

New York Times and International Best-Selling Author of *Unstoppable*

NICK VUJICIC

STAND STRONG

You Can Overcome Bullying
(and Other Stuff That Keeps You Down)

STAND
STRONG

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Life Without Limits

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This book, which strives to help put an end to the global bullying epidemic, is dedicated to my son, Kiyoshi, in hopes that my child and yours will grow up in a better and kinder world.



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One

Why Me? Why You?

You are not alone.
Bullying is a global
epidemic.

am a bully's dream, no doubt about it.

No arms. No legs. No defense.

Born without limbs for reasons never determined, I was blessed in so many other ways. My greatest blessing was a loving and supportive family. They sheltered and encouraged me for the first years of my life. But once I left the protective shelter of family for the hallways and playgrounds of elementary school, I felt like I had a target on my chest that said, "Bullies, aim here."

I felt alone in my fear of bullies, but I wasn't alone. And neither are you.

If you've been bullied, the first thing you need to understand is that their attacks, taunts, and mean acts aren't really about you, any flaws you might have, or anything you might have done. Bullies have their own issues. They pick on you to make themselves feel better, to vent their anger, to feel more powerful, or even because they can't think of anything else to do.

I know it's lame, but it's true.

When I was a teenager, I wasted a lot of time trying to figure out why bullies picked on me. There was one guy in particular who really got inside my head. He bullied everybody, but for some reason I took it personally. I obsessed over his motives. Finally I realized that his bullying wasn't about my problems. It was about his.

You may have a bully who has had the same impact on you, getting inside your head, knotting your stomach with stress, and tormenting your dreams because you can't figure out why you are the target. I'm here to ease your mind and lighten that burden.

Your bully's motives don't matter. You do.

Your safety and your happiness are important to me and everyone else who loves and cares about you; so instead of focusing on why a bully is picking on you, let's focus on helping you feel secure and happy again.

Does that sound like a plan? I think so!

But before we move on, I want you to know that there is no single infallible strategy for dealing one on one with bullies. And I certainly don't recommend you resort to violence if you can help it! Don't ever let a bully lure you into a fight. If a bully attacks you, defend yourself; but get away as fast as you can. If you have any reason to think a bully is going to harm you physically, you need to talk to an adult who can help you before that happens.

THE BULLYING EPIDEMIC

It's important to understand from the beginning that many people share your pain in dealing with this problem. Being bullied, sadly, is as common as catching a cold or stubbing your toe. I travel all over the world talking to young people about this issue. No matter where I go, bullying is a major topic of concern. Teens in every school in every town and every country tell me they have mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual pain because of being bullied.

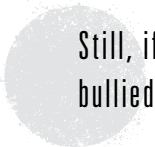
A teen in China told me that he'd tried to commit suicide eight times because of being bullied at school. A cute little Korean girl in Boise, Idaho, came up to me crying after I gave a speech on bullying. She said, "I get teased every day about being Korean because I'm the only Asian in the whole school."

I hear similar stories from bullying victims in Chile, Brazil, Australia, Russia, Serbia, and around the world. Bullying is everywhere, and it takes many forms. Most of us are familiar with childhood bullies who threaten to beat us up, make fun of us, or turn friends against us. Adults may experience bullying in the form of sexual harassment or as discrimination based on race, religion, sexual identity, or disabilities. Bullies can be your boss, coworkers, teachers, coaches, boyfriends, or girlfriends—anyone who abuses his power or position.

It's sad to say, but parents can be bullies too. Suicides are a

major problem among young people in Asia, and part of the problem is that many teens are under incredible pressure to earn top grades so they can make it into the best schools and get the best jobs for the most pay. Parents naturally want their children to do well, but when a mother and father give love and support only if their child is successful in their eyes, it is a form of bullying. There was one case in which the parents burned their child with cigarettes because her grades were not up to their standards. That's an extreme case to be sure, but I've encountered similar stories around the world.

The most common bullying experience is being taunted or ridiculed for being "different" in some way. I'm the poster child for this. For most of my life, I've been a bully magnet. I've heard every imaginable nasty comment about my lack of limbs. Cruel jokes. Even physical threats.



Still, if you are being
bullied, it hurts.

It didn't help that my family moved a couple of times when I was in school. We went from one side of Australia to the other, then we moved to the United States and back again. At each new school, I wasn't just the only kid with no arms and no legs; I was usually the only kid in a wheelchair. When we moved to the United States, I hit the bully-target trifecta: I was the only

kid in my school with no arms and no legs, the only kid in a wheelchair, *and* the only kid with an Australian accent!

Different? *Me, mate?*

Sure, I stood out from the crowd and the fact that I was often the new kid without friends made me an even easier target. But I realized early on that bullies would find a reason to pick on anyone. They called the smart kids “nerds,” the tall kids “bird legs,” and the short kids “runts.” If perfect people existed, bullies probably would mock them for being “too perfect.”

Still, if you are being bullied, it hurts. It’s a terrible experience that often seems like it will never end. As someone who endured it throughout my teenage years and still runs into it from time to time, I want to give you hope and peace. You can rise above and beyond it.

