

STANDING UP TO BULLIES

By Kevin Loughery

Once bullied as a child, Brad Perkins of Austin, Texas, uses taekwondo instruction and the Tenets of Taekwondo as a means to thwart bullying in his community, instill self-confidence and teach students to respect others and themselves.



How did you get involved in the anti-bully movement?

One of the reasons I got into taekwondo was because I was bullied in middle school. A friend of mine did a taekwondo demonstration at the Texas State Capitol back in June at an anti-bullying rally. He asked me and my school if we wanted to come perform, and we did. We did a demonstration, and I talked a bit about how martial arts can help with bullying without using physical contact. From that point on, it led to other events. That rally is what prompted the whole thing.

What is your taekwondo background?

I didn't take taekwondo until I was in the Navy, years after being bullied. I was afraid to go into a martial arts school as a child. I was too intimidated to walk in because I was afraid of getting broken in 20 different places. That was what I thought about martial arts schools at the time.

I learned taekwondo aboard an aircraft carrier during Desert Storm. It really taught me self-confidence, and that was what I needed. I was really lacking self-confidence at the time.

Taekwondo is such a physical sport.

How is teaching kids physicality a way to thwart bullying?

Of course, in school systems, you're not allowed to punch or strike. I teach my kids that they can block if someone throws a punch at you or grabs you, and you're able to disarm them. It is self-defense. But from there, you can also step back. I give

examples that if a bully throws a punch, just to step away from the punch if you can or block it. Don't attack because then you're part of the situation.

You own and operate a dojang in Texas. Tell us about it.

I started the school back in 2009. The name of the school is Maximum Taekwondo and Yoga, and I'm teaching out of my house right now. I converted my garage into a dojang, and I cut a big one-way mirror through the living room into the garage so that parents could look in. Right now I am working to open a larger location in Austin, hopefully, by January.

Your can read about my approach on my website at www.Maxtaekwondoyoga.com. Like all taekwondo schools, I teach the Tenets of Taekwondo, focusing on honesty, having courage and stepping up. With that approach, I've had a couple of students—one being my son—step up to bullies and stop them from attacking other people without even using taekwondo, just using their words, energy, confidence and not backing down.

That's what I try to instill in the students: you don't need to use violence or any physical contact at all to confront a bully. You just need to understand that they are insecure themselves and if you show courage and confidence they will back down.

That's what I impress upon my students and at these seminars. The bullies themselves are intimidated and insecure, but they have an advantage over you in that they take your

power away from you. What you need to do is take it back through the Tenets of Taekwondo.

How is your school different than most?

This is a trick question to answer without trying to offend any schools. I'm designing my school to be an anti-bully school. I've been in taekwondo for a long time, and I've been to a lot of schools, many of which focus on competition. The competition aspect is fine, but I don't care if my students are great performers. I want people who may be insecure, afraid, or who want to learn but are afraid to put their foot in the front door like I was when I was a kid. I want those kinds of people to let them know that there is help, and within their own actions, they can make improvements. I would also like this approach to spread throughout other martial arts schools. I want schools to teach some aspect of an anti-bullying program and how to break away from bullies with different types of self-defense. Bullying is an epidemic; it's getting worse and worse, especially here in Texas. I would like to have schools be anti-bully zones.

How else do you work to stop bullying in your community?

What I do with the anti-bully movement is work with central-Texas anti-bully groups and other martial artists. We're going to public schools, private schools and recreation centers talking about what bullying is, anti-bullying, solutions on how to deal with bullies and how taekwondo can help be a solution to bullying.