

REVISED & UPDATED 3RD EDITION

# STICK UP FOR YOURSELF!

EVERY KID'S GUIDE TO PERSONAL POWER

AND POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

free spirit  
PUBLISHING®

GERSHEN KAUFMAN, Ph.D., and LEV RAPHAEL, Ph.D.

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## DEDICATION

To Kinsley and Caden,  
and Eliana, Ruby, and Franklin

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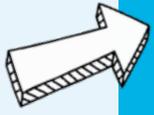
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# A NOTE TO PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER ADULTS



Hey, kids! Be sure to give your parents and teachers the inside scoop about what's in this book!

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 worth-

less 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 leads some people to believe that too much self-esteem is bad for kids. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Indiscriminate praise, flattery, social promotion, and falsely inflated self-worth are indeed bad for kids, but those aren't what self-esteem is really 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 do exist, of course. But they aren't the result of genuine pride. Instead, they're the result of contempt for others. Pride grows out of enjoying ourselves, our accomplishments, our skills, and our abilities. It's not about diminishing anyone else.

Contempt, on the other hand, often masquerades as pride, but it's really false pride if you look closely. When we're contemptuous of others, we perceive them as being beneath us. We see ourselves as superior. Secretly, however, we're actually feeling *inferior* to others. Contempt allows us to temporarily rise above those feelings of inferiority. But in order to keep feeling this way, we have to 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. Kids 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, loneliness, jealousy, or resentment of another person's success. 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, these emotions can escalate into violence. We've seen this in the school shootings that shock us so profoundly year after year. The children and teens who wound and kill their classmates and teachers aren't kids with positive self-esteem and genuine pride in themselves. For reasons we may never fully understand, these kids developed utter contempt for others, coupled with a burning rage. It wasn't only 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, and even violent or desperate actions. When we help kids build positive self-esteem, we're not teaching them to diminish anyone else, and we're certainly not teaching them to be contemptuous. Instead, we're teaching them to take pride in themselves; to feel good about themselves when they do the right thing and own responsibility when they don't; to celebrate their achievements (both tangible and intangible); to know what they stand for and what they won't stand for; and to strive to be their best inside and out. When kids have a solid grasp of their feelings and needs, trust their emotions and perceptions, have a realistic sense of their capabilities, and have personal power, *then* they feel secure and confident inside themselves and feel 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 together.

Personal power requires something else: understanding how powerlessness and uncertainty can affect our lives. When uncertainty combines with powerlessness, the resulting threats we feel to our safety can be either real or imagined. They might take the form of bullying, worries about school shootings, or fear of terrorist acts. We need to learn how to handle those things that render us powerless or uncertain—and we can. That's just as true for kids as it is for adults. And it's why we added a new chapter called "How to Build Inner Security" to this revised and updated third edition of the book. We

believe kids can learn and use skills for counteracting and overcoming feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty. Personal power and positive self-esteem are the essential tools for strengthening inner security, whether it's at home, at school, or online.

*Stick Up for Yourself!* is based on a program that we originally developed for adults. Called "Affect and Self-Esteem," it was first taught as a noncredit workshop at Michigan State University. Next it became a course in the Department of Educational Administration, and then it was offered as an undergraduate course in the Department of Psychology. The adult program is also available in book form, titled *Dynamics of Power: Fighting Shame and Building Self-Esteem*. To create the book you hold in your hands now, we adapted our program's concepts, principles, and tools so that children ages nine to thirteen could learn them on their own.

While *Stick Up for Yourself!* is written for kids to use and enjoy independently, we do encourage you to read this book along 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 be the best possible people they can be—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 whatever truly matters to them.

For teachers, counselors, and group leaders who want to go further, we've written a companion teacher's guide for use with students in fourth through eighth grades. 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 become a regular part of every 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. You can reach us via email at [help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com), or send letters to:

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**Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael**

## 1

## WHAT IT MEANS TO STICK UP FOR YOURSELF



**MICAH** 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 just running away from school and never going back.

That night, Micah'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."

**JAZMIN'S** dad blames her for everything. Last night, her little brother broke a plate, and her dad 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, Jazmin texts her best friend and tells her about it.

"He blames me for stuff I didn't even do!" she types angrily.

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

**JUAN** 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 Juan says is "Quit it, man!" And he doesn't even say it loud—barely a whisper.

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

Over dinner, Juan 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 Micah'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 Jazmin's friend tells her to stick up for herself, what does that mean? Should she talk back to her dad? 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 Juan's father tells him to stick up for himself, what does that mean? Should Juan 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 in or on (like a notebook or a tablet), and time to write.

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

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 if you don't feel a sense of genuine pride in yourself.**

And this book will tell you how to get inner security. **You can't stick up for yourself if you don't feel safe and secure inside yourself. Personal power and positive self-esteem are essential for building inner security.**

## 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 lots of ideas here that aren't always found in books for kids. But we know kids can understand the ideas and use them.

In fact, we know lots of kids *have* used them. This is the third edition of *Stick Up for Yourself!* It has important updates including a whole new chapter about building inner security. Since writing the very first edition of this book, we've received many letters from kids who have tried these ideas. Here's what some of them have said:

"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 spilled milk on 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 home 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!”

“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. You can also keep your writing on a tablet or computer. You get to choose! (You can even draw your responses if that works better for you.) Wherever you do your writing, you’ll also use that place to jot down other thoughts you have while you’re reading. Add stories from your life. Set personal power, positive self-esteem, and inner security 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.

Kids have many kinds of families. Maybe you live with one or two parents. Maybe you live with a foster parent, grandparent, or guardian, or other adult. Sometimes in this book you'll see the words *mom*, *dad*, and *parents*. When you read these words, think about whatever adults take care of you.

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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Best wishes,

**GERSHEN KAUFMAN AND LEV RAPHAEL**

