

Sam Takes a Stand



By Hetty van Gurp and Rick Lewis



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Peaceful Schools International

Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia, Canada

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*To all the people who know that
courage combined with skill
and compassion can
overcome fear.*

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Hetty and Rick

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Sam and Lucas had been good friends since kindergarten. That's why Sam was so upset the day Lucas made fun of his sweater.

That evening, Sam's father taught him how to use a 'Goodwill Sandwich' message when someone says something cruel.

Sam was happy when the 'Goodwill Sandwich' worked and Lucas apologized.

One day, during a class discussion about feelings, Sam explained the 'Goodwill Sandwich' idea that he had learned from his father.



"It's easy," said Sam. "You start out by saying something that shows you understand the other person. Then you talk about what's bothering you. Then you ask the other person to help you solve the problem so you can both be happy."

"Can you give us an example?" asked Sam's teacher.

Lucas raised his hand. "Sam, why don't you tell the class what you said to me last week when I teased you?"



“Thanks, Lucas,” said Sam.

“This is what I said to Lucas last week when he laughed at my sweater. ‘Lucas, I know the class really likes your jokes. It really hurt my feelings when everyone laughed at my sweater during recess yesterday. Is there a way for you to make everyone laugh without making fun of me?’”



Sam’s teacher was very happy that Sam shared the ‘Goodwill Sandwich’ idea with his classmates, and she hoped the other children in her class would start using this way of solving problems with their friends.

Now Sam had another problem. Jake, a new boy in school, had been teasing Sam for a few weeks. Jake was not a friend, and Sam was afraid of him. Sam had tried using a 'Goodwill Sandwich' message, but Jake just laughed.

Sam did not know what to do, and the teasing was getting worse each day. Sam had even started taking a different route to and from school to avoid Jake.



The teasing happened on the playground, in the hallways and also in the washroom. Sam was losing sleep and not paying attention in class. He wanted to make Jake stop, but he didn't know how.

One day, Sam woke up and asked his mother if he could stay home. "I'm not feeling well," Sam said. His mother suspected that something else was wrong.

"Sam," she said, "is there something you want to tell me about?"



Sam started to cry. His mother knew then that something was bothering Sam. "Is someone hurting you at school?" she asked. The look on Sam's face told her she was right.

Sam broke down and told his mother everything that had happened over the past few weeks. Jake teased him about his haircut, laughed at his new jacket, made jokes about the way he played soccer, and he called Sam names whenever he saw him.

“Sam, it really bothers me to see you so upset. Have you told your teacher what’s going on?”

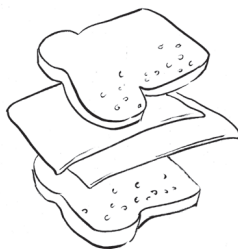


“No, I haven’t said anything,” said Sam. “I don’t want people to think I can’t take care of myself. Besides, I don’t want to make it worse.”

“Sam, it sounds as if it couldn’t get too much worse. But I know you want to do as much as you can to solve this problem yourself. What have you already tried?”

“I tried using a ‘Goodwill Sandwich,’ but Jake just laughed at me,” said Sam.

“Well, Sam, the ‘Goodwill Sandwich’ may not always work, especially if the other person seems to enjoy making people upset. Why don’t we try to think of some other things you can say to Jake to see if he’ll stop bothering you. If talking with Jake in a different way doesn’t work, will you promise to tell me? Then we can decide what to do next. Maybe you’ll decide to tell your teacher yourself, or maybe you’ll decide that you want me to join you.”



"Maybe you should stay home today, and we can practice some things you might say the next time Jake decides to pick on you," said Sam's mother.

Sam smiled and felt happy that his mother understood.

"What do you think Jake is trying to do when he picks on you?" asked Sam's mother.

Sam thought for a few minutes. "I think that sometimes Jake is trying to get everyone to laugh, but he also teases me when no one is around," said Sam.

"OK," said Sam's mother, "the next time Jake calls you a name, you could try this."

"First, put up your hand and say, 'Hold on a minute.' "



“Then, you could say something like this,” said Sam’s mother.

“Maybe you were just kidding around when you called me a loser, but I didn’t take it as a joke. I am not going to call you names, and I want you to stop calling me names. Now, is there a problem we have to work out?”

Sam thought about this for a moment. “That’s good, Mom, but what if he still laughs and walks away?”

“Well, that wouldn’t be so bad, would it? It may be hard for Jake to say he’s sorry, but you can tell you did a good job with your message if he stops and leaves you alone.”

“Here’s another way of telling Jake that you won’t put up with being called names.”

