

REVISED AND UPDATED!

STICK UP FOR YOURSELF!

EVERY KID'S GUIDE TO PERSONAL POWER

AND POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

GERSHEN KAUFMAN, Ph.D., LEV RAPHAEL, Ph.D.,
AND PAMELA ESPELAND

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

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DEDICATION

To David and Aaron, Deborah and Joshua,
Nicky, Emma, and Jonah

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HEY KIDS! BE SURE
TO GIVE YOUR PARENTS
AND TEACHERS
THE INSIDE SCOOP!



IMPORTANT INFORMATION!
FOR PARENTS + TEACHERS

Positive self-esteem is the single most important psychological skill we can develop in order to thrive in society. Having self-esteem means being proud of ourselves and experiencing that pride from within. Without self-esteem, kids doubt themselves, cave in to peer pressure, feel worthless or inferior, and may turn to drugs or alcohol as a crutch. With self-esteem, kids feel secure inside themselves, are more willing to take positive risks, are more likely to take responsibility for their actions, can cope with life's changes and challenges, and are resilient in the face of rejection, disappointment, failure, and defeat.

Self-esteem is *not* conceit, it's *not* arrogance, and it's *not* superiority. Unfortunately, it's often confused with all three (and also with narcissism, egotism, and disrespect), which has contributed to a "self-esteem backlash." You've probably seen the articles and heard the assertions that too much self-esteem is bad for kids. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indiscriminate praise, flattery, social promotion, and falsely inflated self-worth are bad for kids, but those aren't what self-esteem is about. Self-esteem is based on facts and truths, achievements and competencies. The more self-esteem kids have, and the stronger it is, the better equipped they are to make their way in the world.

Conceit, arrogance, and superiority aren't the result of genuine pride. They are the result of *contempt* for others. Pride grows out of enjoying ourselves, our accomplishments, our skills and abilities. It's not about diminishing anyone else.

Contempt often masquerades as pride, but it's a false pride. When we're contemptuous of others, we perceive them as being beneath us. Secretly, however, we feel *inferior* to others. Contempt allows us to rise above those feelings of inferiority temporarily, but in order to keep feeling this way, we must continually find someone else to feel superior to—someone else we can put down in order to stay on top.

We believe that contempt is a root cause of two great problems facing our schools (and our world) today: bullying and violence. Bullies who taunt, tease, and harass others aren't kids with positive self-esteem and genuine pride in themselves. They are kids who lack social skills and empathy and may have other serious problems, including parents or older siblings who bully them, deep-seated anger, jealousy of other people's success, and loneliness. In order to bully others, you must believe that their feelings, wants, and needs don't matter. You must feel contempt for them.

When contempt combines with feelings of powerlessness and shame, this may (and often does) escalate into violence. We've seen this in the school shootings that have shocked us so profoundly in recent years. The children and teens who wounded and killed their classmates and teachers weren't kids with positive self-esteem and genuine pride in themselves. Some were bullied, tormented, and humiliated by their peers; some were rejected, excluded, and ignored. For reasons we may never fully understand, these kids developed absolute contempt for others, coupled with a desire for vengeance. It wasn't just that other people's feelings, wants, and needs didn't matter. Their *lives* didn't matter.

Self-esteem isn't the culprit here. Rather, the *lack* of positive self-esteem may lead some kids to take inappropriate, hurtful, even desperate actions. When we help kids build self-esteem, we're not teaching them to diminish others, and we're certainly not teaching them to be contemptuous. We're teaching them to take pride in themselves, feel good about themselves when they do the right thing (and own responsibility when they don't), celebrate their achievements (both tangible and intangible), know what they stand for (and what they won't stand for), and strive to be their best inside and out. When kids have a solid grasp of their feelings and needs, when they trust their emotions and perceptions, when they have a realistic sense of their capabilities, and when they have personal power—they feel secure and confident inside themselves—there's no need to put other people down.

Self-esteem isn't something we're born with. It's something we learn, which means it can be taught. We believe that all children should be taught the skills of personal power and positive self-esteem at home and in the classroom, right along with reading, writing, and arithmetic. All of these "basics" work hand-in-hand.

Stick Up for Yourself! is based on a program originally developed for adults. Called "Affect and Self-Esteem," it is currently offered as an undergraduate course in the Psychology Department at Michigan State University. To create this book, we adapted the course materials so children ages 8–12 can learn them on their own.

