



BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL

AN EMPOWERMENT PLAN
FOR TEENS WHO ARE
BULLIED OR HARASSED

NANCY WILLARD, M.S., J.D.

EMBRACE CIVILITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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PRAISE FOR BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL

Bullying can quickly form traumatic memories in a child's brain, and these memories can hamper the child's ability to perform well in school and in life. Fortunately there are now a number of evidence-based strategies that children, parents, and teachers can use that can use that will strengthen the neural circuits of confidence and optimism that are needed to live a full and satisfying life, and Nancy Willard's book is filled with brain-changing and life-enhancing strategies. *Be Positively Powerful* makes an excellent contribution to this field.

- Mark Robert Waldman, Executive MBA Faculty, Loyola Marymount University, Author of *NeuroWisdom: The New Brain Science of Money, Happiness, and Success*.

Nancy Willard is a knowledgeable, caring and tough – in the best sense of the word! – advocate for all children. Combining educational and legal understandings, Nancy is an important leader in supporting and furthering practically important school improvement efforts that have the potential to be helpful for students. *Be Positively Powerful* provides helpful insights for teens on strategies to become more empowered in the face of such hurtful situations. This guidance is also helpful for parents of teens and younger children. The free Guide that is on Nancy's site provides excellent legally grounded guidance on how parents and students can document and file a complaint to insist that the school take these concerns seriously.

- Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., Incoming co-president, International Observatory for School Climate and Violence Prevention; Adjunct Professor in Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University; President Emeritus and co-founder, National School Climate Center.

Be Positively Powerful represents a profoundly beneficial contribution to the field of bullying prevention. This is a resource for teens who are being bullied or harassed that can help to empower them to seek to reduce the times that they are treated badly, respond effectively if they are, and reduce the potential of long lasting harm. As there is little evidence in the national or state surveys that the approaches schools have been directed to use to reduce or respond to bullying is being effective, insight for parents and teens on how to reduce the harmful impact is truly welcome.

- James Dillon, Director, The Center for Leadership and Bullying Prevention, author of *Reframing Bullying Prevention to Build Stronger School Communities*.

Nancy's approach is centered on using young people as agents of change who can powerfully transform their communities by modeling and sharing positive behaviors marked by kindness, civility, mutual respect, empathy, and meaningful conflict resolution. *Be Positively Powerful* provides exceptionally helpful guidance for teens to support their personal empowerment and tools to assist them in effectively responding to challenging situations.

- Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D., co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center, co-author of *Bullying Today: Bullet Points and Best Practices*, *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying (2nd edition)*, *Words Wound: Delete Cyberbullying and Make Kindness Go Viral*.

Nancy Willard has been a leader in the field of bullying since her book on cyberbullying was published in 2007. She knows how important it is to empower young people with the insight and skills to effectively present themselves and respond to the challenge of someone being hurtful to them, both in school and online. *Be Positively Powerful* provides valuable insight into strategies teens and younger children with the support of their parents can use to become empowered and emerge from these challenges with strength and a commitment to make a positive difference in their world.

- Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D., co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center, co-author of *Bullying Today: Bullet Points and Best Practices*, *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying (2nd edition)*, *Words Wound: Delete Cyberbullying and Make Kindness Go Viral*.

In *Be Positively Powerful*, Nancy Willard uses the 3 Rs of sexuality education -- rights, respect, and responsibility -- as she guides young people through the realities of the impact of bullying and concrete solutions to improving situations.

- L. Kris Gowen, PhD, EdM, author of *Sexual Decisions: The Ultimate Teen Guide*.

Be Positively Powerful builds on solid evidence that empowering students, both those who have been bullied and those who have bullied, is essential to developing resilient students and building a respectful school climate. Nancy Willard's book is based on a realization that conventional approaches to anti-bullying are ineffective at best, and all-too-often counter-productive. She describes, in detail, powerful alternative strategies that students can employ to reduce the likelihood that others will treat them badly. It is a resource that should be considered by any school seeking to develop anti-bullying curriculum.

- Gary Obermeyer, Learning Options, school change consultant, virtual learning community facilitator, and author of *Growing Into Schools of the Future*.

Nancy combines a genuine passion for justice for kids with an equal desire to help schools cope with the challenges they face and shift to a more positive approach. In *Be Positively Powerful* she outlines effective, research-based strategies to assist students who are being bullied. This book is not only helpful for teens, but will also provide parents of either teens or younger children with insight into positive strategies they can help their child embrace that can provide great assistance to them in surviving these horrible situations.

- Stuart Green, DMH, LCSW, Director, NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention, Associate Director, Overlook Family Medicine

INTRODUCTION

Imagine this scenario: You are a student who is being bullied or harassed by other students at your school. Snide comments, nasty rumors, “eye-rolling” by these people, as well as others around you, have all become part of your life. Or maybe you are being treated badly by a school staff member. You are becoming increasingly depressed and often you do not want to go to school.

Now imagine that you’ve asked for help from the principal. The principal may have indicated a sincere intent to help make things better, but the bullying or harassment has not stopped. Or the principal did try, but this has made things worse and so now you are afraid to ask for help again.

Alternatively, you may have heard such comments as: “This isn’t bullying.” “They were just joking.” “You are overreacting.” “You just need to learn to deal with it.” “If you would stop (describe behavior), this wouldn’t happen.” All these responses have done is to make you feel worse.

You may possibly not need to imagine this scenario because you have been living it. If so, it is most important that you understand that the way you are being treated is not okay and needs to stop. You have a right to feel safe at school, not be treated badly by others, to receive an education, and to fully participate in school activities.

Things can be done to help to make things better. While things may seem tough now, you have the power to get through this and build a positive and happy future. ***Be Positively Powerful*** will provide you with insight and strategies to do this.

- **Chapter 1. Why What Schools Are Doing Is Not Working.** This Chapter explains why what schools are doing is not working. It is not that educators do not care and do not want to see bullying stopped. What they have been told about bullying is inaccurate and the way they have been told to address bullying is ineffective. This chapter also provides insight into how your school could make positive changes.
- **Chapter 2. Bullying and Your Brain.** This Chapter provides information about the impact of serious or chronic bullying on your brain and how you can rewire your brain to achieve greater happiness.
- **Chapter 3. Be Positively Powerful Personal Strategies.** This long Chapter will provide you information and strategies you can use to increase your resilience, positive feelings, and friendships that can reduce the likelihood that others will treat you badly. These are strategies that can help to reduce the potential that you will become emotionally upset if someone is hurtful. These strategies can be combined into actions you can take when someone is being hurtful to help you respond in a positively powerful way, which is addressed in Chapter 4.

- **Chapter 4. Respond in a Positively Powerful Way.** This Chapter provides you with guidance on how to respond in hurtful situations in a way that allows you to retain your personal power and shift to positive. This includes how to immediately respond, how to how to start a Positivity Ripple, and how to Stop, Own It, and Fix It.
- **Chapter 5. Build a Movement to Support Helpful Allies.** This Chapter provides you with strategies you can implement with other students to foster positive relations in your school and strategies you can use to step in to help others.

ABOUT SOME TERMS

“Bullying.” When one or more people have engaged in a seriously hurtful act or are being repeatedly hurtful to another person in a way that is causing that person significant emotional distress.

“Harassment.” When this “bullying” is based on what is called “protected class status” under civil rights laws this is called “discriminatory harassment.” “Protected class status” includes disabilities, sexual orientation or identity, race, national origin, or religion. Harassment also includes “sexual harassment.” (In most of this document, I will use the term “bullying” to also include “harassment,” unless I am specifically talking about “harassment.”)

“Hurtful Acts,” “Hurtful Incident,” “Being Hurtful,” or “Treated Badly” These are the hurtful acts or incidents that may be serious or may be happening repeatedly to constitute “bullying”—or may just be hurtful acts or incidents.

“Bully.” I never use the term “bully” and encourage you not to do so either. Bullying is behavior that we hope can be changed. If you call someone “a bully” this tends to make it harder to encourage them to stop their hurtful behavior.

“Victim.” I will also never use the term “victim” to describe someone who is being bullied because I never want someone who is being treated badly to think of themselves as a “victim.” If you have been the “target” of hurtful behavior, you can become powerful and not “victimized” by what has happened.

“Parent.” The term “parent” will be used for any person who is helping you in a parenting capacity. This could be a guardian or an advocate.

SOME NOTES

NOTE TO TEENS

While *Be Positively Powerful* has been written for teens who may be experiencing hurtful situations, you are encouraged to share this information with parents and other trusted adults, so that you can implement these strategies together.

NOTE TO PARENTS

While *Be Positively Powerful*, has been written for teens experiencing hurtful situations, these same strategies can be used by younger children, with your guidance.

NOTE TO PARENTS AND TEENS

In my original version of *Be Positively Powerful*, I provided more information on why what schools are doing is work working and what they should do. I also provided detailed guidance on how to document serious or chronic bullying or harassment situations and insist that schools respond in a way to make things better.

However, this made the book too long and too focused on a more complicated process. So I have taken this material out. A Guide entitled *How to Document Bullying or Harassment and Insist on a Positive Response by the School* providing this insight is freely available on my web site at <http://embracecivility.org>. There is also an additional Guide on how to work with your child in implementing the strategies in this book.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

I have been told that there would be an interest in using *Be Positively Powerful*, as a resource in schools if I had not included the information on why what schools are doing is not working and not mentioned that if students reported to their principal, this is not likely to make things better.

Based on all available research, what schools are currently doing is not effectively reducing bullying. Further, often if students do report, things likely will not improve for them. I have chosen to present the situation that is currently present in many schools accurately to teens.

However, I have written a book for school leaders, *Engage Students to Embrace Civility*. If your school is interested in charting a positive path forward both by implementing a student leadership program and revising the way you respond to the more serious or chronic hurtful situations, and would be interested in a revised version of *Be Positively Powerful* this would be happily and willingly accomplished.

This revised version of ***Be Positively Powerful***, is not solely focused on students who are being bullied. This focuses on empowerment strategies for all students.

- How all students can be positively powerful.
- How students can effectively respond if someone is hurtful.
- Why hurtful students might choose a different path and how they can take personal responsibility to remedy the harm.
- How witnesses can best step in to help, tell someone being hurtful to stop, and when and how they should report serious concerns.

An ***Embrace Civility*** student survey that a student leadership group can conduct to identify student positive norms and promote such norms in the school is also available.

CHAPTER 1. WHY WHAT SCHOOLS ARE DOING IS NOT WORKING

What schools are doing to try to stop bullying and in response to students reporting they have been bullied is not working. If you purchased this book because you are being bullied, you already know this.

I could assure you that if you report that you are being bullied to your school, the principal would help to make things better. In some schools, this may be accurate. However, based on the research, this would not be an accurate statement in most schools. So I am not going to tell you something that is not accurate.

Schools have been trying to better address bullying for over a decade. There is no evidence that what most schools are currently doing is reducing bullying behavior or stopping bullying when students report.

Most educators deeply care about the well being of their students. Educators clearly do not want to see bullying happen. They want students to tell them if they are being bullied. They think that if students do ask for help, their response will make things better.