“Hold on, Jake. I guess you are going to keep calling me names if that’s really what you want to do, but you could also decide to stop and let us have a normal conversation. If you want to treat me with respect, I’ll be happy to stay here and talk. Otherwise, I’m leaving.”

Sam was starting to understand that he would have to build up the courage to say something to Jake. Up until now, he had just run away and avoided Jake whenever he could, but that was not solving the problem.

Sam’s mother was happy to see that Sam was beginning to smile a little bit.

“I’m beginning to get it,” said Sam. “When Jake or someone else bothers me, and I want the behavior to stop, I will have to say something that shows that I am not going to cry or run away. I need to speak up for myself.”

Sam knew this was not going to be easy, so he asked his mother if they could practice.

“What a good idea, Sam. I think practicing will help you feel more confident. But before we practice, here are a few more short statements you could try.”

“Hold on, Jake. I don’t mistreat others, and I don’t allow others to mistreat me. So stop calling me names.”

“Here’s another one,” said Sam’s mother.

“Maybe you haven’t heard, but this school has a policy against bullying. If someone hears you say things like that, they will report you.”

“And here is one more,” said Sam’s mother.

“All right, we’re done here. I’ve had enough. I’m leaving.”

Sam was feeling excited about trying these out.

“There’s one final idea I want to give you before we get started,” said Sam’s mother. “Because it takes courage to speak up when someone’s mistreating you, you might want to try some ‘self-talk.’ You could say to yourself, ‘I have every right to be respected,’ or ‘I know I can do this,’ or ‘I am brave and strong,’ or ‘I feel good about speaking up, no matter what happens.’”

“OK, Sam, now let’s practice. Pretend that I’m Jake, and I just called you a nerd in front of your friends. Before you start, remember to build up your courage with self-talk, take a deep breath, make eye contact, and start with the ‘Stop’ signal.”



Sam and his mother spent the next hour practicing all the ideas Sam had learned. Even though it was

serious practice, Sam and his mom had a few laughs. During one role-play, Sam said, "Jake, maybe you meant that as a joke, but that isn't how I took it. I guess if you really want to call me names, you will, but then I'll find a way to get even with you."

His mom laughed and said, "I know there is a part of you that would really like to get even with Jake and put him in his place. But if you threaten him, you will be doing the same thing he does. But you know what? Jake has probably never met a person who can use words like you can, and I'll bet you will end up making your point anyway. It will just be in an assertive way, not an aggressive way. You will look strong...and smart."

"What does 'assertive' mean, Mom?" asked Sam.

"Being assertive means saying what you think and want with confidence," answered Sam's mother. "I know you can do it, Sam."

By lunch time, Sam was feeling so good that he wanted to go to school for the afternoon.

Before Sam left, his mother said to him, “Sam, you don’t deserve to have anyone hurt you. If Jake doesn’t stop what he is doing to you, I want you to tell me so we can talk with your teacher about it. Sometimes even grown-ups need help from other grown-ups, like the police, when people won’t stop doing harmful things. No matter how well you deliver your message to Jake, there is no guarantee he will change. But even if he doesn’t, you can feel very good about speaking up for yourself in a strong way. Speaking up assertively doesn’t always make other people change, but it always makes us feel better to say what’s on our minds.”

Sam walked to school after lunch, and he entered his classroom with new confidence. In fact, he almost wanted Jake to say something mean to him so he could use one of the statements his mother taught him. Sure enough, he wasn’t disappointed.



When the bell rang, everyone filed into the hall to get their coats. Jake walked over to Sam and said, "Hey, Sam, what's the matter? Did Mama's little baby stay home to watch cartoons this morning?"

Jake turned around to see if anyone was laughing, but before he knew it, Sam said, "Hold on, Jake. I guess you'll keep on calling me names if that's what you want to do, but if you decide to stop, we could have a normal conversation. If you treat me with respect, I'll talk to you. Otherwise, I'm leaving."

Jake was left standing in the hallway and, for once, he didn't have another word to say. Some of Sam's classmates cheered and patted Sam on the back. Sam realized that he was not the only one being picked on by Jake.

Sam went home that evening and told his mother what happened. "I'm proud of you, Sam. I know that must have been hard, but it will be easier next time, and before long, Jake will have nothing more to say to you."

Sam went to bed that night feeling happy knowing that he had taken a stand and spoken up. Although he suspected that Jake might leave him alone from now on, he smiled thinking about what he would say next time.