We encourage you to read this book with your child or your students and talk together about the stories, concepts, and activities. (You might learn a few things yourself!) As a caring, concerned adult, you're in a perfect position to help kids build personal power and positive self-esteem. Treat them with respect. Encourage them to do their best—without expecting perfection. Allow them to make mistakes and take positive risks. Give them opportunities to make choices and decisions. Invite them to share their feelings, needs, and future dreams. Be someone they trust and can talk to about things that matter to them.

For teachers, counselors, and group leaders who want to go further, we have written a companion teacher's guide for use with students in grades 3–7. For more information about *A Teacher's Guide to Stick Up for Yourself!*, please turn to the back of this book or contact Free Spirit Publishing.

It's our hope that the ideas and tools presented here will one day be a regular part of the curriculum—that all kids will be taught to stick up for themselves in healthy, positive, meaningful ways. Please let us know how *Stick Up for Yourself!* works for you and the children in your care.

Gershen Kaufman, Lev Raphael, and Pamela Espeland

WHAT IT MEANS TO STICK UP FOR YOURSELF



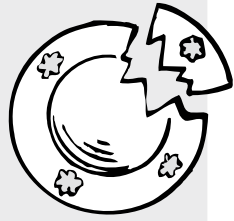
TYLER is having a bad day at school. Kids are hassling him again—calling him names, making fun of him, trying to trip him when the teachers aren't looking. He tries to ignore them, but they won't stop. Sometimes he feels like punching them all—or running away and not coming back.

That night, Tyler's mom asks him how his day went.

"I HATE school!" he says. "I'm tired of getting picked on. I wish I could quit going to school."

"You know you can't quit," his mom says. "You need to start sticking up for yourself."

ASHLEY'S parents blame her for everything. Last night, her little brother broke a plate, and they yelled at *her!* "If you had cleared the table like you were supposed to...." "If you'd been watching him like you should...." "If you'd pay more attention, like we've told you before...." Blah blah blah. It makes her sick!



Later, Ashley meets her best friend in an Internet chat room and tells her about it.

"They blame me for stuff I don't even do!" she pounds out on her keyboard.

"Parents can be so clueless," her friend writes back. "Don't let them push you around anymore. Stick up for yourself!"

JOSE knows the rule about not talking in study hall. He's quietly doing his math, minding his own business, when Matthew kicks him under the table for no reason. All Jose says is "Quit it, man!" And he doesn't even say it loud—barely a whisper.

Right away, the teacher orders him—Jose—to stay after school! Jose tries to explain, but the teacher cuts him off with "Not another word out of you." Meanwhile, Matthew sits there with a big stupid grin on his face.

Over dinner, Jose tells his family about it.

"You broke a rule," his dad says. "But it doesn't sound like you did it on purpose. Your teacher wasn't fair. You need to stick up for yourself."

When Tyler's mom tells him to stick up for himself, what does that mean? Should he start hassling the kids who hassle him? Should he fight with them? Should he try to get back at them for making his life miserable?

When Ashley's friend tells her to stick up for herself, what does that mean? Should she talk back to her parents? Should she whack her little brother for getting her into trouble? Should she go to her room and slam the door as loud as she can?

When Jose's father tells him to stick up for himself, what does that mean? Should Jose keep talking after the teacher tells him to stop? Should he kick Matthew and hope he talks, too? Should he go to the principal and complain about the teacher?

Did anyone ever tell *you* to stick up for yourself? Maybe you were confused, too. When you don't know what it means to stick up for yourself, you end up doing things it *doesn't* mean.

- Sticking up for yourself doesn't mean getting back at someone else.
- It doesn't mean acting bossy, stuck-up, or rude.
- It doesn't mean saying and doing whatever you want, whenever you want.

Here's what it *does* mean:

- Sticking up for yourself means knowing who you are and what you stand for, and being true to yourself.
- It means knowing how to speak up for yourself, and doing so when it's the right thing to do. (Sometimes it isn't.)
- It means there's always someone on your side—*you*.

WHAT YOU NEED TO STICK UP FOR YOURSELF

If you want to make a painting, you need paints, a paintbrush, and something to paint on. If you want to write a book, you need an idea, something to write with and on, and time to write.

If you want to stick up for yourself, you need *personal power* and *positive self-esteem*.

This book tells you how to get personal power. An important part of personal power is getting to know yourself. *You can't stick up for yourself if you don't know who you are and what matters to you.*

This book also tells you how to get positive self-esteem. *You can't stick up for yourself if you don't like yourself and feel a real sense of pride in yourself.*

HOW TO MAKE THIS BOOK WORK FOR YOU

Do you know the story of *Alice in Wonderland*? If you do, maybe you remember "Drink Me" and "Eat Me." When Alice took a sip from a bottle labeled "Drink Me," she instantly got smaller. And when she took a bite from a cake labeled "Eat Me," she instantly got bigger.