The data from a national student survey called the Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicates that there has not been any reduction in the rate at which students report that they are being bullied since the survey started asking this question in 2009.

Ample research demonstrates that the majority of students do not think educators are doing a good enough job addressing bullying, that most staff ignore bullying, and that reporting will just make things worse.

While educators want to better address bullying, there are barriers that are outside of their control. These include mandates for testing, little time for discussions on social issues, over-crowded classrooms, and lack of sufficient funding. Educators are also thoroughly overwhelmed by the responsibilities that have been placed on them and the lack of resources necessary to do their jobs.

There are also challenges related to the fact that students come to school from different backgrounds, with different values. Bullying at school can also be supported by social or community values.

Another huge challenge is that what educators have been told about bullying behavior is partially inaccurate. Further, they are doing what they have been told to do to respond to your report of being bullied. The problem is that they have been told to do is—and always will be—ineffective.

So it is not that they do not care. They do care. They do not want you to be bullied. They are also very frustrated because what they are doing is not working.

ABOUT BULLYING BEHAVIOR

What educators have been told about bullying is partially inaccurate. Educators have been told that the students who engage in bullying are “problem students” who need to be subjected to sanctions to stop.

There are students who have experienced serious challenges and could be being hurtful to you. These are students who have themselves likely been abused or neglected at home and have been bullied and excluded at school.

Punishment will not change the hurtful behavior of these students. They need comprehensive support to recover from the trauma they have experienced.

If a student such as this is being hurtful to you, it is likely the principal will try to do something about this because the principal already knows this student has challenges. Please tell the principal that you want to see this student being supported, not simply punished. If there are any times where it would be safe for you to reach out to be kind to this student, this would also likely be helpful.

However, these “problem students” are not the primary source of bullying. The students who are the source of most bullying are the higher social status students who are not considered “problem students.”

These students have a “privileged” and “entitled” social status in your school. They are considered “popular” and “cool.” They are compliant to school staff.

They are being hurtful to achieve dominance and higher social status. They may denigrate and exclude students who they consider “different.” They also will engage in battles with rivals or those who they perceive to be rivals.

They are socially skilled and have empathy. They know exactly how to stab you or others in the back and twist the knife ever so slightly to make you or others feel miserable—without alerting attention from school staff. What they lack is compassion.

They are also very careful. They generally do not engage in hurtful behavior in obvious ways in front of school staff. They can often be hurtful in ways that cause school staff to simply ignore their behavior—or worse to laugh at you.

Realize that what these students are trying to do is show off their personal power to others by being hurtful to you. The most important reasons for their actions may have little to do with you—unless they perceive you as a rival. Their actions are designed to get attention from other students and prove their power to those other students.

A pattern that can emerge is that these students will pick on students who they are pretty sure can be triggered into an outburst. This angry outburst is their “reward,” which affirms their power to themselves and to other students.

When a student who is being bullied finally gets angry and responds in such a way that school staff do notice, it is more often than not that the targeted student is the one who is disciplined rather than those who have been participating in the bullying.

If this describes a pattern that you are in, the guidance in *Be Positively Powerful* will help. It is essential that you stop rewarding students who are being hurtful by getting visibly upset when they treat you badly or that ends up with you getting disciplined.

Unfortunately, if you report to the school that one or more of these kinds of students are being hurtful to you, the principal may not believe you. These students are not considered “problem students.” These are not the kinds of students who principals think should be punished with a suspension. They also have high social status parents who would complain.

This is why you will need to do a really good job working with your parent in documenting what is happening and the harmful impact. A Guide to do this is on my web site.

WHAT SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN TOLD TO DO

Another part of the problem is the way schools have been directed to address bullying under state statutes. Schools have been told to create a policy against bullying, tell students to report, investigate to determine whether a student violated the policy, and, if so, suspend this student.

Students are told that if they are being bullied they should tell a staff member, because the staff member will make things better. The majority of students do not report to the school because most of them think this will make things worse.

The perspective of students in many schools is likely accurate, based on research. A recent study found that about two thirds of bullied secondary students did not report what was happening to the school. For those who did report, things got worse a third of the time or stayed the same a third of the time. Things only got better a third of the time. Overall, this translates to a 10% level of effectiveness of the “tell an adult” approach.

The focus in statutes and policies is on more serious hurtful incidents, like fights or threats. If you are being treated badly through ongoing negative comments or other hurtful actions that are more minor when considering each incident by itself and you did report this, it is very likely that your principal decided that what happened to you was not serious enough to justify a response.

These ongoing hurtful incidents are causing you just as much, if not more harm, than more serious incidents. But principals may be less likely to recognize this.

The reason for this is that your principal is thinking only in terms of the disciplinary code and the possibility of suspending the other student. Principals do not think they should suspend students for minor incidents.

Further complicating the situation, principals have also been told to stop suspending students. This is because it is well known that suspensions are ineffective in changing bad behavior and many schools suspend black and brown students far more frequently than other students.

Basically, principals are being told to do two different things that are in direct conflict: “Suspend. No, don’t suspend.”

RATIONALIZATIONS

Since the only option principals think they have to respond to a report of bullying is to suspend the hurtful student, they frequently will rationalize that the hurtful behavior just does not meet the statutory definition of “bullying” and, therefore, the school has no responsibility to do anything. Students will also rationalize their hurtful behavior.

So what does it mean to “rationalize?” People like to think of themselves as being “good.” So when they engage in hurtful or inappropriate behavior, they create what are called “rationalizations”—excuses they tell themselves to justify their behavior.

By rationalizing their actions, they can make it appear that their hurtful behavior wasn’t actually hurtful or was justified.

The four common rationalizations are:

- **Spin It.** A more neutral term is used to describe the action as not that bad. “I was just joking around.” “It was a prank.”
- **Deny Personal Responsibility.** This can occur someone else can be blamed—or a reason is provided for not taking action: “Everybody does it.” “It wasn’t my fault.” “This wasn’t bullying, so it is not a violation of the policy.” “This was off-campus. It is not my job to respond.”
- **Deny the Harm.** The harm that was caused is minimized. “What happened wasn’t that bad.” “You are overreacting.”
- **Blame the Other.** Those who are targeted are blamed. “You deserved it.” “You don’t belong here” “If you would stop (describe behavior), this wouldn’t happen.”

If you listen carefully you can hear many use these kinds of rationalizations used both in schools and in society.

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

More recently, it has been recommended to schools that they use Restorative Practices. Restorative Practices are really good. However, in many schools, what is considered to be a Restorative Practice ends up being forced mediation.

Mediation does not work if one student has lots more power than the other. Mediation often ends up with a forced apology, a forced acceptance of that apology, and nothing more.

If a principal is trying to force you to participate in mediation, ask the principal to conduct a search on “misdirections in bullying prevention and intervention.” Advise the principal that you certainly want the student who has been hurtful to you to be involved in a process that will lead this student to accept personal responsibility and take steps to remedy the harm to you.

Tell the principal that you want a written statement from this student that states what this student was doing that was hurtful, why this student thought it was appropriate to be doing this and why, at this time, the student recognizes that this was wrong, that this student will agree to stop all further hurtful acts, and how this student will remedy the harm done to you.

Tell the principal that you would like to have this kind of written statement from all of this student’s known supporters. Further, require that these students be on notice that any future hurtful act directed at you, no matter how minor, will result in a disciplinary consequence.

In addition, if there are any other protective steps that need to be taken, including removing the hurtful student or students from any class they have with you, these should be taken.

WHAT SCHOOLS SHOULD BE DOING

Bullying behavior is socially motivated. Students are engaging in behavior they think will increase their dominance and status in the schools. Schools cannot reduce this hurtful behavior by issuing rules or expectations. They can’t reduce this behavior by giving students they see behaving rewards. They can’t reduce this behavior by punishing the students who they consider have misbehaved in serious way.

By issuing rules and expectations and engaging in punishment, educators are modeling dominance behavior. The students who are most motivated to receive rewards are often the ones who are hurtful to others when out of the sight of school staff. Students who are suspended are frequently the ones who triggered because they are being treated badly by other students or by school staff. The principal rarely asks, “Tell me what is happening to you?”

The only way they can reduce this hurtful behavior is for adults to let go of their thinking that they are “in control.” Schools must fully engage students as important partners in the creation of a positive school environment. Schools must reach out to the consistently kind and compassionate students to be leaders in this effort. They must teach all students the skills necessary to feel empowered and respond effectively in hurtful incidents—as a witness, the one treated badly, and the one being hurtful.

If a serious or chronic hurtful situation becomes known, the principal must conduct a comprehensive investigation to find out what is happening, identify the motivations, and determine whether any involved students need to be better supported by the school. They also must determine whether ways in which the school operates may need to be changed. This may include correcting staff behavior.

To effectively intervene, principals should:

- Hold those who are hurtful and their supporters accountable to accept personal responsibility and take steps to remedy the harm.
- Provide additional support to any involved student who has challenges in interpersonal relationships.
- If specific actions should be taken to better protect a student who is being bullied, identify and implement those protections.
- Correct any aspects of the school environment that appear to be supporting the hurtful situation—including correcting staff behavior, if necessary.

BOTTOM LINE

If you are constantly experiencing others be hurtful to you even if in more minor ways—day after day, week after week—what you are experiencing is obviously causing you harm and is interfering with your right to receive an education and participate in school activities. This is not right.

Be Positively Powerful will provide you with guidance you can use to become better empowered to reduce the times this is occurring and so that you know how you can more effectively respond when someone is hurtful.

There is additional guidance on Embrace Civility in the Digital Age website on how you and your parents can better document what is happening to you and insist that the school take appropriate steps to see that this is stopped.

CHAPTER 2. BULLYING AND YOUR BRAIN

Because you have experienced or are experiencing serious or chronic bullying, it is important that you know how this has or is likely affecting your brain. When you understand how this is happening, you have the ability to gain better control, limit the harm, and take steps to achieve greater happiness and success.

When someone is bullying you, this is considered a form of trauma. You could have experienced a very troubling, intense incident, such as an incident that involves physical harm or threat. These serious incidents are more often recognized as trauma.

You could also experience more chronic, ongoing harm, like never ending nasty comments and acts of exclusion. This is a situation that is called “toxic stress.” These kinds of situations are also a form of trauma.

When someone experiences trauma, this has an impact on their brain. Researchers who study this have identified actual physical changes in the brain and changes in brain chemicals associated with experiencing trauma, which includes being bullied or harassed.

YOUR BRAIN AND TRAUMA OR TOXIC STRESS

Human brains developed with a natural tendency to focus on potential danger and risk. Why? Because this was necessary for survival. Failure to note that a dangerous animal is close by could result in death.

While these days, the odds of your encountering a cougar or bear in your every day walks are low, however, unfortunately, many young people encounter hurtful peers and sometimes adults who are hurtful. These experiences of ongoing psychological abuse also cause significant harm.

Because of the need to ensure your survival, your brain looks for bad news, overreacts to bad things that have happened, and stores memories of those bad things so that you can avoid risk in the future. Your brain pays more attention to the bad than to the good. Memories of bad things stick like “velcro,” while memories of good things slip like on “teflon.”

