means that it must be good for us to see others portrayed as fools. Does this make us evil? No! It is just the way we are. Our ancestors have been laughing at people's stupidity for millions of years, and this trait has become biologically programmed right into our genes. That is why we start laughing from the time we're babies, without anyone having explained to us what is funny.

Why should it be so pleasurable to see others being fools? Because, like all other animals, we have a need for superiority -- to be better than our competitors. The most important trait of human beings is intelligence -- more than anything else, this differentiates us from the other animals and is responsible for the incredible success of our species. Everyone wants to be smart. The easiest way in the world for us to feel smart is for someone else to look stupid. It's like winning a soccer match by having the opponents kick the ball into the wrong goal. You don't do anything, and you win! When others are being fools, an inner voice within us says, "Ha, ha, ha! Look how dumb he is! I'm much smarter than that," and "Thank God it's him and not me!" These thoughts are not usually conscious. It's just that biologically it has to feel good to be smarter and more capable than others.

Victims have a defective sense of humor

But there's another part of the equation. To have a complete, healthy sense of humor, it is not enough to be able to laugh at others. If it's good for us to laugh at other people, whom are they going to laugh at? Obviously, it has to be OK for others to laugh at us. And the truth is that none of us are perfect. We all have things about us that can be laughed at. Even our positive characteristics can be portrayed in a way that makes them look bad, and thus funny. An essential characteristic of an emotionally healthy person is that he knows he's not perfect, and can take a joke about himself and make a joke about himself. Psychologists are still wondering what was wrong with the Columbine killers and the other students who committed massacres. They are having difficulty because the essential human trait of humor is not part of their diagnostic manual. But the most accurate way of diagnosing what was wrong with these murderers is that they had a deficient sense of humor: they couldn't take a joke about themselves. And this is what is wrong with every victim of relentless teasing. Fortunately, as

you have been learning in this website, this is a deficiency that is easy to correct with the right approach.

The value of being funny

You certainly want the children in your care to develop a sense of humor, so they can become more resilient and happy. And if you are a teacher, you would like to be funnier so that your students will learn better, and so that school will be more fun for both you and them. But you are faced with the dilemma: since humor is a form of violence, how can you do this without getting in trouble? Now, I am not a true expert in teaching people how to be funny, and I am not nearly as funny as I think I should be, but I believe I can help by giving you a clearer understanding of humor.

Five levels of humor

There are five general levels of humor. (I am excluding things like wordplays. My concern is only in the most common type of humor, the kind that makes us feel really good, which requires making people look bad. It may be more appropriate to call it comedy). The higher the level, the more risk is involved. They are as follows:

1. Jokes about imaginary people. These include things like, "Did you hear the one about a guy who goes into a bar..." These are completely safe because the person does not exist, so we don't have to be afraid anyone will be offended and try to retaliate.

2. Jokes about real people who are famous. This includes all the Monica Lewinsky jokes. Sure, President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky are real, but they don't know us, and they don't personally care about us. Because most of us aren't important enough to hang out with them, they will never know we made fun of them, so we can't get in trouble.

3. Jokes about people we know, behind their backs. This type of humor is very common. For instance, we sit around the lunchroom talking about a colleague or supervisor who isn't there at the moment, saying things we wouldn't dare say in his presence. This is mildly risky because word may get back to him that we made fun of him.

4. Making jokes about ourselves. This is risky because it requires openly admitting our faults to others. Not everyone has the internal

strength to do this, because our nature is to try to show how wonderful we are.

5. Making fun of people right in front of their faces. This is the highest form of the art of humor, and involves the most risk. There is the danger that the person will be truly offended. To pull this off successfully, we have to know the person well enough to know he can take a joke without getting upset. But this kind of humor is also the most enjoyable. Good friends can do this with each other. In fact, it's impossible for two people to be good friends if they can't allow themselves to make fun of each other. It is also what happens when you go to a comedy club. People pay money to have comedians stand up and make fun of them. Chances are you feel cheated if he made fun of most of the audience but overlooked you.

Five ways to be funny

Now that you have all this theoretical information, how do you use it? That depends on whether you are a parent or a teacher. If you are a parent, your relationship with your children is informal. You spend lots of time with them at the dinner table, in the car, in front of the TV, etc. Within the walls of your home, you have lots of opportunity to use all five levels of humor without having to worry about getting in trouble.

However, if you are a teacher, you have to be much more careful about what you say. You can have your career destroyed for the crime of making a joke!

You may be expecting the advice I give on using humor to follow my outline of the five levels of humor I just defined. Unfortunately, life isn't always as neat as we would like it to be. Instead, it will be based on the safest and healthiest ways to be funny.

1. Making fun of yourself. This is appropriate for both teachers and parents. It is the absolutely best thing you can do for several reasons. One is that you will be modeling to the children the attitude of health: that I am not perfect, and I can laugh about my imperfections. After all, if even the teachers can make fun of themselves and enjoy being laughed at, then certainly we should all be able to. A second reason is that it is perfectly safe. No one else can claim to be hurt when you make a joke about yourself. You can even make fun of your religion, your skin

color, and your sex, things that may otherwise be taboo, when you make the jokes about yourself.

2. Making fun of imaginary people. This is like the “This guy goes into a bar...” joke. No particular ethnic, religious, or physical characteristics are being made fun of. It’ll make people laugh, but no one can get hurt. If you are a teacher, though, you probably won’t have too many opportunities to make such jokes if you are trying not to stray from the material you are trying to teach.

3. Making jokes about ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, or physical characteristics. Teachers: Don’t even think about it! Aside from the fact that you can lose your job, you may actually be hurting children who share the traits being ridiculed. Even if there are no such children in your class or school, you are not making your students better people by fostering bigotry. Maybe we’ll be fortunate to live long enough to see a society in which everyone enjoys making fun of each other and no one is stupid enough to get hurt by it, but we shouldn’t hold our breaths. Parents: you can be more relaxed about making fun of people’s traits. There isn’t much chance of getting in trouble, though you may be turning your kids into bigots if you don’t make extra effort to teach them to respect people’s differences. If you are going to joke about other groups of people to your children, it is essential that you joke about your own group’s characteristics as well.

4. Making fun of famous people. Fortunately, this is still acceptable in society. However, if you are a teacher, you still have to be careful about offending people who identify with those you ridicule. If you want to play it safe, don’t make such jokes in school unless you really know your audience.

5. Making fun of your children. Making fun of the people right in front of you is, of course, the highest and most difficult form of humor. In order to pull this off successfully, you have to be sure that the child will laugh at the joke and realize that you are not being serious. This is especially true if you are a teacher. Never be angry with the child you are making fun of, because that means you see the child as an enemy and want to hurt him! It should

be obvious to all listeners that you like the child you are joking about. If you are a teacher, remember the instructions in item 3 about ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, or physical characteristics. You don't want to get fired! Another important rule is that if you are going to allow yourself to joke about kids, it has to be a two-way street. They should be allowed to make jokes about you, too. After all, what lesson will you be teaching if it is OK to make fun of others but others are not allowed to make fun of you?

I know this list is not all-inclusive, and I may be missing some important situations. However, I hope it gives you some useful guidelines for adding humor in you life.

Good luck. I hope you enjoyed this Revolutionary Manual.

Sincerely,
Izzy Kalman