

Dr. Kay, I don't go to your school but I have a problem. I'm being bullied. I haven't told my Mom but this guy is really bothering me. I want to hurt him, like he's hurt me. He's never hurt me like punched me or anything, just in my head, you know.

Name withheld

Trey was my good friend all through school. He was big and goofy. I didn't think that he was very strong but I soon learned that he was stronger than most. Trey's family didn't have a ton of money and he kind of smelled bad too but he was a good friend, so I didn't mind.

Trey got picked on a lot. When I say a lot, I mean every day multiple times a day for years. I saw it and I even saw Trey try to play it off by joining in on the joke. Someone would make fun of his cheap clothes and he would respond with, "Yeah, my family is so poor that we go to Kentucky Fried Chicken to lick other people's fingers."

Don't join in on the joke. That advice about poking fun at yourself to get the bully to stop doesn't work. The logic behind it is letting the bully know that those words don't bother you, but making fun of yourself is further humiliating and not good for your self-esteem.

One day after school, Trey confided in me that the bullying really bothered him. Looking back at the situation with adult eyes, I would say that Trey was suffering from depression, most likely triggered (at least in part) by the bullying and resulting self-esteem problems. Back then, I didn't know how serious the situation was; I just wanted to help a friend. We talked honestly about some of the things that people would say like, "Your armpits smell so bad that Ms. Kravitz gave you an A for NOT raising your hand," and, "Trey, you're so big, Goodyear wanted to fly YOU over the Superbowl."

I could tell that some of those comments really did bother my buddy and I hated that for him. When Trey started taking these comments to heart, the depression began to sink its nasty head in, like a tick buried into his flesh. He couldn't stop thinking about it. Those comments started to affect his life. He would find any excuse to miss school.

Don't let the words of a few people influence how you feel about yourself or how you live your life.

As a friend, I told him the truth, "Trey, you really do smell bad." We came up with a plan. The first step was Trey had to shower every morning. Next step was I asked my older brother to give me his old bottle of cologne.

You have two choices here:

1 Remove the reason that people make fun of you. If you are being bullied for your lunch money, bring your lunch to school. If you have a cheap phone and people are making fun of your 1990's brick, don't pull it out. If you can't help but talk about Justin Bieber's last tour, replace the words Justin Bieber with a more popular band.

2 Forget what other people are saying about you. Don't let their words bother you. Figure out what you want to work on. What would make you feel better about yourself? If you're being made fun of for things that seem out of your control, like your teeth or weight, look at yourself objectively. Does the problem bother YOU? If so, do what you can to minimize it – don't drink stuff that stains your teeth, keep them sparkling – diet and exercise to lose some weight.

Trey couldn't control that he had cheap clothing. But it was also dirty and most of it was too small. We went through all of his clothes. He had T-shirts that were years old and since they were too small, they emphasized his weight problem. We threw away everything that didn't fit. The clothing that fit, but was dirty, we washed at my house, because his mother's washing machine left rust stains. The clothes that still had stains in obvious places were thrown out. About two dozen decent items were left. I don't know why but my Mom loves to iron clothing so she pressed some of Trey's shirts. She also pressed his blue jeans, but we didn't want him to be made fun of for being a nerd, so we re-washed them.

Trey and I started to lift weights in my garage. At the time, I didn't know much about a healthy diet and we both knew that Trey's Mom wasn't going to spend a bunch of money on diet food so Trey adopted a pretty simple diet, *Don't eat anything white*. It sounds too simple but it worked for Trey. He refused to eat anything white including sugar, potatoes, bread, and pasta. Because he was hungry, he ate more vegetables, fruits, meat, and nuts.

Do things that make you feel good about yourself. Self-confidence looks good on anyone. Kids who take martial arts aren't picked on nearly as much as those who don't take a self-defense class. It's not because they defend themselves physically, but because they project self-confidence.

During our work-outs in my garage, we would talk about who was still bothering Trey. Some of those kids were easily avoided by taking a different path down the hall. Others couldn't be avoided, so we agreed that we would walk together and pretend that we were so engrossed in a conversation that neither of us could even hear the negative comments. A couple of times, it was obvious we were pretending not to hear them because one time Stu Smith yelled as loud as he could, "Trey, your family is so poor they all share one piece of dental floss." We refused to laugh; our heads held high, we kept walking, stoic and impervious to Stu's attack.

Avoid the bully when you can and walk with a buddy when you can't.

Near the end of the school year, Trey was attacked. I wasn't around when it happened. I got called in to the assistant principal's office, and thought I was in trouble. But Mr. Shelton told me Trey had been jumped by three guys and wanted to know whether there was some on-going feud between Trey and these guys. I told him no and that Trey wouldn't hurt anyone. I asked if Trey was alright. Mr. Shelton said, "Trey is fine. He's the biggest guy in school and he comes across as being so resistant to people making fun of him. Maybe these three guys thought that if they could take Trey down, they would be the tough guys. But it back-fired. Trey kept walking, shaking his shoulder to get one off his back and dragging the other down the hall." Shelton concluded with, "That Trey has real potential on the football team."

Don't fight back. If you get hit, walk away like you barely felt it. Give all indication that you are the toughest kid in the school. Be brave, stand tall.

At this point, Trey was now seriously famous. The truth spread that three guys jumped him and Trey kept his cool, like three kittens were simply a pesky nuisance. From that point forward, no one messed with Trey and since he was my best-friend, no one messed with me either.

Back to your problem, if you went to my school, I would definitely tell you to tell an adult right away because it could escalate. I know there is a "Kid

Code” and you can’t rat on your peers. But there are some times that you MUST snitch. When you could be physically harmed, tell an adult at school. When the bullying gets to a point that it’s affecting how you live your life, like skipping school, tell your parents and school counselor. If you’re daydreaming about how to seriously hurt your nemesis, let someone know how strongly you feel about the problem.

Bottom line, you can be whoever you want to be. As you leave the house, stand tall. If people are talking about you behind your back through the computer, texts, and Emails, ignore them. Delete your account, change your phone number. If people are making fun of you in person, ignore them or if you agree with some of what they’re saying, work on it. Think about Trey dragging his tormentors down the hall. Better yet, try being Trey for a day. You might like how it feels.

If you have a question about your child’s attendance at school, feel that your child refuses to go to school, or have a question about your child’s education, you can Email me at DrJimK@yahoo.com and your question with my answer may be published in this magazine.