Experiencing trauma can alter brain functioning in many ways, but four of the most important changes appear to occur in the following areas:

- **Prefrontal Cortex.** The prefrontal cortex or “thinking center” is located near the top of your head, behind your forehead. The prefrontal cortex is where thinking and reasoning occur. When this area of the brain is functioning well, you are able to think clearly, make good decisions, and be aware of yourself and others.
- **Anterior Cingulate Cortex.** The anterior cingulate cortex or “emotional regulation center” is located next to the prefrontal cortex, but is deeper inside the brain. This area is responsible for regulating your emotions. Ideally, the emotional regulation center is working closely with your thinking center. When this connection is working well, you are able to manage difficult thoughts and emotions without being totally overwhelmed.
- **Hippocampus.** The hippocampus or “memory center” is located much deeper inside the brain. The hippocampus helps to translate short term memory into long term memory.
- **Amygdala.** The amygdala or “threat response center” is a tiny structure deep inside your brain. The job of the amygdala is to receive all incoming information, that is everything you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste, and answer one question: “Is this a threat?”

If your brain detects that a dangerous threat may be present, your amygdala takes over and your whole body goes into a fight, flight, or freeze mode. When this happens, adrenalin and cortisol rush through your body and your thinking center shuts down.

This response to a threatening situation is just what we want our brains to do when a threat is present, because this allows our bodies to respond effectively to that threat.

When someone experiences an intense traumatic event, like a soldier on the battle field, this event can cause profound changes in their brain that result in a condition called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. An intense, traumatic bullying incident can also result in this kind of PTSD.

In addition, ongoing chronic difficult situations, sometimes called “toxic stress” can cause PTSD. These chronic difficult situations could include challenging life circumstances or ongoing situations where you are being treated badly or excluded at school.

When you are under constant stress, your brain is constantly pumping more cortisol, the stress hormone, into your system. This causes the more primitive portions of your brain remain activated for longer than they should. This also creates neural pathways that cause you to be more focused on potential threats.

The degree to which individual people are impacted by a traumatic event or toxic stress can vary. If a person has feelings of self-confidence and positive connections with supportive others, it is less likely that the traumatic event or toxic stress will

cause long term damage. Self-confidence is grounded in effective skills in responding to the situation.

When your amygdala or threat response center is over activated you can experience chronic stress, fear, anxiety, and irritation and have a harder time feeling safe, calming down, sleeping, or learning.

You can also be more easily triggered by a situation that you perceive to present a similar threat. Painful memories can become reactivated by different "cues" from the outside world. This might be how someone looks at you or even being in a place where someone was hurtful to you in the past. This can trigger a threat response even when there is no genuine danger at this point in time.

When a current threat or you have a mistaken perception that you might be in danger, you are very likely to trigger. You may respond in a way that is an over reaction—an outburst. You are reacting, not thinking. This is because the chemicals in your brain are preparing you to fight or run from that cougar. Your prefrontal lobe is not functioning. You are not able to think clearly.

Even when you are not facing a present threat, your brain has become filled with neural pathways that are trying to help protect you from future danger. You are always alert to when someone might be hurtful to you. You pay closer attention to who is around you and where you are so that you are prepared to respond. You have become hyper vigilant and are more likely to overreact than remain calm.

This is why it is imperative that the school respond to your complaints that you are being chronically bullied, even though the individual hurtful incidents are not that serious. Ongoing, chronic, persistent minor hurtful acts create a situation where you are experiencing toxic stress and this is causing your body to be constantly pumping cortisol, and this is causing you harm.

The hippocampus regulates the storage and retrieval of memories, as well as differentiating between past and present experiences. The increased stress hormones make it more challenging for the hippocampus to function. Trauma actually reduces the amount of gray matter in the hippocampus.

This causes you to have more challenges in telling the difference between past and present experiences. Situations that might resemble prior hurtful incidents can cause more intense panic and fear—even though the current situation does not present a threat or that much of a threat. The problem is that it is harder for your brain to tell what is actually happening.

This can at times lead you to make mistaken conclusions. Your brain has less of an ability to figure out whether a current situation is actually threatening or to determine how threatening the situation actually is. Your brain may translate a minor hurtful incident as being a more significant incident. You may overreact. This is because the thinking and emotional regulation parts of your brain are under activated, because you have been experiencing toxic stress.

The fact that this happens may cause a problem between you and school staff when you report a current hurtful incident. A school staff member may think that you are overreacting. You may actually be overreacting to this specific incident. This is how your brain is responding because you have been experiencing chronic bullying.

This does not mean that nothing should be done about the current hurtful incident. However, you may also need help from talking with a school counselor in realizing that what you just experienced perhaps was not intended to be hurtful or was a minor incident that should be able to be more easily resolved.

Because your brain is primed to look for the bad and the potential risk, you may also not see the good things that are actually happening to you. If you are always worried about someone saying something hurtful to you, you may very well miss the fact that someone just smiled at you.

Because your emotional regulation center has also been affected, even when you want to calm down and feel better, you just can't. When your thinking center is so busy thinking about how to protect yourself, you are likely to have greater difficulties with concentration and attention. You are less able to think clearly. Because of this, you likely will have a harder time learning and remembering what you have learned.

You may also, at this point, be behaving in ways that contribute to others treating you badly. The way you treat them and the way you respond to them when they are interacting with you may be perceived as though you are the one who does not want to get along. The strategies in Chapter 3 can help you to make positive changes in your behavior to address this.

YOUR BRAIN CAN CHANGE

So can this be changed and, if so, how? Absolutely, positively, without any doubt this can change. You can change your brain. You can create new neural pathways that can help your brain focus on the positive. As you do this, you will achieve greater happiness and better relations with others.

Neuroplasticity is a term that describes the brain's ability to change. Your brain's neural connections can reorganize by forming new connections throughout your life. Neuroplasticity is possible because of the capacity of your brain's neurons and neural networks to change their connections in response to new information or changes in behavior.

Developmental plasticity occurs when the neurons in a young child's brain rapidly sprout branches and form synapses, or connections. As the brain begins to process sensory information, some of these synapses strengthen and others weaken. This creates a network of neural connections.

Unfortunately, if you have experienced trauma, such as bullying, abuse, challenges in your life circumstances, as you are growing, some of these neural connections have formed in a way that keep your brain functioning in a hyper vigilant manner, with a focus on possible threats and a tendency to trigger.

But your brain does not have to remain in this way. Your brain can create new neural pathways that support greater calmness and happiness. By focusing on positive things that are happening in your life, you can change your brain.

The strategies that are provided in the next chapter are the top strategies that have been identified by researchers that have documented effectiveness in helping people who have experienced trauma change their brains so they can achieve greater happiness and success.

One of the key important insights into changing your brain relates to how your brain tends to focus more attention on negative, rather than positive experiences. To rewire your brain to achieve greater happiness, it is necessary to have focused attention on these positive strategies for a period of time.

ASKING FOR HELP

If you have become seriously depressed, it is important to talk with a trusted adult and ask for help from a professional who has expertise in helping young people who have experienced trauma.

Sometimes it is hard to recognize or acknowledge the symptoms of depression in yourself and to take action to get help. There are many ways that you can be helped. But the trusted adults in your life have to know how you are feeling. They might not always be able to figure this out, unless you talk with them.

The following is a list of the symptoms of serious depression. If you think that you are experiencing any of these symptoms, even just some of the time, please reach out to a trusted adult to explain what is happening.

- **Profound sadness.** Feeling hopeless and empty and that no matter how hard you try, you just can't control your negative thoughts.
- **Guilt.** Feeling that that you are worthless and helpless.
- **Irritability.** Feeling angry, anxious, or restless.
- **Trouble thinking clearly.** Difficulties concentrating, making decisions, or remembering details.
- **Physical symptoms.** Aches and pains, headaches, or digestive problems that do not seem to have any other medical cause.
- **Fatigue.** Feeling tired all the time and a loss of energy.

- **Loss of interest.** Not interested in fun activities like hobbies or social interactions.
- **Sleep changes.** Waking up too early in the morning, not being able to fall asleep, or sleeping too much.
- **Appetite changes.** Changes in eating habits like eating too much or too little.
- **Self-harm or risky behavior.** Self-cutting and other forms of self-harm or exceptionally risky behavior that could result in harm.
- **Suicidal thoughts.** Having thoughts of harming or killing yourself. If you're thinking about suicide, you need to get help immediately. The National Suicide Lifeline phone number is 1-800-273-8255. They are available 24/7 with someone you can talk to.

Experts in trauma do not recommend reliance on psychotropic drugs, such as drugs for depression or anxiety, in situations where someone has or is experiencing trauma or toxic stress. The reason for this is that reliance on drugs does not help the person who has or is experiencing trauma or toxic stress address the impact of the trauma—such use just masks the harmful impact.

Additionally, if you are being bullied and this is resulting in these kinds of concerns, the answer should not be that you are placed on drugs that have dangerous side-effects. The answer should be that the school takes the responsibility to stop what is happening to you. There is a Guide on the Embrace Civility in the Digital Age web site to help you and your parent document what is happening and the resulting harm and follow a process that will hopefully result in positive changes.

POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

An important concept in the field of trauma is that of Post Traumatic Growth. Post Traumatic Growth is positive change that results from having experienced more significant challenges. Many of the positive leaders in our society have grown through and as a result of the challenges they faced when younger. This can be you.

Post Traumatic Growth tends to occur in five ways.

- New opportunities, opening up possibilities that were not present before.
- Closer relationships with people and an increased sense of connection with others who suffer.
- An increased sense of one's own personal strengths.
- A greater appreciation for life in general.
- A deepening of spiritual life and commitment to spiritual values.

CHAPTER 3. POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

The objective of these positively powerful strategies is to increase your resilience, positive feelings, and friendships. Resilience is the ability to respond to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. Resilience means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences or the ability to feel happy and be successful after something difficult or bad has happened.

Each of these positively powerful strategies will help your brain to form new neural pathways that will help you to overcome the toxic stress and trauma you have experienced. If you take the time to develop these inner strengths this can help you cope with new challenges, recover from the pain you have experienced, maintain your emotional well-being, and move forward to a happy and successful life.

The overall best way to build your inner strengths is to focus on the positive. The goal is to increase the amount of time that you are focused on the positive things happening in your life, the strengths you are building, and the successes you are having. When you focus on these positive things, your brain is growing new neural pathways that will make lasting changes to support ongoing success and happiness. In other words, by focusing on the good, you are building the connections in your brain to support your positive future.

These Positively Powerful Personal Strategies have been proven by research to work. But they will not work immediately. To work will require constant repetition for a period of time. Only then will you start to see positive results.

To accomplish this repetition, two strategies to keep yourself on path are suggested:

- **Keep a Daily Journal.** Get a hard bound book to keep as your Journal. For many of these suggestions, it will be suggested that you either take specific actions during the day, accomplish certain tasks, or reflect on what happened. Appendix A provides questions for you to respond to every evening in your Journal.
- **Transition Strategy.** Use transition times while in school to remind you to focus on certain positive actions. Some examples: One of the positive strategies is to be mindful of your physical posture—to stand tall. Just before you get up out of your seat to go to a new class, remind yourself that you are going to walk with pride. Another strategy is to practice mindfulness. When you sit down in your next class, remind yourself to take a minute to achieve mindfulness and self-calming.