RISING ABOVE

God put you on this earth because He loves you and He has a plan for you. With His help, and the guidance offered in this book, you will be able to put your bullies in their proper place so their taunts and shunning won’t matter to you. My experience proves that anyone can rise above bullying and have a ridiculously wonderful life. I know you can do the same.

To help you begin, I want to plant a thought in your brain. This is blatant mind control, of course; so if you want to block

it, go ahead and put tinfoil around your head. (It will look silly, but that's okay with me if it's okay with you.) The thought I want you to consider is that while being bullied is an awful thing to go through, it can also be a great opportunity.

I know what you are thinking: *Nick must have been kicked in the head by a kangaroo!* No, it was a wallaby. But aside from that, I believe you can turn your evil bully into a source for good in your life. Instead of letting your antagonist drive you nuts, depress you, dog your every thought, ruin your sleep, and stomp all over your dreams, why not turn the tables?

While being bullied is an awful thing to go through, it can also be a great opportunity.

Bullies want to abuse you. Instead of allowing that, you can use them as your personal motivators. Power up and let the bully eat your dust. In the pages that follow, I will help you build your antibully antibodies. This is a process that works by building strength from the inside out, from your deepest thoughts and feelings—your heart and soul—to the way you see the world, make decisions, and take actions. You build your bully defense system from the inside out by

1. figuring out who you are so no bully can tell you differently or make you feel badly;

2. taking responsibility for your own behavior and happiness so bullies have no ultimate power over you;
3. establishing strong values that no bully can shake;
4. creating a safety zone within yourself where you can go mentally to draw strength and comfort;
5. building strong and supportive relationships to stand up for you against bullies;
6. learning to monitor and manage your responses to the emotions triggered by bullying;
7. developing a spiritual foundation to help you be at peace and be strong against bullying;
8. taking the opportunity to learn from your bullying experience so that you can become stronger, wiser, more confident, more faith filled, and more prepared to handle any challenges;
9. creating your bully defense strategy so you are prepared to handle bullies of all kinds; and
10. mastering empathy so you are aware of the needs of others and serve them whenever possible to help them overcome bullying.

Once all those things are in place, you will have your own bully defense system. Then you can join me in working to eradicate the epidemic of bullying so no one else has to suffer. Together, with God's help, we can bring an end to the bullying epidemic.

Too often people who are bullied become bullies themselves. It's a vicious cycle, and one of my goals in writing this book is to break it by first helping you so you can then help me and all the others around the globe dedicated to ridding the world of bullying.

We can do this. We can band together and make this a bully-free world. In 2012, I visited a school in Hawaii to talk about bullying. About a year later, the headmaster sent me a letter saying that my visit had changed the school. He said they did not have a single instance of bullying for an entire year after I talked to the students!

You are taking the first step in joining this campaign by reading this book. Please, when you are done, pass it on to others. Share what you've learned from it with your siblings, friends, parents, teachers, and anyone else you think might benefit.

If you are a teen and you are overwhelmed by bullying in any form, this book will help you understand that the game bullies play is designed to make you feel bad so they can feel superior. Refuse to play that game. Instead, believe those who love you when we say you matter to us and to your Creator. You are a child of God, created in His image. You are beautiful. You are the perfectly unique *you*.

That doesn't mean you are flawless, but that's the beauty of it. We are all perfect and imperfect at the same time. God

designed us this way because there is beauty in both, and purpose too.

After reading this book, you will be able to make the following statements with confidence and clarity:

- Bullies can't hurt me or define me because I have defined myself. I know who I am and where I am going.
- I don't give anyone else the power to make me feel badly. I take responsibility for my own happiness.
- My values are unshakable. I have a plan for my life guided by them.
- My strength comes from within, and no bully can make me feel insecure.
- I know my family and friends will always stand up for me, just as I will for them.
- I am aware of my emotions, especially anger and fear, and I control my response to them so that I stay positive in my thoughts and actions.
- My spiritual life is strong and empowering. I know I was created for a purpose and I am loved unconditionally. Where I am weak, my Creator is strong.
- I find something positive to take away from every challenge, including being bullied.
- I reach out to help others at every opportunity, especially those who are being bullied in any way.

Together we will build your bully defense system. You will feel stronger than you've ever felt, and you will be better prepared to face all the challenges life might throw at you.

I love you.

Nick's Notes for Chapter One

- Bullying is a global epidemic. So if you are being bullied, you are not alone—and there is plenty of help available.
- When a bully picks on you, it isn't about you or any flaws you might have; it's about the bully's own issues. So try not to take it personally.
- There is no single infallible strategy for dealing with each and every bully. Your best bet is to work on building strength from within and strategies for every scenario you might face.
- If a bully attacks you, defend yourself; but get away as fast as you can. If you have any reason to think a bully is going to harm you physically, you need to talk to an adult who can help you before that happens.



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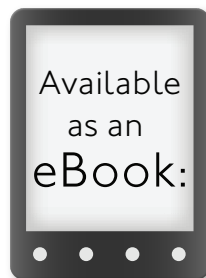
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