

# Becoming a Trusted Adult

## Helping your child cope with bullies

### About the

### 5th Dimension Institute

Our mission is that of a pebble in a pond. Every person who commits to reaching out and making a difference causes a ripple effect. We want to help magnify those ripples. There are a lot of ways to make a difference. There are a lot of passionate individuals committed to making a difference. This is our way of lending weight to those efforts. This is our unique voice, our commitment to making a positive impact in the world.



### About the Author

Master Caputo has studied extensively in areas such as communication, personal achievement and motivation. His goal is to use the martial arts as a catalyst to effect positive growth in students of all ages. To this end, he developed "Creative Connections" a multifaceted program designed to impact students of all ages both within a traditional martial arts setting and out in the community. He is a contributing author to the book "Helping Boys Succeed in School" and is currently authoring a second book dealing more fully with the topic of bullying. He is also the author of the children's book "The Adventures of Jay and Tay".



*Billy came home from school crying. Again. It really wasn't school that was the problem; it was two girls on the bus who had decided that Billy would be the target of repeated bullying. They would pinch him and call him names until he cried, which of course would lead to more name calling and further embarrassment. One would sit next to him and the other would position themselves in the seat behind. The other children pretended not to notice what was happening. Who can blame them? They were mostly relieved they weren't the target, and were unwilling to risk drawing the attention of the two girls.*



*Billy's mom was beside herself with frustration. Her seven year old son was sensitive, and small for his age. This wasn't the first time he had been chosen as a target. She was thinking about the miserable process of going to the school, complaining to the administration, getting the bus company involved, and worst of all, once more putting her child in the position of having his mommy come to the rescue. There had to be a better way.*

When a child is in crisis, they can become paralyzed. They don't know what to do, so they react based on what they feel. They lash out, cry or freeze, which is exactly what a bully expects to happen. Rarely is there a parent or authority figure around to rescue the victim or intervene and stop the bullying behavior. Instead, most parents find themselves dealing with the aftermath. They are left picking up the pieces of their child's self esteem and trying to put them back together. They attempt to go through the proper channels, and hope someone can keep it from happening again. Some parents just give up. They drive their child to school, or even change school systems, in the hopes that they can simply avoid the bullies and get on with their lives.

What if you could teach your child how to deal with bullies when the situation occurs? Imagine if that child believed they were capable of handling the crisis alone. That they were prepared to deal with that bully themselves. Just that confidence alone would instantly reduce the likelihood that they will be viewed as a victim. What the child needs is a training partner. Someone who will play "What if" and allow the victim to practice neutralizing bullying behavior in a safe environment. What the child needs is a trusted adult.

*"Do you want me to talk to the school, or do you want me to help you learn how to make them stop?" Billy's mom was hesitant, but willing to try something new if Billy was agreeable. Billy was. He wanted to be able to take care of this, even though he had no idea how, and was terrified of what might happen. Mom nodded her approval and laid out the plan.*

*She pulled out two chairs, having her son sit next to her. "I'm going to pretend to be one of the girls who picks on you. Where do they pinch you? What names do they call you?" This was making Billy uncomfortable. He is reluctant to say. Mom knows this is immensely important if she is going to be able to establish a trusting relationship. She asks Billy how he learned to catch a ball. Billy says by having*

someone throw it to him. She explains that this is the same thing. Only instead of learning to catch, he's learning to handle bully behavior. She needs to be able to throw the ball, or he'll never learn to catch it.

Billy agrees. For the next two weeks they practice. Billy learns to sit up when he gets pinched, look calmly into his mother's eyes, shake his head and turn away. Mom wants him to say "Please stop." in a firm tone, but Billy is afraid he'll be so upset he won't be able to speak. So they stick to practicing "the look", and mom drives him to school. Every night they practice, until Billy decides he's ready.

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### **What is a trusted adult?**

A trusted adult serves as both a training partner and a confidant. Their purpose is to listen to the child's situation, and help them come up with a plan which will give the child the ability to deal with the crisis. They become a role player who simulates the situation, and provides constructive feedback which will help the child develop an effective strategy through practice and repetition. Not every adult will be able to successfully assume the role of trusted adult. There are certain key qualities which must be present for the relationship to work.

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## **4 Keys to a Successful Relationship**

### **Mutual Respect**

Both individuals need to respect and support each other. The child should see the adult as someone who genuinely supports them. If the adult appears to be going through the motions and is not genuinely engaged in the process, it will be challenging to establish trust. The adult must also "walk their talk". For example, if the adult is recommending the child be patient and remain calm, they must demonstrate the ability to do so. If, on the other hand, the child witnesses that adult yelling and losing patience with others, that will undermine their credibility.