REMAIN CALM

I will take the time each day to sit quietly, be mindful, and achieve calmness and focus. If things get tough, I will take deep breaths and remind myself to remain calm.

Those who are treated badly often overreact in response. Realize that the goal of anyone who is being hurtful to you is to get a response from you that provides evidence of the effectiveness of their hurtful acts. Further, in many situations, they are trying to get the attention of others. Your reaction to what they have done contributes to their success in getting this attention.

In other words, when you respond in a way that shows your distress, especially if this is evident to any other student who is watching, you are allowing the student who has been hurtful to “win.” Your distressed response is evidence of their success. Your distressed response is their reward. For as long as you are rewarding their hurtful behavior, they are less likely to stop.

As hard as it often is, remaining calm and not reacting when someone is being hurtful is the best way to ensure that this student is not perceived to be successful.

Make yourself a personal goal: “If someone is being hurtful to me, I will not respond in a way that shows that I am upset or distressed.”

However, there is something important you need to know if you have gotten into a pattern of responding with distress when someone has been hurtful and then you stop responding, this very often will cause this person to try harder to get you to respond.

Watch for this happening. Realize that if this happens, this is clear evidence that you are achieving success—although, at the time, it likely will not feel this way. Stick to your goal of not responding and the person will soon realize that their efforts are not achieving the success they desire.

Recall the discussion in Chapter 2, because you have experienced trauma, your brain the neural connections in your brain have been wired to be more likely to trigger. So in order to get to the point where you do not show a response to being treated badly, this will take some practice and effort.

Also recall that the experience of trauma can cause damage to the hippocampus in your brain. Research has shown that the regular practice of mindfulness can increase the gray matter in the hippocampus. (Search: hippocampus, mindfulness.)

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

The practice of mindfulness helps people achieve calmness and focus—to self-regulate. (Search: mindfulness.) The website for the organization Mindful, at <http://mindful.org> defines mindfulness like this:

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

You can achieve greater mindfulness by routinely engaging in the practice of meditation. The following are the simple steps from the mindful.org web site.

1) Take a seat. *Whatever you're sitting on—a chair, a meditation cushion, a park bench—find a spot that gives you a stable, solid seat, not perching or hanging back.*

2) Notice what your legs are doing. *If on a cushion on the floor, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. (If you already do some kind of seated yoga posture, go ahead.) If on a chair, it's good if the bottoms of your feet are touching the floor.*

3) Straighten—but don't stiffen— your upper body. *The spine has natural curvature. Let it be there. Your head and shoulders can comfortably rest on top of your vertebrae.*

4) Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. *Then let your hands drop onto the tops of your legs. With your upper arms at your sides, your hands will land in the right spot. Too far forward will make you hunch. Too far back will make you stiff. You're tuning the strings of your body—not too tight and not too loose.*

5) Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. *You may let your eyelids lower. If you feel the need, you may lower them completely, but it's not necessary to close your eyes when meditating. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.*

6) Be there for a few moments. *Relax. Now get up and go about your day. And if the next thing on the agenda is doing some mindfulness practice by paying attention to your breath or the sensations in your body, you've started off on the right foot—and hands and arms and everything else.*

7) Begin again. *When your posture is established, feel your breath—or some say “follow” it—as it goes out and as it goes in. (Some versions of the practice put more emphasis on the outbreath, and for the inbreath you simply leave a spacious pause.) Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. When you get around to noticing this—in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes—return your attention to the breath. Don't bother judging yourself or obsessing over the content of the thoughts. Come back. You go away, you come back.*

That's it. That's the practice. It's often been said that it's very simple, but it's not necessarily easy. The work is to just keep doing it. Results will accrue.

Consider how long this activity might take—not long at all. Realize that the more you can intentionally practice being mindful, the more effectively you will prepare

your brain so that it does not trigger when someone is hurtful or a challenging situation emerges.

You will find that if you routinely do this, not only will you be better able to retain your calm in a hurtful situation, you will also increase your success in your academic studies. When you achieve mindfulness, this shifts your focus to your prefrontal cortex, which allows you to think more clearly.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGY

A Transitions Strategy to routinely practice mindfulness in school is when you come into a new class and take your seat and take a few minutes to go through the mindfulness steps described above.

When you are at home, you may find some longer mediation audios or videos online. More extended periods of mindfulness or meditation can be helpful. You may also take a yoga class, which is considered “movement mindfulness.”

One fun way to achieve mindfulness is to create and use a “glitter jar.” Conduct a search for this online and you will find instructions for creating one. Then when you come into a class and are going through the mindfulness steps, you could close your eyes and see in your mind’s eye your glitter jar at home settling down.

KNOW HOW TO SELF REGULATE

If someone is hurtful to you or you become upset by something else, it is exceptionally important that you self regulate as rapidly as possible. Frequent practicing of mindfulness will help create neural pathways to allow you to self regulate more effectively. This is why frequent mindfulness practice is so important.

There are seven stages in an escalation:

- **Calm.** You feel calm and relaxed.
- **Trigger.** Something happens that triggers you by making you feel upset.
- **Agitation.** You become increasingly unfocused and upset.
- **Acceleration.** As the situation remains unresolved, your entire focus is now on the upset.
- **Peak.** You become out of control and engage in severe disruptive behavior.
- **De-escalation.** Having triggered and lost control, you now feel confused and embarrassed, but the severity of the peak behavior has passed.
- **Recovery.** The time it takes for you to calm down and regain the ability to resume activities.

The key to effective self regulation is to have a good idea of what triggers you so that when something like this starts to happen you can be mindful of what might happen next. Then, if you start to feel agitated, this is the time to take a specific step to take yourself out of the current situation to get to a place where you can self regulate.

The mindfulness approach set forth above is a good approach also for de-escalation. You may also need to engage in some physical activity. If you start to get agitated or close to a trigger, your amygdala caused your body to release adrenalin. It is important to get this out of your system. Vigorous physical activity is the best way to do this.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGY

If you have a history of triggering, you may need to talk with the school to obtain special permission to remove yourself from any situation when you start to feel agitated.

You may agree to a place where you can go to self regulate. This might be the counselor’s office or perhaps the school library. You should have some kind of a permanent pass, so that no other staff person stops you from going to a place to self regulate.

If you triggered and started to escalate or got out of control, be sure to note this in your Journal. Write out what happened and how you handled the situation. Do a self-evaluation of your effectiveness and decide whether there are things you might want to change in the future. It is most important not to focus on what you did, but what you learned.

KEEP YOUR PERSONAL POWER

I will stand tall and walk with pride. I will not allow what happens to me control how I think about myself or respond.

Bullying is all about gaining dominance over another and taking that person’s personal power. So the very important thing you must learn how to do is not allow anyone to take your personal power.

There are two strategies you can implement that can help you to better keep your own personal power in situations where someone is trying to take it from you. These two approaches are: Stand Tall and Control Your Thinking.

STAND TALL

In both humans and other primates, standing tall with a very open posture indicates high power, whereas hunching over and keeping your arms crossed over your chest reflects lower power. Many times students who are bullied maintain physical posture that demonstrate a lack of presence.

Research conducted by Dr. Cuddy, a professor at Harvard School of Business, has demonstrated that adopting a pose that indicates power—a “power pose”—can result in an increase feelings of confidence. An excellent TedTalk by Dr. Cuddy on Power Posing provides greater insight into this. (Search: Cuddy, power posing, tedtalk.)

Dr. Cuddy did an experiment where she had one group of college students stand with power for a period of time and another group maintain a powerless pose. These students were then interviewed as though they were applying for a job. Their interviews were video-taped. People who knew nothing about what the students did before their interview favored the students who had stood in a powerful position before the job interview.

What this study demonstrated is that holding a “power pose” before a challenging interpersonal relationship task allowed students to increase their effective performance. This showed that it is possible to “fake it” by assuming a power pose, which will then help a person “make it” by feeling more confident.

In addition to intentionally standing tall and walking with pride, it might help if you take a self defense or martial arts class. Both self defense and martial arts classes help you gain better control over how you hold your body.

You likely will never need to use the self defense or martial arts skills in hurtful or dangerous situations, but just knowing that you have such skills and could use them can lead you to stand taller and walk more confidently with pride.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGY

Stand up and hold yourself in a position that you think indicates that you have no power—shoulders hunched, arms crossed. Hold yourself for a minute like this. How does this make you feel?

Now stand up tall. Shoulders back. Head held high. Arms out to your side or over your head in a celebration post, like you just won a race. Hold yourself for a minute like this. How does this make you feel?

Every morning, before you leave the house to go to school, practice power posing. Stand for a few minutes in a position of physical power. Perhaps you can do this while looking at yourself in your mirror. Create some affirmations you can say to yourself as you are standing tall.

A Transitions Strategy is remind yourself to stand tall and walk with pride whenever you step into school or go to another class. Another strategy whenever you are walking in an area where you previously have experienced concerns is to remind yourself to stand tall and walk with pride through this area.

CONTROL YOUR THINKING

You will never be able to control when or if someone might treat you badly. You must know that you have the ability to control your thinking about how you feel about yourself and how you respond if someone is hurtful.

The key understanding of the importance of controlling your thinking is to realize that harmful consequences are not just caused by the bad things that happen to us—but also by our beliefs about those bad things. While we can't control what might happen, we can control our beliefs and our thinking.

This is an old theory. The underlying principles of the ancient Stoic philosophers, as set forth by Epictetus, who in the first century A.D. stated: “Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them.”

Think in terms of an A-B-C-model: A is the adversity or bad event. C is the consequence of how you feel or respond. But A is not solely responsible for C. B is what you think or believe about A, not merely that A happened. Thus, $A + B = C$. While it is not possible to change A, it is possible to be in control of B, and thus have greater control over the resulting C.

Translation: We don't always have control over what happens to us. But we do have the ability to control what we think of ourselves and how we respond.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL PERSONAL STRATEGY

If you are even in a situation where someone has been hurtful or find yourself thinking about a past situation that occurred, tell yourself you will not give any other person the power to make you feel bad about yourself.

If you experienced a situation where someone was hurtful and you controlled your thinking, write about this in your Journal. Write out what happened and how you handled the situation. Do a self-evaluation of your effectiveness and decide whether there are things you might want to change in the future. It is most important not to focus on what you did, but what you learned.

THINK THINGS THROUGH

In any challenging situation, I will think things through to decide what to do.

When you gain interpersonal relationship problem solving skills—that is learn how to think of their own solutions to problems you can become more resilient in figuring out how to respond if someone is hurtful. It is also helpful to focus on goal setting and action planning.