Reading this book won't make you instantly able to stick up for yourself. Learning how takes time. It takes work. And it takes *wanting to change*.

We believe you can learn how to stick up for yourself. That's why we wrote this book for you. You'll discover

many ideas here that aren't usually found in books for kids. But we believe kids can understand them and use them.

In fact, since writing the first edition of this book in 1990, we've received many letters from kids who have tried these ideas. Here's what some of them have said:

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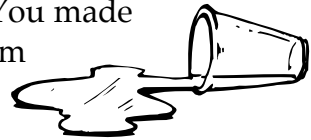
"This book really helped me with my feelings. I used to fight a lot with my friends until I read it. I wrote about my feelings and talked with an adult, like you said. It worked."

○ ○ ○

"This book really helped me because I'm the smallest in my fourth grade class and everyone picks on me or makes fun of me. Since I read this book, I can stick up for myself."

○ ○ ○

"During lunch, my friend knocked a glass of milk onto the floor and blamed me for it. He said, 'You made me do it.' But I didn't listen. I know I'm responsible only for my behavior."



○ ○ ○

"There's this boy at school who always used to tease me. Now he stays away from me because I know how to stick up for myself."

○ ○ ○

"My mom and I talked about the book while I was reading it. Now I'm making more choices for myself. I used to go to my friend's swimming pool and my mom would pick me up when she was ready. I didn't like having to leave before I was ready. We talked about it, and she said I could call her when I wanted to come home."

○ ○ ○

“I’m making better choices now. I don’t just go along with other people anymore. Especially when I don’t want to.”

○ ○ ○

“The part about being responsible really helped me. Especially the part that said we can choose to keep our hands to ourselves, even though we get mad and feel like hitting someone. Last time my sister and I got into a fight, I went in my room and sat on my bed and punched my pillow. I also like the part that said we can choose to do our schoolwork and chores without being nagged or reminded. That really helped!”

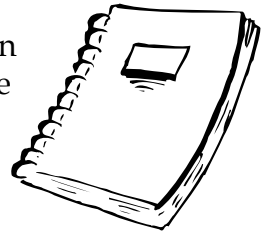
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“I play baseball and I’m not too good. I strike out and miss fly balls and I’m not even in the starting lineup. After reading this book, I can say, ‘Hey, I did my best.’ That goes for my school subjects and other sports, too.”

○ ○ ○

If you want this book to work for you, try these tips:

- * Don’t just read it. DO it! Whenever you see a “Get Personal” box, take time to do the writing activity. You’ll learn a lot about yourself.
- * Use a special notebook or journal for your “Get Personal” writing. Jot down other thoughts you have while you’re reading. Add stories from your life. Set personal power and self-esteem goals for yourself, and track your progress.



* Share this book with an adult you trust—someone who cares about you and wants the best for you. Talk about the ideas and how they relate to your life.

Please let us know how this book works for you. Write to us and tell us if it helps you stick up for yourself. Write to us and tell us if it doesn't. Here's where you can reach us:

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We'd love to hear from you.

Best wishes,

Gershen Kaufman, Lev Raphael, and Pamela Espeland

HOW TO GET AND USE PERSONAL POWER

When you hear the words “personal power,” what do you think they mean?



- A. BEING STRONGER THAN OTHER PEOPLE?
- B. BEING SMARTER THAN OTHER PEOPLE?
- C. BEING BETTER THAN OTHER PEOPLE?
- D. BEING ABLE TO MAKE OTHER PEOPLE DO WHAT YOU WANT?
- E. HAVING MORE MONEY THAN OTHER PEOPLE?
- F. BEING FAMOUS, LIKE A ROCK STAR, A MOVIE STAR, OR AN ATHLETE?
- G. ALL OF THE ABOVE?

When we use the words “personal power,” we don’t mean any of those things. Personal power means *being secure and confident inside yourself*.

Anyone can have personal power. Even though you’re “just a kid,” *you* can have personal power. You can learn how to get it and use it. No matter how you feel right now, you can learn to feel secure and confident.

It will take time and practice. It may take courage to make changes in your life. But you can do it!

Like the year has four seasons, personal power has four parts. They are:

1. Be responsible.
2. Make choices.
3. Get to know yourself.
4. Get and use power in your relationships and your life.



BE RESPONSIBLE

Fact: *You are responsible for the kind of person you are and how you live your life.*

Maybe it doesn't seem that way to you. How can you be responsible if adults are always telling you what to do?