Sam Takes a Stand: Ideas for Adult Coaches

First of all, thank you for your willingness to help young people navigate the tricky waters of social competency. Most of us had to learn the skills for getting along with others without direct instruction. If we were lucky, we had adults in our lives who modeled social competencies for us, whether they ever taught them directly or not. While we are very grateful for what we did learn, many of us were left with holes in our learning: we might have learned good listening skills, but we missed out on negotiation skills, or perhaps we learned how to read the expressions on people's faces, but never learned how to verbally express empathy.

The stories in the Sam series are all designed to give parents and teachers tools for educating their children on the more challenging social competencies. With our help, maybe our children won't have to learn the hard way.

Most adults would agree that assertiveness is one of the most difficult social skills to master. In *Sam Takes a Stand*, Sam's mother defines assertiveness as "being able to say what you think or want, with confidence." If you asked most adults, they would describe assertiveness as the happy medium between passivity (never speaking up on your own behalf) and aggressiveness (always demanding what you want, regardless of the feelings and needs of others).

In *Sam and the Goodwill Sandwich*, Sam learned to express himself

in an effective way with Lucas, a friend who had hurt Sam's feelings accidentally. In *Sam Takes a Stand*, Sam learns how to speak up on his own behalf with Jake, a boy Sam would not choose to have as a friend.

Sadly, learning to deal with put-downs, mean jokes, demeaning comments, teasing, and verbal abuse, without resorting to counterattack or aggression, is a task that most of our children have to learn today. We hope this story will allow you to help your children learn verbal strategies for leaving abusive situations with their dignity intact.

How to Help

The types of skills we are talking about are not in the domain of what we would call 'natural language.' Because people don't usually talk this way, children will need practice and coaching in order to make these verbal techniques work effectively. Perhaps it would be a useful idea to help your children learn one piece of the technique at a time.

Skill One: Recognizing Abuse

As simple as it seems to adults, sometimes it is hard for children to recognize the difference between abuse and friendly teasing. Some of the questions we might ask them include:

Does this person hurt your feelings very often?

Do you have as many good times with this person as bad times?

Is the person usually nice, but he/she made a mistake this time?

Does the person seem to enjoy making you feel bad?
If you ask the person to stop, does he or she?
Does being around this person make you feel bad about yourself?

Skill Two: Preparing to Speak Up

Some difficult conversations take rehearsal...some really difficult ones require us to psych ourselves up. In the story, Sam's mom teaches him a concept called 'self-talk.' It is a valuable skill to learn. It means using short, direct, powerful statements to encourage yourself, telling yourself things that make you feel worthy and valuable and competent. Since so much of communication takes place in the realm of nonverbal signals, helping our children be prepared inwardly will help them look and sound confident and strong when they do the speaking parts that will come next. Sam's mother gives him some good statements to think. Others might be:

"I can do this."

"I deserve to be treated well."

"I am strong and confident."

"I have every right to speak up for myself."

You'll notice that all these self-statements are positive, and none of them are directed toward the other person's character. Sam's mother does not coach him to say, "Jake is a jerk, and I'll put him in his place." Self-talk is always about our own strengths, and never about the other person's weaknesses.

Skill Three: Interrupting the Negativity

Before Sam can speak up for himself, he needs the verbal air space to do it. In the story, Sam's mother teaches him the nonverbal strategy of holding up his hand in the 'stop' position (hand up, palm facing toward the other person). This gesture is almost universally recognized as a sign for someone to stop whatever it is that person is doing. Even if the other person does not pay attention to the sign, the person making the sign has made a move to escape the 'target' role. By adding the words, "Hold it," Sam harnesses his verbal and physical energies in a powerful way.

Skill Four: Getting the Aggressor to Listen

This step is hard, even for adults. The most natural tendency when we are being mistreated is to either: 1) go on the attack and tell the other person how bad or wrong he or she is, or 2) simply leave the scene without speaking up. Neither of these strategies is likely to end the problem.

Getting the aggressor to listen calls for something unexpected: to give the aggressor a chance to save face. To do this, the speaker says something to give the aggressor an out, such as:

"Maybe you're just kidding around..."

"Maybe you don't think this is a big deal..."

"Maybe you're having a bad day..."

Skill Five: Stating Your Own Perspective

Have your child finish the sentences above with lines that express his or her own perspective, like:

"Maybe you are just kidding around, but I don't think this is funny."

"Maybe you don't think this is a big deal, but I do."

"Maybe you are having a bad day, but it isn't fair to take it out on me."

Skill Six: Express a Positive Preference but Be Ready to Exit

A lot of times, coming up with a graceful exit allows targeted children to feel stronger. While we cannot expect aggressors who are acting in a bullying fashion to apologize, we can certainly limit our exposure to negativity and walk away with our dignity intact.