USE EFFECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

There are interrelated skills that are necessary to engage in effective problem solving:

- What is the situation? Step back from the situation and think about what has happened to make sure you have a clear understanding.
- What do I want to accomplish? Determine what you would like to achieve.
- What strategies could I use? Identify several different strategies or actions you could take to resolve a problem or respond to a situation.
- Is each in accord with my values and does each use my strengths? Evaluate the strategies based on your own personal values and whether the strategy uses your strengths (discussed later).
- For each, what might happen? Think about and try to predict or envision what might happen if you followed each of those strategies or actions.
- What is my best choice? After thinking through what might happen as a consequence of each strategy you thought of, then weight the pros and cons to decide which strategy or action would be the best to take.
- How should I proceed? Determine what steps to take to accomplish this strategy or action.
- Did this work? Evaluate your effectiveness, knowing that the first thing you try might not work.
- If not successful, what else could I do? Repeat this process if the first strategy or action did not achieve the desired goal.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL PERSONAL STRATEGY

At the end of the day, in your Journal, think about what happened during the day and whether you faced a situation where you needed to engage in effective problem solving. Write about what happened and how you used this Think Things Through strategy. How did this work? Do a self-evaluation of your effectiveness and decide whether there are things you might want to change in the future. It is most important not to focus on what you did, but what you learned.

ENGAGE IN GOAL SETTING AND ACTION PLANNING

If you can maintain a focus on your future and engage in effective goal setting and action planning this will also help you to achieve greater resilience and the ability to achieve positive outcomes in your life.

Essential steps in effective goal setting are:

- Set goals that are motivating because they have value to you.
- Make sure your goals are specific and doable.
- Put your goals in writing.
- Make sure it will be clear when you have met your goal.

Following the setting of goals, it is necessary to create an action plan. The steps to create an action plan are:

- Think Things Through to identify the action steps necessary.
- Decide what needs to happen when.
- Identify when each action step has been taken.
- Evaluate the effectiveness.
- Revise the action plan as necessary.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL PERSONAL STRATEGY

At the end of the day, in your Journal, identify a goal that you want to achieve the following day. Then outline the actions steps you will follow to achieve this goal. Then the following night, note how well you followed your action plan to achieve this goal.

Once you are achieving success in following your action plan to achieve your daily goal, set some longer term goals. Perhaps you could set a goal to achieve over a week. Then expand this to more longer term goals and action plans.

MAKE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

I will maintain positive connections with good friends and trusted adults.

Positive connections with both good friends and trusted adults are important for your emotional well-being.

MAKE GOOD FRIENDS

Having some good friends can help you feel better about yourself and have more fun in your life. Having some good friends also is very helpful if another student is being hurtful to you. Being able to get support from friends and talking through what has happened to decide what else you might need to do can be exceptionally helpful.

To have good friends, you have to put forth the effort. No one is going to come knocking on your door to ask you to be a friend. It is important to be a good friend. What qualities would you like to have in a friend? Do you act in this way with your friends or others? If you have one or a few friends, you might see if they are interested in expanding your friendship circle.

The biggest barrier to finding new friends is fear of rejection. The best way to deal with the fear is to not place a high priority on achieving closer relations with everyone you interact with. Just focus on getting to know others better and reaching out to be kind to them.

If a closer friendship emerges, this is great. If it turns out that this person is not interested in a closer relationship, that is also fine. You can both get to know each other without any more extensive expectations.

The best way to find new friends is to start with an activity that you are interested in. Is there a club at school you might want to join or a class you might want to take? Is there an after school center you could go to? Can you spend some time in the library and connect with other students there? Get engaged in these activities with the idea of enjoying the activity and possibly making a new friend.

When interacting with people smile and reach out to be kind. Smiling is an invitation to others that you want to interact with them. If this is a challenge for you practice at home.

Make sure that you are not keeping yourself in a bubble. Present yourself as someone who wants to get to know other people. Put away your smart phone at first—but if it seems like you might want to continue your connection be sure to share contact information.

Be the friend that you want to have. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Be available to someone when they need you. Make sure that you are giving as much to the other person as you are getting from them. Be encouraging. Let them know that you believe in them and support them.

Give your friends space. Everybody needs time by themselves. Don't expect too much of their time and attention. Don't be offended if they turn you down because they are busy or need some alone time. If you keep up with your own interests and have a wider circle of friends you can share time with them all depending on the circumstances.

Realize that friendship break-ups happen. This is a normal part of life and does not mean that anything is wrong with either of you.

If you have a friendship break-up do not allow your pain to turn to anger and attack. Let go of your feelings of hurt by forgiving the other person. As hard as it may be, accept that the friendship is over, acknowledge it was meaningful, and take time to grieve your loss. Practice something to say about what happened if someone asks. Keep yourself busy doing things that you enjoy and be open to meet new people or trying a new activity.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL PERSONAL STRATEGY

Conduct a friendship audit. Who are your current friends? What interests do you share? What are the strengths of these friendships? What are any weaknesses? How can you build on these strengths? How can you make new friends? Set a goal and create an action plan based on the prior guidance.

Implement a smiling at people Transitions Strategy. As you are walking from one class to another, make a specific effort to smile at five people as you pass them in the hall.

CONNECT WITH A TRUSTED ADULT

Having trusted adults in your life is also important. Trusted adults are people you can turn to when you have a problem, when something bad is happening to you, or when you have embarrassing or difficult questions.

A trusted adult is someone you can talk with about anything, someone you feel happy being around, and someone who is a good listener. A trusted adult is someone you feel comfortable talking with about something that makes you feel uncomfortable, or confused or a problem you might be having. A trusted adult is someone you believe would try to help you solve a problem situation.

Trusted adults may include your parents, a teacher, a coach or youth organization leader, a faith leader, or others. It is generally best to be able to identify a number of trusted adults who you could talk to in different situations.

Sometimes, adults will take the responsibility to reach out to young people to offer to support them. However, to find some helpful trusted adults, it is also probably necessary that you take the steps to reach out. Consider this a form of a quest—a quest to find some adults, even just one adult, who you can really trust to help you.

- A trusted adult should make you feel safe and be someone you think you could share more serious concerns with.
- A trusted adult should be a good listener—someone who will listen to your opinions and ideas, seek to understand your perspective by asking questions, and offer validation for your feelings, rather than telling you to stop feeling the way that you do.
- A trusted adult should help you Thing Things Through and not immediately jump to their conclusion about what you should do.

Before you decide to share information that is more sensitive with an adult you are not yet sure you can trust, try having a conversation about something that is not very important or personal. After this conversation, ask yourself: Does this adult listen to me? Does this adult accept my opinions?

After this, then imagine yourself revealing something difficult or embarrassing to this adult. How would you feel sharing this? Do you think this adult listen to you and try to help you? Would this adult help and support you in Thinking Things Through—or would this adult try to take over?

If you start to share more sensitive information with an adult you are not yet sure you can trust, do so slowly and be very watchful for warning signs. Is this person listening to me with an open perspective? Or are there signs that the person might be wrongly judging me—a questioning look, a defensive body posture, statements that include "should," or a disapproving tone?

If any of these warning signs appear, stop explaining the situation, wait for this person to make one statement of "what you should do," thank this person, and change the subject or find a reason to leave.

When you do find a trusted adult, be sure to reach out when things get tough. Also share the good news. If a trusted adult has been helpful to you, be sure to thank this person. A thank you note would be gratefully received.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL PERSONAL STRATEGY

Conduct a trusted adult audit. Do you have a sufficient number of adults in your life who you trust that you can talk to about serious concerns? If not, go on a quest to find one or several trusted adults. Set a goal and create an action plan based on the prior guidance.

REACH OUT TO BE KIND

I will daily reach out to be kind to others because I know this will make them and me feel happier.

One of the best ways you can both reduce the potential of being treated badly and improve your own happiness is by intentionally reaching out to be kind to others many times a day. Research has documented many positive benefits of being kind to others. Being kind to others:

- Can significantly increase your happiness and decrease your feelings of separation from others.
- Can help you feel stronger, more energetic, calmer, less depressed, and increases your feelings of self-worth.
- Makes you feel as good as if you were one someone was kind to.
- Encourages others people to be kind.

Young people who demonstrate greater compassion for others and regularly reach out to be kind have more valuable friends and are more accepted by their peers

than those who do not. This insight provides a powerful, and easy to implement approach to increase positive relationships and friendships.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGY

One of the best things you could do to reduce the potential that other students will be hurtful to you is to set of goal of reaching out to be kind to others at least five or more times a day. It is very important that you are intentional about this.

Here is a fun strategy: Get five bright copper pennies and begin the day with those pennies in your left pocket. When you intentionally reach out to be kind to someone, transfer one of those pennies over to your right pocket. When you find that you transfer five pennies by lunch time, you can increase to 10. At the end of the day, in your Journal, write down what you accomplished:

- Who did you reach out to be kind to? (Describe the person if you do not know their name.)
- What did you do to be kind?
- How did this person respond?
- How did you feel?

When you have gotten into the practice of being intentionally kind several times a day and feel more effective in doing so, now is the time to “up your game.”

Note other students in your school who are more often excluded or treated badly. Intentionally reach out to be kind to these students.

Make note of the friends of any student who has been hurtful to you. Whenever you have the opportunity to do so, reach out to be kind to one of these friends. What this has the potential of doing is causing this friend to tell their friend to stop being hurtful. Keep a special note of the times that you are able to do this.

If someone has been hurtful to you and for right now is not being hurtful, reach out to be kind to this person. This does not have to be anything significant. Just say a friendly “hello,” or compliment this person on an answer given in class.

By the way, in the future when you get a job, you will find that this daily practice of reaching out to be kind to others will be very helpful in achieving success in the workplace.

USE YOUR STRENGTHS

I know that I have many positive strengths. I will use my personal strengths every day and when things get tough. I will seek to build new strengths.

Drs. Peterson and Seligman led a team of 55 distinguished social scientists to identify and classify the core capacities that lead to goodness in human beings across cultures, nations, and beliefs. These are called character strengths.

The VIA Institute on Character has a free character strengths Inventory on its web site that you can complete (at <http://viacharacter.org>). A brief version of this, developed with their permission, is provided as Appendix B.

Everyone has different character strengths. This survey will help you to identify your top character strengths.

One experiment the researchers did with this survey was to provide participants in a study with insight into their top five character strengths. The participants were then were asked to use one of their personal strengths in a new and different way each day. This strategy was found to have excellent success in generating happiness and decreasing depression.

On the VIA Institute for Character web site there is guidance on strategies you can use to build every one of these character strengths.

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

1. *Wisdom and Knowledge—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.*
 - *Creativity [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.*
 - *Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.*
 - *Judgment [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.*
 - *Love of Learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematic ally to what one knows.*

- *Perspective [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.*
2. *Courage—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.*
- *Bravery [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.*
 - *Perseverance [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks.*
 - *Honesty [authenticity, integrity]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions.*
 - *Zest [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.*
3. *Humanity—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others.*
- *Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.*
 - *Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.*
 - *Social Intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.*
4. *Justice—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.*
- *Teamwork [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share.*
 - *Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.*
 - *Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the time maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.*
5. *Temperance—Strengths that protect against excess.*
- *Forgiveness: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.*

- *Humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.*
 - *Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.*
 - *Self-Regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions.*
6. *Transcendence—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.*
- *Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.*
 - *Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.*
 - *Hope [optimism, future - mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.*
 - *Humor [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.*
 - *Spirituality [faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.*

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGY

Every day you pick a different character strength to work on. At the end of the day write a report on the character strength you used and how this worked in your Journal.

Knowing your character strengths can also support effective Problem Solving. When thinking about possible strategies to respond to a more challenging situation it is important to identify strategies that use one of your personal character strengths. In your Journal when you report on a time when you Thought Things Through, be sure to identify which character strength you decided to use.

