



# Stop Bullying Now

12 Best Ways to End Physical Bullying in Schools

by Dr. T



## I was running for my life.

I knew he was right behind me and would catch me. I felt like an animal being hunted. I couldn't run faster; I was scared and out of breath. He had only one thing in mind—to get me, again!

I felt humiliated and ashamed of myself as I ran. Two kids beat me up almost every day after school. There was nothing I could do. No one would stop it. Most of the adults just thought, "Boys will be boys."

I felt his heavy breath on my back. He caught me from behind, pulling me backward to the hard ground. My instincts were to try to protect myself from being hurt, and not to fight back. Fighting back would only make him angry, and then he might really hurt me—as his brother did when he knocked out my front teeth with a rock the year before, and before that when he himself purposely ran into me with his bike. I ended up in the hospital that time with a severe head injury that has caused me problems to this day.

He pinned me down with his knees on my chest. Sitting on top of me, he began punching my face. I attempted to cover up my face with my hands; that's all I could do. I felt so helpless!

All of a sudden, I felt a very sharp pain in my back—as if I had fallen on a hot needle. I jumped up without thinking, yelling in agony. A bee had stung me! I stood there for a moment in shock, trying to reach the wounded area with my hand. Then I remembered what had been happening just moments before the sting, and I felt an overwhelming sense of fear and

dejection. But it suddenly ended when I realized that Vinnie, the bully who, along with his brother, had plagued me most of the way through elementary school, wasn't beating me up. In fact, he lay stunned on his back about 10 feet away where I had thrown him when I had gotten stung. I looked down at him and felt a sudden surge of power. At that moment, I realized that I was strong and that I had let this person beat me up because I thought I was weak. I had thought of myself as a victim. It was an awe-inspiring feeling that changed my life from that time on.

Vinnie must have seen that feeling on my face, for his eyes became wide with fear. He moved away, crawling backward. He then got up and, still facing me, moved cautiously down the street. Without a word, he left me standing alone in the yard where only minutes ago he had been beating me up. Vinnie never beat me up again. He still called me names, like he always did, but that was from afar. He never even came close to me again.

I still vividly remember that day. I wonder what I could have done to stop being bullied. I didn't want to fight and I wasn't a fast runner, so I let myself get beat up. Perhaps, looking back on it now, I could have used my brain to prevent myself from being bullied. Perhaps I could have tried to make friends with Vinnie and his brother, or tried to reason with them. Maybe I could have called a proper authority or tried to trick them, telling them that my uncle was a policeman or that I had an infectious disease they would catch if they came into contact with

me. Or maybe I could have used humor and made them laugh, or perhaps I really could have stood up to them. It's hard to know what would have worked. But anything my imagination could have thought up would have been better than all the beatings I took.

Maybe this all seems out-of-date today with all the conflicts you may have to face, but I still think that resolving conflict without fighting by using what I now call "mental self-defense" is the best way because it is the most powerful tool we have. I realize that we can't stop conflict before it happens with physical abilities alone. We need another set of skills to do that. We need to learn the mental martial arts, the skills of peacefully resolving conflict before it gets to the physical level.

I wish only that I could have studied the martial arts when I was young—not to beat up Vinnie and his brother, but to learn how to avoid a fight, to prevent it from happening. Now, after 35 years of taking and teaching the martial arts, I have discovered that if you learn mental self-defense along with the physical skills of the martial arts, you won't have to fight or run away; you will be able to defeat the bully without fighting.

If someone came up to you right now and wanted to fight, would you know how to respond? What would you do? Fight? Run away? Freeze?

If you fight, you go against the real meaning of the martial arts, since you are not able to end the conflict before it started. If you run away, you may be happy to escape but you may not feel good about yourself. Furthermore, you don't solve the problem; the bully will probably confront you again. If you freeze, you are probably very afraid—which is natural—but

freezing won't help your situation much.

Is there another way to deal with a person who wants to harm you? At Martial Arts for Peace schools, students are taught physical self-defense skills to help them feel confident if they have to fight but they are encouraged not to fight. Does this make sense? If not, talk it over with someone you trust, for it is a very important point.

When you are taught how to defend yourself, you are actually being taught how to stop a fight. The reason you can stop a fight without fighting is that you are not afraid—or, at least, less afraid—of the other person. If you have confidence because you know how to defend yourself, you don't have to fight. You don't have to prove anything to anyone because you know you are strong.

But how can you stop other people from wanting to beat you up? How do you stop them from fighting?

The following is a list of 12 ways to stop a fight through non-violent means—what we call "mental self-defense." Remember that true students of the martial arts are gentle people who always try to end a fight with their mind instead of their fists or feet. This is the way to real power and strength. However, if you have no choice and must fight, try to do it in a way that is not harmful.

- Make friends. Treat the bully as a friend instead of an enemy. Most bullies are in need of admiration and respect.
- Use humor. You can try to turn a scary situation into a funny one, but be careful not to make fun of the bully.
- Use trickery. Your imagination can help you resolve conflict.





Pretend you are sick. Pretend you have poison oak and that if you fight with the bully, he will catch it. Tell him someone is about to meet you. Pretend to faint.

- Walk away. Don't get into the fight. Just walk away. This is a simple and often-overlooked way to end conflict before it begins.
- Agree with an insult. If a bully attacks you verbally, agree with him. Even if you feel insulted, let your anger rise up, then let it go. Just agree and see what happens.
- Refuse to fight. This probably sounds contrary to what you have always been told, but one way to stop a conflict is to just not fight, no matter what happens. A winner of a fight is the one who avoids it.
- Stand up to the bully. This can work, but it can also make the bully angrier, so be careful. You must decide if you think it will work.
- Scream or yell. A good shout (kiai or kihap) can shock the bully and distract him for a moment so you can get away.
- Ignore the threats. This is similar to simply walking away. You hear the threats, but you turn and walk away from the bully, even though he is calling you a coward and trying to get you angry enough to react. Be like bamboo and bend with the wind.

- Use authority. Call a teacher, police officer, parent or anyone you know who can help stop the bully from hurting you.
- Reason with the bully. If you are a good talker, perhaps you and the bully can talk it out. If you don't argue or get angrier, if you act friendly, you might convince the bully not to hurt you. Use the most powerful weapon you have—your brain.
- Take a martial arts stance. As a last resort, you can get into a strong combat stance. This tells the bully you are prepared to protect yourself if attacked. But it is hoped one or more of the ways suggested above will work.

There are probably many more methods for stopping conflict before it starts. Perhaps you, your friends, your family or your teacher can think of others.

Always keep two things in mind: Learn physical self-defense so you don't have to fight, and learn mental self-defense to avoid and resolve conflict before it becomes physical. Be a victor—not a victim—through martial arts for peace. ✂

*About the author: Dr. T (a.k.a. Terrence Webster-Doyle) is an educator, martial artist and author of the internationally acclaimed, award-winning series of books titled *Martial Arts for Peace*. He holds a sixth-degree black belt in karate and directs the *Martial Arts for Peace Association* in Middlebury, Vermont. He can be contacted at (802) 388-0922, or you can e-mail him at [atrium@sover.net](mailto:atrium@sover.net).*