"If you want to have a normal conversation, fine. Otherwise, we're finished here."

"Is there something we need to talk about that is making you so angry? If you can talk about it without the insults, I'll listen. Otherwise, I'm out of here."

"I'm not insulting you, and I don't want you insulting me. Stop it or I'm leaving."

"I'm not playing the putdown game. Can we talk about something else or are we finished?"

Skill Seven: Get Help, if Necessary

No one deserves to be victimized by anyone else. We can teach our children that even grown-ups need help sometimes, when people who are acting in a harmful way will not stop their destructive behavior. Let's give our children a way to speak up assertively and seek help in a way that will gain them more adult support.

"Ms. Jones, I tried talking with Joe, but he is still bothering me. I am not tattling...I'm asking for help."

"Mr. Smith, I have tried everything I know to get Jaamal to stop calling me names and pushing me around. I don't know what else to do, and I do not want to get aggressive back. Can you help me out here?"

Practice, Practice, Practice!

It can't be emphasized enough that these skills must be practiced over and over again before they can be expressed smoothly. In a way, it is much like a foreign language; your child will sound awkward at first, but will become more fluent in the "language of assertion" the more he or she practices the technique out loud.

Conclusion:

Assertiveness won't always get us the desired outcomes. Sadly, other people will not always change their behavior. Assertiveness is really about feeling worthy or expressing our own truths and preferences in an ethical fashion that does not perpetuate the cycle of overpowering others with force. We can help our children feel good about speaking up on their own behalf, regardless of what the aggressors might do or say.

Thank you for being the caring and aware coach that you are!



About Peaceful Schools International



Peaceful Schools
International

Peaceful Schools International (PSI) is a nonprofit, charitable organization with the mission of supporting schools as they work to develop innovative programs and policies to ensure that everyone in the school feels safe, valued and respected.

Schools wishing to celebrate their commitment to creating a school-wide culture of peace can become members of PSI through a simple, voluntary application process. PSI provides ongoing support to its members through a web site, newsletters and other resources and workshops. As of 2009, PSI has involved 300 schools in 14 countries.

PSI celebrates peaceful schools around the world.
For more information visit:

<http://www.peacefulschoolsinternational.org>

Resources from Peaceful Schools International

available at <https://store.peacefulschoolsinternational.com/>

Peace in the Classroom - Hetty van Gurp (Adams)

An entertaining collection of creative activities to use in the classroom to promote peace. A very usable resource. K-8.

The Peaceful School: Models that Work - Hetty van Gurp

Explores many practical ways that schools can develop a culture of peace, by sharing ideas and approaches from 20 schools across Canada. The original materials, activities, events and other resources they developed are reproduced here, helping students to learn about cooperation, respect, effective communication, diversity, expressing emotion and resolving conflict.

Peer Mediation: A Complete Guide - Hetty van Gurp

This book is designed for those who understand the philosophy of conflict resolution and peer mediation and are looking for practical tools to implement it. The book includes games, role-plays, worksheets and exercises to train mediators in the nature of conflict, the process of mediation and communication skills.

Creating Caring Schools: Peace-promoting activities for all seasons -

Hetty van Gurp

This book for elementary and secondary teachers and administrators includes over 30 practical school-wide initiatives with many variations, CD and sheet music for the original song "The Right Thing to Do" and a full cross-listing index.

Peace@School - This toolkit consists of two DVDs and a set of three guidebooks. It includes two critically acclaimed films directed by award-winning filmmaker Teresa MacInnes and produced by the National Film Board of Canada. *Waging Peace* follows a year of change at a junior high, while *Learning Peace* shows an elementary school that has integrated peace education into its curriculum, with amazing results. (Available in French and English.)

About the Authors



Hetty van Gorp, founder of Peaceful Schools International, is an internationally recognized educator and author and an inspiring and passionate presenter. She is the author of several books and many educational materials. Her accomplishments are the subject of a National Film Board of Canada documentary film entitled "Teaching Peace in a Time of War." In 2006 Hetty was named as a Canadian hero by ***Time*** magazine. ***Reader's Digest*** also recognized Hetty as a Canadian hero in 2007.



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When Sam is teased by a classmate, he tries the 'Goodwill Sandwich' approach his father taught him. Sam learns that this approach does not always work.

In Sam Takes a Stand, Sam's mother teaches him how to be assertive when he encounters verbal abuse. Sam practices at home and the next day, he gets to use his new skills when Jake makes fun of him.

Assertiveness: "being able to say what you think or want, with confidence."

Included in this book is a guide for adults.

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