Write down a way that you could respond immediately in situations where someone has been hurtful, using each of your top strengths. Create at least five possible responses, each using a different one of your Strengths. Practice these immediate responses that use your Strengths.

FOCUS ON THE GOOD

I will focus on the good things that are happening to me and in my life. I will be thankful and express my gratitude.

The more you can maintain positive feelings about yourself, the less likely you will act in ways that demonstrates a perceived weakness that could lead to your being targeted. Also, the less likely you will be to think badly about yourself if someone is hurtful. The best way to maintain positive feelings is to focus on positive experiences and be grateful for those experiences.

Remember in the discussion in Chapter 2 about how your brain functions that our brain is wired to focus more on negative experiences than positive ones. When you intentionally seek to shift your focus, you can rewire your brain to be more happy. Intentionally and frequently focusing on the good can build neural pathways to support greater happiness.

Please take the time to watch a TedTalk by Dr. Rick Hanson called Hardwiring Happiness. (Search: hanson, hardwiring happiness, tedtalk.) The approach Dr. Hanson recommends to use a focus on positive experiences to change your brain. Dr. Hanson calls this approach the HEAL method—Have, Enrich, Absorb, Link.

- **Step 1. Have a Good Experience.** Either notice a positive experience that is happening to you or create a positive experience for yourself.
- **Step 2. Enrich It.** Keep thinking about this experience for at least 10 seconds or longer. Feel the positive experience in your body. Enjoy it. Think about how wonderful this is. Really take the time to feel good.
- **Step 3. Absorb It.** Think about this positive experience as being absorbed by you—traveling deep into your mind and warming your heart. Bring the experience deeply into your being.
- **Step 4. Link Positive and Negative Material Together.** This step is considered optional by Dr. Hanson. The idea is to strongly feel this positive experience, briefly bring to mind a negative thought, and then let go of the negative thought and just focus on the positive experience. If you try this, make sure not to let the negative thinking take over. Simply hold the positive, then briefly, just for a second, reflect on the negative, and then return to the positive.

Your goal should be to focus on five positive experiences for every negative experience or thought. This means that every time you experience a negative incident or think about a negative incident, you should shift your focus to five positive things.

BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL PERSONAL STRATEGY

To translate this into action while you are at school, if you experience someone being hurtful to you, as soon as you can pull out a notebook and a pen and write down five recent positive experiences or things you are grateful for. For each of these positive experiences you write down take a brief moment to Enrich It and Absorb It. Then, if you find yourself thinking about the negative incident again, look at what you wrote and shift to positive thinking.

An additional strategy may also have a positive impact. During the times when you are enriching and absorbing a positive experience shift your eyes so that you are looking to the right and left, back and forth, several times. This can help to make sure that this positive experience is embedded into both sides of your brain.

In the evening, when you are writing in your Journal, be sure to write down five positive things that happened to you during the day. The act of writing itself provides another way to enrich and absorb the positive experiences.

Lastly, you may consider writing a gratitude letter or thank you note to someone to whom you are grateful.

CHAPTER 4. A POSITIVELY POWERFUL RESPONSE

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

When someone is hurtful to you, you can combine the use of the strategies set forth in Chapter 3 to respond in a positively powerful way. As noted before, think of bullying in the context of gaming. A student who is engaging in bullying is trying to obtain “power points” from you. Do your best to not allow this to occur.

If you respond to being treated badly in a way that demonstrates the perception that you are upset or that this has bothered you by looking sad, having an angry outburst, or retaliating this is the way you lose “power points” to another. When you are being treated badly, it is exceptionally important to remain calm, stand tall, and keep your personal power—no matter how upset you feel inside.

The reason it is suggested that you practice the strategies set forth in Chapter 3 on a daily basis, reminding yourself to do these during Transitions and keeping a Journal, is so that your brain can form new neural pathways that will increase your effectiveness in responding in situations when someone is hurtful to you.

The key thing to remember if someone is hurtful is that if they go low, you go positively powerful. Always remember: When someone is hurtful to you, they reveal who they are, not who you are.

Also, based on solid research, realize that the vast majority of students do not like to see someone being hurtful and do not admire this student or this student’s supporter. Students truly admire those who are kind, compassionate, and inclusive. The problem is that in many schools, students do not know this and are worried that the student being hurtful is too powerful and could target them,

Based on the research, if someone is hurtful to you in front of a group of ten students who are not the hurtful student’s friends, eight students of those students are thinking, “I really do not like to see this. I do not admire that student who is being hurtful.”

But these students also are likely thinking, “But that hurtful student is really powerful. If I say something, I could be that student’s next target. I should mind my own business.” If someone is hurtful to you, look around and realize that there are a lot of supporters, who are unfortunately also fearful of the student who is being hurtful.

Key points to support a Positively Powerful immediate response:

- **Remain Calm and Keep Your Personal Power.** Do not display any anger or show that you are distressed because doing this gives away your power.
- **Start a Positivity Ripple.** As soon as possible, shift to a Focus on the Good by following the recommended Positivity Ripple steps.
- **Stop, Own It, and Fix It.** Stop yourself from being hurtful and if you were, take steps to remedy the harm. Do not engage in retaliation. This will only further and increase the Cycle of Hurt. (Note, I am not suggesting you have been hurtful. This guidance is just in case you have been.)
- **Assert Yourself with Care.** In some situations, it may be appropriate for you to directly approach the student being hurtful. It is best to do this through private messaging. If this student responds in a hurtful manner, you will now have permanent evidence of what is happening.

REMAIN CALM AND STAND TALL

Here is the combined process to respond in a positively powerful way if someone is hurtful that avoids showing that you are angry or upset:

- **Remain Calm and Keep your Personal Power.** Take deep breaths to self-regulate. Stand Tall. Control Your Thinking by thinking to yourself, “I am worthy. I deserve respect. I choose not to give that person the power to make me feel bad. That person is showing who they are, not who I am.”
 - Envision a white bubble of protective light all around you, blocking any negative energy from getting through to you.
 - Remember that most of the other students who are watching this do not admire the person being hurtful. They want to see you succeed.
- **Think Things Through.** Decide whether you can or should engage in any verbal response at this time. Only respond to this person if you are sure that you can remain calm.
 - **Use Your Strengths.** If you respond verbally—keep it short and powerful—using one of your Character Strengths in a positive way. Then, hold your head high and walk away with pride.
 - If you choose to simply ignore this person, hold your head high and walk away with pride. If you are in a place where you cannot leave, then ignore and pull out a book. Or start a conversation with another person.
 - If you can, walk to a place where there is a school staff member who would be in a position to witness continuing harm. But do not talk to that staff

member in front of other students because this may be interpreted as “tattling.”

- If you are online—capture the post and report abuse to the site. Then, keep your hands off the keyboard until you are certain you have self regulated and thought things through. Then, follow the Positivity Ripple steps below.
- **Make a Positive Connection.** As soon as possible connect with a friend or trusted adult to describe what happened, receive support, and Think Things Through about what additional response might be necessary at this time.
- **Document the incident.** If you have been having ongoing problems with this other student being hurtful, document in writing what happened.
- **Focus on the Good.** Then immediately write down five positive things you are grateful for so that writing about this incident does not deepen your focus on the negative.

START A POSITIVITY RIPPLE

Remember the key to positivity through a Focus on Good. A focus on five positive experiences can help to undo the harm of one negative experience. If you “go low” after a negative incident, you lose power to the person who was hurtful. But if you go positively powerful, you will gain power.

Always think to yourself: **“If they go low, I will go positively powerful.”**

This is a story of a real incident: A high school student, Caitlin Prater-Haacke, had been sent a message on Facebook telling her to kill herself. Instead of replying to the message, she took out a marker and some Post-It Notes—lots of Post It Notes. The next day she posted positive messages on every locker in her school. (Search: cyberbullying, positive post it notes, caitlin. Be sure to watch her TedTalk video.)

Remember, think in terms of personal “power games.” Who won the “power game?” Who got the most “power points?”

You can use a similar strategy. You can create a Positivity Ripple. You can also bring in your friends to make this an even more positively powerful ripple.

Think of when you toss a small stone into water. What happens? The impact of the stone sends ripples across the surface of the water. These ripples go far beyond where the stone entered. Now envision tossing a handful of small stones into the water. How many ripples will this create?

The way you respond if someone is hurtful can create a positive ripple effect that can create positive change. When you realize that you have this positivity rippling power this can increase the power of your response. You can also inspire positivity in other—because one good act inspires countless others—and the results of that positivity will ripple back to you.

These are the steps to go positively powerful in response to someone being hurtful to you by starting a Positivity Ripple.

- **Keep Your Personal Power** As soon as possible, find and post a meme about being strong and courageous on all of your social media pages. Then, find and post a meme about the value of kindness or gratitude.
- **Reach Out to be Kind.** Next message five or more of your best friends. Send them a kindness, appreciation, or gratitude positivity meme. Write this to them: "I am starting a Positivity Ripple. Please write to five of your best friends and tell them what you appreciate about them. What I appreciate about you is ... Let's see how big of a Positivity Ripple we can create."

This Positivity Ripple can also be done in person or using Post It Notes. However, likely it is most powerful to do this on social media because then many others will see this. Stand tall and feel your personal power and realize that you can do this!

Look for memes you can share on Facebook or Instagram.

STOP, OWN IT, AND FIX IT

Sometimes students are hurtful to you because you have been hurtful to them—or because they perceive that you were hurtful to them even though you did not intend to be hurtful. Sometimes another student is being hurtful to you because your relationship has just broken up.

(Note, in including this section, I am not suggesting you have been hurtful. This is just in case you have been. These are also ideas you could share with a friend if that friend is being hurtful.)

STOP—FOCUS ON YOUR PERSONAL VALUES

Think through the reasons why you would not want to be hurtful to another. These reasons reflect your personal values. These reasons might include:

- How I would feel if someone did this to me or to someone I care about.
- How I would feel about myself because of how this reflects on me.
- It is against my values to be hurtful to others.
- How I would make the other student feel.
- What my mom, dad, or other adult whose opinion I value would think.
- What my friends would think.
- How being hurtful might damage my reputation.
- That I might get into trouble.

All of these reasons are good reasons. Just like we all have different character strengths, we all also have different reasons why we would not be hurtful to others.

STOP—DO NOT ENGAGE IN RETALIATION

Now take this thinking a bit further. Why would you choose not to be hurtful to someone who has been hurtful to you? Are these reasons still valid? Do these reasons still reflect your personal values? If you know that people can change and that you have the power to respond in a positive manner, rather than doing something that will reflect badly on you, aren't these reasons still very valid?

A Cycle of Hurt starts with a hurtful act, or a student's perspective that someone has been hurtful, which leads that student to engage in retaliation, which is followed by more retaliation by the other student, and on and on this goes with everyone ending up feeling bad.

Obviously, retaliating against someone who has been hurtful—whether this is a person, a group, a political leader, or a country—is something that happens quite frequently in our society.

Is this what you like to see? Many times young adults are sent to war—to risk their lives, be wounded, be killed—because the leaders of one country are engaging in retaliation against another country. Is this how you want to see our global society function?