### **Consistency**

Developing a strategy that has a high success rate will require practice. The trusted adult needs to be willing to set time aside regularly to help the child develop their bully prevention skills. They also need to be consistent in their interest and support of the child.

### **Honesty**

The adult must be willing to give honest feedback to the child. They need to be able to tell that child what needs to be said, even if it is upsetting to hear. Often parents want to tell their child everything will be OK. The trusted adult needs to be able to say "This might not work, what do we do then?" or "Part of the reason this happens is because of the way you behave in this situation. Maybe we can work to change that."

### **Strategic Criticism**

When practicing, the adult needs to remain focused on the drill. Sometimes things can get derailed by emotions as the child relives a stressful situation. The trusted adult acknowledges the feelings, but keeps focusing on refining and perfecting the child's response to the situation.

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*Billy's waiting for the bus with mom. "Are you ready?" Mom asks.*

*"I guess so." Billy replies*

*Mom asks again "Are you ready?"*

*Billy straightens his back and lifts his chin. "Yes, I'm ready" he states.*

*"Good," says mom. "What if it doesn't work?"*

*"We try again." replies Billy.*

*Mom smiles and reminds him to try to remember everything that happens so they can make adjustments if necessary. "I'll be right here after school." She watches her son get on the bus, resisting the urge to follow him and tear into those two girls. She heads home, preparing to wait for hours that will seem more like days.*

Once a child has a trusted adult in their corner, the possibilities are endless. They have someone to practice that presentation for school, or help strategize how to approach a new friend, or how to ask a teacher for extra help. That child now has someone they are willing to open up to. Someone who has established themselves as a trustworthy ally willing to take an active role in that child's ability to navigate through life's challenges. There is a process that should be observed, especially when dealing with a crisis situation, such as defending against bully behavior.

## **10 Steps to Breaking the Bullying Cycle**

### **1. Discuss the situation**

This serves two purposes. It allows the trusted adult to gather information which will help them better seek a solution which the child had a role in determining, and it allows the child to relive the experience and release their anxieties instead of internalizing them.

### **2. Establish training guidelines**

These are the rules for practicing. Both the adult and child need to know what the boundaries are and have the ability to respectfully cease the session if things get too emotional or frustrating.

### **3. Practice together**

The focus should be on refinement and repetition. Try to make it fun if at all possible, and discuss different scenarios.

### **4. Provide honest, constructive feedback**

Let them know how they are doing. Make sure that if corrections need to be made, the adult is clear regarding those corrections. Give them specifics so the child doesn't feel picked on. Say "Try it this way." As opposed to "You're doing it wrong."

### **5. Prepare mentally**

Coach them up before the situation occurs if at all possible. Remind them that there is the possibility that it won't work, and that's ok.

### **6. Focus on gathering information**

Remind the child to gather information about what occurs so that you can discuss it later. This will change the way the child views the crisis, as they will be looking for clues to resolving the conflict instead of being in blind reaction.

### **7. Review the results**

Discuss what happened and plan what to do next.

### **8. Modify the strategy and repeat**

If necessary, make adjustments if the situation was not resolved satisfactorily.

### **9. Keep working towards the desired result**

Help the child stay focussed on the desired outcome, which will help them avoid getting frustrated. Most likely the problem will not go away on the first attempt.

### **10. Encourage patience and persistence**

Breaking the cycle can take time. Make sure they understand that they may not get results right away. Over time, these skills will better prepare them to handle not only the current situation, but future ones as well.

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"I did it! I did it!" Billy comes flying off the bus, literally bouncing up and down as he gets a hug from mom. Mom tries not to burst into tears of relief as Billy describes what happened on the bus. The sense of relief she feels is overwhelming. The stress of the last three weeks fades. She hopes they've turned a corner. She smiles as they walk towards home. Billy is holding her hand as he exclaims, "It was just like we practiced!"

There is no quick fix when dealing with bully situations. Emotions run high, and everyone involved feels frustrated and helpless. A trusted adult can change that. Parents can take control by focussing on the one thing they can positively influence: their child's preparedness in these situations. The child learns that they can take control. The next time they're in a crisis, and they ask themselves "What do I do?" an answer will come to mind. One they practiced. Just like catching a ball.



To learn more about the program, and explore additional trusted adult activities, visit the free exploratory web site:

[CreativeConnectionsTTMA.com](http://CreativeConnectionsTTMA.com)

You can also use the facility locator to find out if there is a participating martial arts school near you. We know how important it is to have positive role models validating your efforts to transform your child into a responsible adult. Creative Connections is committed to doing our part with the support of your community martial arts professionals.