

My Positive Action Plan

This is a Positive Action Plan for young people who are experiencing bullying.

Tap Into Your Personal Power

Stand up and raise your hands into the “victory sign,” with a proud smile on your face. Hold this position for several minutes. This is a “power pose.” Scientists have discovered that if you “power pose,” this causes your fear hormones to go down and your confidence hormones to go up. By making your body look more powerful, you will then feel more powerful. You can actually “fake it” until you “make it.” Take a few minutes each morning to “power pose.”

Walk with Pride

If someone says or does something hurtful, do this: Take a deep breath and remind yourself to remain calm. Immediately focus on your body. Back straight. Shoulders down. Head up. Do not look at this person. Think to yourself, “Let it go!” Imagine the hurt directed to you turning into dust and blowing away. Walk to a place where there are friendly people. If you receive a hurtful text or message, do not respond until you have talked with a friend.

Reach Out for Support

Write the names of people you feel close to ~ those who will support you if you are feeling down.

Two adults at school:

Two adults outside of school:

Good friends:

Pay Attention to the Good

Keep a notebook by your bed. Every night before you go to sleep, write about three good things that happened. Then write one thing you want to accomplish the next day. Create a positive affirmation for yourself and repeat it often.

Learn From Your “Heros”

Find courage in stories of those who faced challenges ~ and through these challenges became powerful and let go of their fear. Pay attention to the stories you have read or watched in movies. Investigate the people you admire. Realize that you can follow in their footsteps. Write your favorite quote about facing challenges and succeeding:

Plan for Good Times

Describe what activities you enjoy, especially with other people. How can you increase these fun activities?

Focus on Your Future

Describe what you would like to do in the future (you can always change your mind). What are you doing now to accomplish these goals?”

Decide to Make a Positive Difference

Practice a random act of kindness every day to make someone else’s life better. How can you make a positive difference in the lives of others now and in the future?

The My Positive Action Plan is based on the Following Insight for Building Resilience

Other research insights can provide guidance for educators and medical and mental health professionals when working with students who have been bullied, including those also engaging in bullying.

The National Center for School Engagement conducted a qualitative study of high school students who had been bullied in grade school to determine what distinguished those students who were in advance placement classes from those who were incarcerated.¹ This study found three critical factors that supported the bullied students and led to a successful outcome:

- *A place of refuge where they can feel safe, appreciated, and challenged in a constructive way.*
- *Responsible adults who can support and sustain them and provide them examples of appropriate behavior.*
- *A sense of future possibility to persuade them that staying in school, despite the bullying, promises better things to come.²*

Research has also clearly documented that young people who are bullied, but who have supportive friends, experience less distress.³

It is also possible to look beyond the bullying literature for insight into strategies that appear to be logically related to the challenges faced by those who are bullied or are both engaging in and being bullied.

While trauma can indeed lead to traumatic disorders, only a minority of people who are exposed to such trauma have resulting challenges. A field of research that focuses on post traumatic growth may provide insight to assist young people who face the challenges of bullying.⁴

Based on interviews with trauma survivors in many types of trauma, unfortunately including bullying, the traumatic experiences themselves were credited with helping the person achieve improved relationships, new possibilities for their life, a greater appreciation for life, a greater sense of personal strength and spiritual development.

A recent meta-analysis of research related to post traumatic growth indicated that interventions aimed at increasing optimism and social support appeared to promote positive changes in the aftermath of trauma.⁵ Additionally, specific coping strategies, especially religious or spiritual-based coping and positive reappraisal coping appeared to be helpful. Note

these findings appear to be in accord with the findings of the National Center for School Engagement.

Bullying situations generally involve an imbalance of power.” Cuddy and colleagues at Harvard School of Business have noted that in both humans and other primates, expansive open postures are indicative of high power, whereas closed postures reflect lower power.⁶ Many students who are bullied maintain physical postures that demonstrate a lack of social power.

Most significantly, Cuddy has demonstrated that simply adopting a pose that indicates power, a “power pose,” can increase both explicit and implicit feelings of power and confidence. Assuming a position of power results in an increase in the dominance hormone testosterone, while reducing the stress hormone cortisol. In other words, it is possible to “fake it” by assuming a “power pose,” which will make you feel more confident. In one experiment, students who assumed positions of power or lack of power prior to a job interview activity, demonstrated performance in accord with the position they had assumed prior to the interview.

Guidance for Medical and Mental Health Professionals

Provide counseling to patients and their parents on strategies to support positive growth outcomes despite the current negative situation. It is suggested that these include:

- Establishing a support system that includes adults and peers, both in and out of school.
- Learning to hold themselves in a position that demonstrates strength and confidence and to walk with power and pride.
- Identifying “heros” to emulate. Those who have successfully met life challenges.
- Focusing on positive happenings and activities, especially activities involving friendly peers, and thinking about possibilities for their future.
- Deciding to build on the insight they have gained to make a positive difference in the lives of others.⁶

Guidance to support the use of this document is available at: <http://www.embracecivility.org/positiverelationsatschool/>.

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Web site: <http://embracecivility.org>

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1 Seeley, K., Tombari, M., Bennett, L.J. & Dunkle, J.B. (2009) *Peer Victimization in Schools: A Set of Quantitative and Qualitative Studies of the Connections Among Peer Victimization, School Engagement, Truancy, School Achievement, and Other Outcomes*. National Center for School Engagement. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/app/publications/abstract.aspx?ID=256074>.

2 Seeley, K., Tombari, M., Bennett, L.J. & Dunkle, J.B. (2011) *Bullying in Schools: An Overview*, Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/234205.pdf>.

3 Sainio, M., Veenstra, R., Huising, G., & Salmivalli, C. (2011). Victims and their defenders: A dyadic approach. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, vol. 35 no. 2 144-151; Salmivalli, C. (2010) Bullying and the Peer Group: A Review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*. 15, 112-120.; Salmivalli, C., & Peets, K. (2008). Bullies, victims, and bully-victim relationships. In K. Rubin, W. Bukowski & B. Laursen (Eds.), *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups* (pp. 322-340). New York: Guilford Press.

4 Tedeshi, R.G., & Calhoun, L.G. (2004). *Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundation and Empirical Evidence*. Philadelphia, PA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

5 Prati, G. & Pietrantonio, L. (2009). Optimism, social support, and coping strategies as factors contributing to posttraumatic growth: A metaanalysis. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 14, 364-388.

6 Cuddy, Amy J.C., Caroline A. Wilmuth, and Dana R. Carney. "The Benefit of Power Posing Before a High-Stakes Social Evaluation." *Harvard Business School Working Paper*, No. 13-027, September 2012. <http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/9547823/13-027.pdf?sequence=1>. http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html.