Mahatma Gandhi tried to warn about this. "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind". Think also of the leadership of Nelson Mandela. He showed the world that revenge was not the answer to years of injustice. He led his country on a path of forgiveness and unification. He said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies."

Think about what might happen in school. The danger for anyone who is being bullied in retaliating is that they often are the ones who end up getting into trouble.

Here is how this happens: Very often those who are being hurtful, especially those who are seeking social dominance, engage in subtle hurtful acts that are not obvious to school staff. The pain of experiencing these hurtful acts builds up until the targeted student triggers and engages in retaliation. This act of retaliation is often done with greater anger and is far more visible. So this student ends up in the principal's office. The explanation "They have been hurtful to me" is rarely effective. The student who is being bullied ends up being the one who gets suspended.

This of this scenario in terms of a "power game." Those being hurtful have been exceptionally successful. Not only have they demonstrated their power over this student, they have gotten this student into trouble—without getting into trouble themselves.

This is why it is so important to regularly practice all of the strategies in Chapter 3. These strategies will reduce the potential that you might trigger.

If someone you feel like retaliating, this is a strategy to use to avoid doing so:

- **Remain Calm and Focus on the Good.** Engage in specific steps to self regulate so you can remain calm. Focus on five good things to help shift you to thinking in a more positive manner.
- **Keep Your Personal Power.** Remember to keep your personal power by choosing not to let another person control how you feel about yourself or act.
- **Think Things Through.** Know that people can change and just because someone was hurtful does not mean they will continue to be hurtful. Know that you can respond in a powerfully positive manner.
- **Make Positive Connections.** Connect with a friend or a trusted adult to Think Things Through to find a positive way to respond that avoids engaging in retaliation—like starting a Positivity Ripple.

OWN IT AND FIX IT

If you have made a mistake and were hurtful to someone else, realize that you can change, make better choices, and make things better for one you were hurtful to. This will also reduce the potential that this person will be hurtful back.

These are the steps you can take if you have made a mistake and were hurtful to Own It and Fix It:

- **Keep Calm.** Self regulate. Walk away and calm yourself.
- **Think Things Through.** Think about what you did and what you were trying to accomplish. Think about the excuses or rationalizations you made for your behavior. Dig deeper and think about what is going on inside of you that led you to treat someone badly and whether what you did fits with the character of who you are and the values you want to express.
- **Own It.** Build Your Strengths by acknowledging that what you did was wrong.
- **Fix It.** Think Things Through to decide how to best take steps to make things right to the person you treated badly. If things are not right for you, Make a Positive Connection with a trusted adult to ask for help.

Thinking about this can also be something you do on a daily basis in your Journal. At the end of the day think about any time when the way you treated another might have not been in accord with your values.

If you were treated badly, did you avoid engaging in retaliation? If you were hurtful, did you accept personal responsibility and take steps to make things right? Are there any more actions you need to take to remedy the harm and ensure positive relationships? Establish a Goal of doing this and outline your Action Steps.

ASSERT YOURSELF WITH CARE

Think Things Through and discuss the following approach with a trusted adult.

In many situations, it is likely best if you assert yourself in communications with the student who is being hurtful via private messaging, rather than in person. There are several reasons for this:

- When using digital media differences in personal power are less significant.
- You can take the time to write a message carefully and you can take time before you respond to what was written back to you. This way, you can make sure your communications are respectful and balanced.
- You can communicate to this student privately, without this student's supportive friends being around.
- If this student responds in a negative manner, you are not yet again in a public situation with someone saying disparaging things against you.
- You can gain effective evidence, because digital communications can be preserved.

When you use any form of digital media, realize this can be permanently retained. Be sure that your communications are respectful and balanced.

It may be possible to gain digital evidence to support your claim that this person is being hurtful to you. Especially if this student is one who school staff do not think causes problems, this can be very helpful. This approach will likely be most helpful in situations where there has been a relatively significant incident involving a student who is being hurtful to achieve social dominance. .

Here is how to assert yourself effectively using private messaging:

Start your message like this: "I would ask that you stop treating me in the way you are. Today you (describe what happened in detail). Can you tell me why you think it is okay to treat me like this?"

If this student does not correct what you have said about what happened, then you have obtained solid evidence of what really happened. This will avoid the "they said—you said" argument.

When this string of messages gets into the hands of the principal, if the hurtful student denies engaging in the hurtful behavior, you have evidence from this student's lack of correction of what you said happened to document that this is actually what happened.

If this student made a mistake and did not intend to be hurtful or was sorry afterwards, asking why they thought this was okay could lead this student to decide to make things right.

If this student intends to continue to be hurtful, you will likely get an additional harmful message back. Prepare yourself for this and do not overreact. This also will be very helpful evidence to share with the principal. Remember that it is essential your communications remain respectful.

End these communications by saying, “Well, I just thought I would try to get this to stop.” If the person continues to send hurtful messages do not respond. But definitely save the messages.

In addition, after these communications, keep watch for this student’s public posts. If this student posts anything about you after this, be sure to capture this also.

INSIST THE SCHOOL ADDRESS CONCERNS

Unfortunately, many times when students report to the school that they are being treated badly, the school response does not effectively resolve the situation—or the school response makes things worse. What the school should do if you are being seriously treated badly or this is occurring to you in an ongoing manner is conduct a comprehensive investigation and then take steps that are reasonably calculated to:

- Stop the hurtful behavior directed at you and prevent retaliation.
- Ensure that you are protected and provide you with assistance in recovering from the harm that has been done to you.
- Correct any aspects of the school environment that may be contributing to the situation, which may include correcting staff who are treating you in a disrespectful manner or ignoring how you are being treated by students.
- Engage in ongoing monitoring to make sure that the hurtful way you are being treated has stopped.

One challenge is that principals have been told to investigate to determine whether the incident is sufficiently serious and suspend any student who has been seriously aggressive. This causes them to ignore the ongoing situations that involve less serious aggressive behavior—but are causing significant emotional harm to you.

To better insist that the school take your concerns seriously will require that you effectively document all of the hurtful incidents that are happening. Your documentation should include detailed information--who, where, what actions, student witnesses, staff witness, how staff witness responded. This documentation should also include how these hurtful acts are negatively impacting you.

A separate Guide is available on the Embrace Civility in the Digital Age website entitled *How to Document Bullying or Harassment and Insist on a Positive Response by the School*. This Guide provides guidance for how you and your parent can develop this documentation and insist the school address this concern.

CHAPTER 5. BE A LEADER FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

This Chapter provides insight into strategies you could promote within your school to encourage positive change. The strategies that are suggested are in accord with what has been suggested to schools in a student leadership program I developed called *Embrace Civility*. You can find out more about this program on my website. In this book, I am providing suggestions that can be implemented in your school without purchasing my program.

This Chapter also provides strategies you can use to be a Helpful Ally. Helpful Allies are those who step in to help when they witness a hurtful situation. Because you know what it feels like to be treated badly and are now becoming empowered, you can become a very effective Helpful Ally.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP TO EMBRACE CIVILITY

What I tell school leaders in my book *Engage Students to Embrace Civility* is that the only way they will be able to create a positive school climate where all students feel welcome is to fully engage students in the process. I strongly encourage schools to establish a diverse student leadership team to take on the responsibility for fostering a positive school climate and positive relations.

Embrace Civility uses a positive social norms approach where students learn about the positive values and norms of the other students. *Embrace Civility* also teaches students important skills to foster positive relations and to effectively respond in situations where someone is being hurtful—as a witness, the one targeted, or the one who has been hurtful.

These are extension activities that could be implemented by a group of students even without my program. You could share these ideas with other students to see if there is an interest in starting some kind of a student-led effort to improve relations at your school.

- **Welcome to School Display.** Create a display at the entrance of the school that promotes the concepts of kindness and inclusion of all students.
- **Random Acts of Kindness Campaign.** Launch a campaign to encourage all students to engage in acts of kindness. The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation site has lots of activities to promote kindness. (Search: random

acts of kindness foundation. Also conducting a search on “kindness, schools” will yield additional ideas.)

- **Posters, Screen Savers, or Bookmarks.** Hold a poster, screen-saver, or bookmark contest for the entire student body.
- **T-shirt.** Host a competition for a t-shirt design for students to promote their commitment to kindness and inclusion.
- **Quote Competition.** Encourage students to find and submit a quote by a famous person that relates to kindness and inclusion. The quotes could be posted in categories. Students could vote on their favorite quotes. These quotes could be turned into posters.
- **Daily or Weekly Announcements.** Make a daily or weekly public school announcement related to kindness and inclusion.
 - Here is an example of what a member of the student leadership team could say: “Hi. I am ___ a member of the student leadership team promoting kindness and inclusion. Here is your quote of the day: “If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Please take a moment today to reach out to be kind or help someone decide on a positive path. And remember to say thank you to someone who reaches out to be kind to you. We are having a meeting of the student leadership team ___. Remember, membership on this team is open to anyone who makes a commitment to be kind and respectful and who wants to help our school community live by these values.”
- **School-wide Kindness Events.** Participate in kindness events that are promoted by other organizations.
 - **Beyond Differences.** A great organization, Beyond Differences, promotes a number of wonderful activities to help students promote social inclusion. (Search: Beyond Differences.) These are events that take place on one day and include No One Eats Alone, Know Your Classmates, and Call It Out. There is total compatibility between Embrace Civility and the Beyond Differences activities.
 - **GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) No Name Calling Week.** GLSEN hosts a No Name Calling Week generally mid-school year. (D+Search: GLSEN, no name calling.) Their web site has excellent resources to support this effort.
- **Mindful Space or Mindful Movement.** Set up a space in the school where students can go to practice mindfulness. Set up a mindful movement yoga program for students to participate in during lunch or before school.
- **Wall of Thanks.** Create a bulletin board area in the school as a Wall of Thanks. Provide ample “sticky notes” nearby and pens. Encourage everyone in the

school community—students, staff, and parents—to regularly write personal messages of gratitude to others or for anything they are personally thankful for.

- To expand on this activity, members of the Student Leadership Team could pick out a few messages each day to read over the intercom in the morning. Instruct them to specifically pick out messages of gratitude sent to students who are known to have greater challenges.
- **Celebrating and Building Strengths.** Encourage your school to have students complete the VIA Character Strengths survey discussed in Chapter 3. The site contains many activities and approaches that can be used to promote the different strengths. Lead a campaign to focus on one character strength a week.
- **Community Service Day.** Set up one afternoon a month where students go into the community to provide service.
- **Flash Dance.** Create a flash dance. Look for videos on this. (Search: anti bullying flash mob.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are a number of excellent sites online that have wonderful programs, or resources that could be integrated into school activities. Among the best are:

- **Greater Good Science Center.** The Greater Good Science Center has excellent resources on supporting a meaningful happy life. (Search: greater good science.) They also have a news letter. Sign up to receive this news letter and create activities related to the insight that is provided.
- **Teaching Tolerance Resources.** Southern Poverty Law Clinic’s excellent Teaching Tolerance program has a wealth insight and resources for activities that can easily be student led. (Search: teaching tolerance.) The resources on this site can be used to expand on the Embrace Civility lessons in older grades.
- **One and All.** One and All is a site established by Harvard Graduate School of Education that focuses on Strategies to Protect Students, Reject Bullying, and Build Communities Where Everyone Thrives. (Search: harvard, one and all.)