A lot of kids wonder about this. They confuse "being responsible" with "being in charge" or "being the boss" of other people and things.

SARAH is baby-sitting her little brother Jacob while their parents are visiting friends. Jacob wants to watch his favorite TV program. Sarah wants to watch her favorite TV program. Sarah tells Jacob, "Mom and Dad said I was responsible. You have to do what I say."

Sarah is using being responsible as an excuse to get her way. That's not what it means. And there's something else it doesn't mean: having control over everything that happens to you.

There are many things in your life you can't control. Like the weather. Where your family lives. What school you go to. How much homework your teacher gives you. Whether someone decides to be your friend. And how other people act or feel.

fact: *You are responsible only for YOUR OWN behavior and YOUR OWN feelings.*

Be Responsible for Your Behavior

BRANDON and Jamile are playing a car racing video game at Brandon's house. Jamile keeps winning, and Brandon doesn't like that. It's his game, and he should be winning!

Suddenly Brandon grabs Jamile's controller and crashes his car on purpose.

"Hey!" Jamile says. "What did you do that for?"

"You're not supposed to win every game," Brandon answers. "You made me do it."

ALYSSA is going to her friend Tracy's house to play. She's putting on her coat and heading for the door.

"Have you finished cleaning your room?" her mom calls after her.

"I'll do it later," Alyssa promises.

"I'd like you to do it now," her mom says. "You can play with Tracy when you're done."

Alyssa gets really angry at her mom. She gets so angry that she runs to her room, picks up her favorite toy off the floor, throws it...and it breaks.

Tearfully, she gathers up the pieces and takes them to her mom. “Look what you made me do!” she sobs.

Sometimes other people say or do things we don’t like. We get frustrated or angry. We do something to get back at them. And we think that what *we* do is *their* fault.

We are responsible only for our own behavior. Jamile didn’t make Brandon crash his car. Alyssa’s mom didn’t make Alyssa break her favorite toy. Brandon and Alyssa are responsible for their own behavior.

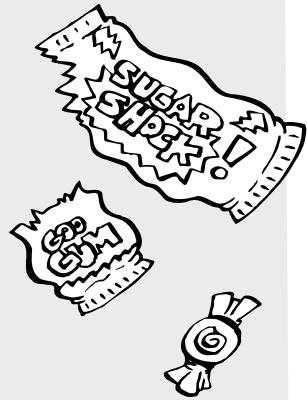
MAX and Zachary aren’t allowed to go to the store by themselves. It’s three blocks away across two busy streets. Their father thinks they’re too young and has told them not to go.

One day, Zachary talks Max into going to the store with him to buy some candy. When Max hesitates, Zachary says, “Don’t be a baby. Dad will never find out.”

Later, their father finds the candy wrappers in the trash.

“I’ve made it clear that you’re not supposed to go to the store on your own,” he says. “Why did you disobey me?”

“It was Zachary’s idea,” Max says. “He made me do it.”



Sometimes we let other people talk us into things we know we shouldn't do. We think this makes us not responsible (or less responsible) for our actions. But Zachary didn't make Max disobey their father and go to the store. Max is responsible for his own behavior.

"Mo-om!" Tiffany shouts. "**MEGAN** ate the last taco!"

"That was supposed to be Tiffany's," their mom scolds Megan. "I bought three tacos for each of you, like always."

"But I didn't mean to eat it!" Megan answers.

Sometimes we do things just because we feel like it. We don't think about what might happen next or how our actions will affect other people. But saying we didn't mean it doesn't undo what we did. Megan is responsible for her own behavior.

Kids aren't the only ones who get mixed up about this. There are plenty of adults who don't take responsibility for their behavior. Maybe you've heard some adults say things like, "I'm sorry I yelled at you. But you made me so angry that I couldn't help myself." Or "I'm in a bad mood, and it's your fault for arguing with me." Or "I didn't mean to miss your softball game. I had to go to a meeting after work."

Adults may use different words than kids, but what they're saying is the same: "I'm not responsible for my own behavior." Now you know this isn't true. So the next time an adult says, "You made me do it!" you can think to yourself, "I didn't make you do anything. I'm responsible only for my own behavior." This is a way to stick up for yourself.

IMPORTANT: Don't *say* it out loud. Just *think* it. Saying it will probably get you into trouble, plus it's rude. It's enough to know inside yourself that you didn't make the adult behave in a certain way. If you want, you can wait until things calm down, then ask the adult if you can talk about what happened. Work together on a plan for the future.



When we know—*really know*—that we're responsible for our own behavior, we can start making some important choices for ourselves.

- * We can choose to tell the truth and not lie, exaggerate, make things up, or make excuses.
- * We can choose to be trustworthy and reliable.
- * We can choose to keep our hands to ourselves, even when we get mad and feel like hitting someone.
- * We can choose to do our schoolwork and our chores without being reminded or nagged.

Being responsible usually makes good things happen at home and in school. The more responsible we are, the more people trust us, and the more freedom and privileges we get.

But this isn't the main reason to start being responsible. The main reason is because it's the best thing to do for you. Being responsible helps you feel secure and confident inside yourself. It gives you a feeling of *personal power*.

Here's something else you should know: Being responsible isn't the same as being perfect. You still make mistakes. You sometimes do things you're not supposed to do. Nobody's perfect! The point is, when you *do* goof up, you accept responsibility. You admit what you did and apologize. If you break something, you offer to fix it or replace it. If you take something that doesn't belong to you, you give it back. You do what you can to make things right. And if nothing you do seems to help, you move on.

Be Responsible for Your Feelings

Someone else can't make you grab another person's video game controller, break your favorite toy, or disobey your parents. In the same way, no one can make you feel happy or unhappy, excited or angry, bored or curious, or any other way. *You are responsible for your own feelings.*

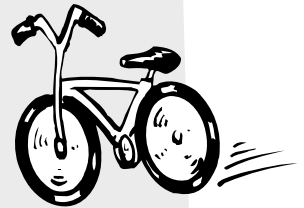
But sometimes things other people say or do can act as triggers for our feelings.

"Did you put your bike away when you got home from school?" **TONY'S** dad asks him.

"Not yet," Tony answers absent-mindedly. He's busy drawing a new character for his comic book. Tony wants to be a comic book artist when he grows up, and he loves to draw.

"You never do it when you're supposed to!" his dad yells. "I want you to put your bike away **RIGHT NOW!**"

Suddenly Tony feels hurt and angry. Why does his dad have to yell? It seems like he always yells! He always accuses Tony of not doing his chores on time! His dad's words and yelling trigger Tony's hurt, angry feelings.



But maybe Tony often needs reminding to do his chores. Maybe he's in the habit of doing other things first or instead—like drawing. So when he says "Not yet," this triggers frustrated, angry feelings in his dad.

We can learn to ignore triggers and decide for ourselves how we want to feel.

MAKE CHOICES

Fact: *Because you are responsible for your own behavior and feelings, you can make choices about them.*

You can choose how to act. You can choose not to grab a friend's video game controller or break a toy or disobey your parents. Even if you feel like doing these things. Even if the feeling seems overpowering or irresistible.

Many times, our actions are tied to our feelings. We hit someone because we feel angry. We yell at someone because we feel frustrated. We cry because we feel sad.

You can choose how angry, frustrated, or sad to feel. You can even choose to have different, more positive and productive feelings.

MARIA studied hard for her math test, and she felt sure after the test that she had done well. But when the teacher handed the tests back, Maria saw that she had gotten six problems wrong. Her teacher had written across the top in big red letters, "You can do better!"

Maria has choices about how to feel. She can feel angry at her teacher for not seeing how hard she studied. She can feel angry at herself for not doing better on the test. She can think, "If I were smarter, I wouldn't get so many wrong. I must be pretty stupid." OR she can tell herself, "I did the best I could on this test, and what I did is good enough. I'll get help before the next test and try to do better."

DANIEL comes home from school excited to tell his mom about his day. His team won at volleyball...he had a fun band lesson...he finished his homework in study period...everything went great! But when he rushes in the door, his mom is on the telephone. She signals him to be quiet until she's through talking.

Daniel has choices about how to feel. He can feel rejected. He can think, "The person on the phone must be more important than I am. Otherwise Mom would hang up right away and pay attention to me." OR he can tell himself, "Mom probably won't be on the phone for very long. I can wait. I can listen to music while I wait so the time will go faster."

CARLOS loves his cat. He raised it from the time it was a kitten. It sleeps in his bed at night and walks with him to the school bus every day. When Carlos comes home after school, his cat is always waiting at the door to greet him.

One day, the cat gets very sick. Carlos's dad takes it to the veterinarian. The vet doesn't think the cat will ever get well. He thinks the cat might die soon.

It's normal and natural to feel sadness and grief at times like these. When someone or something we love seems about to die or be taken away from us, we can feel lonely and scared.

Still, Carlos has choices. He can choose to feel sad and worried all alone. OR he can choose to share his feelings