STEPPING IN TO HELP

While it is true that some students think that those who engage in bullying are “cool” and “popular” what you need to understand is that the vast majority of students do not personally like to see students being hurtful to others. This is what students who participated in a survey I conducted reported.

Students admire those who:

- Are respectful and kind to others.

- Reach out to help someone who has been treated badly.
- Try to include someone who has been excluded.
- Tell someone being hurtful to stop.
- Help someone being treated badly leave the situation.
- Help someone who was hurtful make things right.
- Help other students resolve an argument or conflict.
- Were treated badly, but stood tall and responded in a positive way.
- Were hurtful, but stopped and made things right.
- Make sure they have consent.
- End a relationship or friendship without “drama” or attack.
- Tell an adult if a situation is serious or has not stopped.

Students do not admire those who:

- Think it is “cool” to put others down.
- Say disrespectful and hurtful things to others.
- Laugh when seeing someone being treated badly.
- Create “drama” to get attention.
- Encourage students to exclude those they consider “different.”
- Encourage and support someone who is being hurtful.
- Ignore hurtful situations involving others.

Students truly admire those who step in to help if they witness a hurtful situation. These are the words students use to describe those who step in to help: Brave. Awesome. Amazing. Nice. Confident. Strong. Kind. Friend. Responsible. Caring. Respectful. Hero. Leader. Courageous. Smart. Admirable.

When other students do step in to help, they are often successful in getting the hurtful situations to stop. Essentially, when you witness bullying or other hurtful behavior, you have a choice. You can be a:

- **Hurtful Participant.** Who joins in or supports the harm.
- **Passive Observer.** Who ignores what is happening or walks away.
- **Helpful Ally.** Who steps in to help.

Helpful Allies can help in a variety of ways:

- **Reach Out.** Reach out to be kind to the person being hurt or left out and help friends resolve conflict.
- **Say, “Stop.”** Publicly or privately tell the person being hurtful to stop.
- **Report Concerns.** Tell an adult who can help.

REACH OUT

WHY HELP

If you see someone being treated badly, but are afraid to reach out to help, you could think of this:

- How I would feel if someone treated me badly and no one reached out to me?
- How I would feel about myself if I could have reached out to help, but didn't?

What are some other reasons why you would want to reach out to help?

WAYS TO REACH OUT TO BE KIND

These are some general ways you could reach out to help:

- Tell them that you did not like what happened and you want to help.
- Post a friendly note on their locker.
- Text them to make sure they are okay.
- Smile and say, “hi” when you see them.
- Ask them to join you for lunch.
- Offer to go with them to report to an adult.
- Work with them on a team project.

What are some other ways you could reach out to be kind?

STEP IN TO HELP IN HURTFUL SITUATIONS

If you see someone being treated badly, this is what you could do:

- Determine whether it is safe for you to do anything. If it is not safe for you to do anything, immediately report this to someone who can help.
- Take a deep breath and stand tall.
- Ignore the one being hurtful. Go up to the one being treated badly and start a conversation on something totally unrelated to the hurtful situation.

- Continue to ignore the one who is being hurtful and encourage the one who was being treated badly to walk away with you.
- When you are in a place to talk, help this person Think Things Through to determine what else to do.

HELP OTHERS RESOLVE CONFLICT

If you have some friends who are engaged in a conflict, you can help them to resolve this by helping them Think Things Through. Here is a process:

- Make sure both are calm.
- Ask each to explain what happened and how this made them feel.
- Reflect back to them saying: “You are feeling _, because _.”
- Make sure both understand the other. Ask: “What do you understand about this situation?”
- Ask them to Think Things Through to find solutions that would allow them both to be happy.
- Help them agree what they will try first and if this does not work, what they will try next.
- Ask them to “shake hands” on their agreement.
- Check back later to see if things are okay.

HELP A FRIEND IN DIFFICULT TIMES

If a friend is going through difficult times, these are some ways you can help:

- Keep in frequent contact.
- Take the time to listen with attention and without judgement.
- Invite your friend to participate in fun activities.
- Help your friend to Think Things Through to decide what to do.
- Help your friend to focus on their future and the good things that are happening.
- Tell your friend they are not alone, that help is available, and that things will get better.
- Help your friend reach out to a trusted adult.

SAY “STOP”

IMPORTANT SAFETY GUIDELINES

These are important steps to keep yourself safe if you are telling someone who is being hurtful to stop.

- Keep yourself safe.
- Work with others as a team.
- Strive not to increase attention to the one being hurtful.
- Don’t get into an argument.
- Don’t retaliate.
- If it is not safe, tell an adult who can help.

WAYS TO SAY “STOP”

These are some ways you could say “stop:”

- “How would you feel if someone did that to you?”
- “This really isn’t funny.”
- “We don’t do stuff like that here.”
- “Why are you doing this?”
- “Please walk away and chill out.”
- “Please use another word.”

What are some other ways you could say “stop?”

HELP A HURTFUL FRIEND STOP, OWN IT, AND FIX IT

You can help a hurtful friend accept personal responsibility and stop being hurtful by asking:

- How would you feel if someone did that to you or to me?
- Why do you think what you are doing is okay?
- What do you think others think about what you said or did?
- Are you willing to own it?
- How can you fix it?

You can encourage your friend to accept personal responsibility and to make things right. You can encourage your friend to Think Things Through to decide how to make things right.

If your friend refuses to Stop, Own It, and Fix It, you will probably want to ask yourself whether your friend's values are in accord with your own and how others might think of you if it appears you support your friend in being hurtful.

REPORT CONCERNS

WHEN TO REPORT CONCERNS

These are the kinds of concerns that should be reported to a trusted adult:

- Someone is struggling to deal with a big loss or significant challenge.
- Someone is feeling very hopeless and helpless. is in significant emotional pain, Is anxious or unusually angry
- Someone is talking about wanting to hurt themselves or others.
- You see that a others are being are being seriously hurtful in person or on social media.
- An adult is being hurtful to a young person.
- You or someone else tried to get a hurtful situation to stop and this has not worked.
- It is not safe for you to do something about a serious situation by yourself.
- Your “gut” is telling you something is seriously wrong.

HOW TO REPORT CONCERNS

If you need to report concerns, you should:

- Tell the whole story. Who is involved. What happened. When and where. Why this is happening, if you know.
- Tell an adult who can help:
 - If at school, tell a Principal, Counselor, or Staff member.
 - If with a youth group, tell Staff.
 - If online, save the digital postings, file an abuse report on the site, and report and provide the digital evidence to someone locally. Take a screen shot if necessary.
 - If possibly really serious and someone could get hurt, call 9-1-1.
 - If not sure, talk to your parent or other trusted adult.
 - If the first adult you tell does not respond in a way that you think is effective, tell another adult. Keep telling until someone responds.

APPENDIX A. GUIDELINES FOR YOUR JOURNAL

It is recommended that you get a hardbound journal to write in. Write in your Journal every evening.

It can take some time to change the neural connections in your brain to allow you to achieve greater happiness and success. You should not expect to achieve success immediately. Try to make a commitment to keep this Journal for at least 40 days. Then make a decision about whether you want to continue this.

Here are some thought-starters. Feel free to modify these suggestions and expand on what you write about.

- Did you have a heart-to-heart connection with a friend today? If so, who was this and what did you do or talk about?
- Did you have a heart-to-heart connection with a trusted adult today? If so, who was this and what did you do or talk about?
- How did you reach out to be kind to others today? (Goal is reaching out to at least 5 people.) What did you do? How do you think this made this person feel? How did this make you feel?
- What personal character strengths of yours did you intentionally use today (Goal is to intentionally use a character strength you have or are developing at least 5 times a day.) What character strength did you use? What did you do? How do you think this worked? What did you learn?
- What positive experiences did you intentionally take the time to focus on today? (Goal is to intentionally focus on at least 5 positive experiences a day.) What was the positive experience? Why did this make you feel happy?
- Did you take several minutes at least 5 times a day to achieve a state of mindfulness? Did you engage in one longer session of meditation or yoga?
- Did you have an experience where you needed to stand tall and remind yourself to keep your personal power? If so, describe the situation, describe how you responded, describe how this worked, and describe what you learned?
- Did you have an experience where you needed to intentionally think things through to identify a strategy to take in response to a situation that occurred? If so, describe the situation, describe the strategies you considered, the strategy you chose and why, describe how this worked, and describe what you learned?

- Did you set a goal for today and decide on several action steps to accomplish this goal? If so, describe your goal and action steps, describe what happened, and describe what you learned?
- End your daily writing with a statement like this: “Every day in every way, I am getting better and better.”

APPENDIX B. CHARACTER STRENGTHS SURVEY

Think about who you are as a person. Indicate whether each strength is very much like you, often like you, at times like you, not often like you, or not at all like you. Realize that people have different strengths and that you can choose to build new strengths throughout your life.

Strength	Description	Very Much Like Me	Often Like me	Some Times Like Me	Not Often Like Me	Not At All Like Me
Creativity	I like to think of new and better ways of doing things.					
Curiosity	I am always asking questions and love to discover new things.					
Judgment	I look at all sides of an issue to come up with the right answer.					
Love of learning	I love to learn new things.					
Wisdom	I am considered wise because I evaluate things from different perspectives.					
Bravery	I speak up for what is right, even if others do not agree with me.					
Persevere	I finish what I start, even if it becomes difficult.					
Honesty	I speak the truth and I take responsibility for my feelings and behaviors.					
Zest	I live life as an adventure filled with excitement and energy.					
Love	I value the close relationships I have with others.					

Strength	Description	Very Much Like Me	Often Like me	Some Times Like Me	Not Often Like Me	Not At All Like Me
Kindness	I enjoy helping others, even if I do not know them well.					
Social intelligence	I pay attention to the motives and feelings of others.					
Teamwork	I always do my share and I work hard for the success of my group.					
Fairness	I treat all people in a fair and just manner.					
Leadership	I am good at providing leadership and direction when I am with a group of people.					
Forgiveness	I am willing to forgive someone who has done something wrong.					
Humility	I am humble and let my actions speak more than my words.					
Prudence	I am careful about what I do and strive not to do things I might later regret.					
Self-control	I pay attention and am always in control of what I do and say.					
Appreciate excellence	I appreciate the beautiful and wonderful things in life.					
Gratitude	I pay attention to the good things that happen to me and express my thanks.					
Hope	I believe that good things are coming to me now.					
Humor	I like to laugh, smile, and see the good in all situations.					
Spirituality	I feel my life has a higher purpose that fits within the larger meaning of life.					

Looking over this list, what do you think are your five most important strengths?

Looking over this list, what are the strengths you would most like to develop?

These Character Strengths were first included in Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This inventory of strengths was developed based on material from the VIA Institute on Character. A more comprehensive survey of personal strengths is available on their web site. © Copyright 2004-2014, VIA Institute on Character. All rights reserved. <http://www.viacharacter.org>. This Inventory was created and is disseminated with permission.