

## *I Want my Child to Be Tough, But Not to Be a Bully*

Every parent says it. No parent wants his/her child to be picked on, to be cowardly, to live fearfully, but few parents want their child to be the one who does the picking or inspires the fear, either.

There are exceptions — those parents who do not see that there is a choice. Dad says, “No child of mine is going to be bullied!” and what he is willing to tolerate is his child being a tormentor of innocents. That is like the salesperson who assumes “it is either them or me,” implying that somehow if he does not get the sale, the customer has taken money out of his pocket. It is certainly easier to see things as either black or white, either him or me, either bullied or bully.

One of the reasons martial arts clubs exist is to help both adults and kids learn to protect themselves. This means that at some point they have to face their fears. One way to do that is to get really angry. If you get angry enough, you can attempt anything, but too much anger also makes you lose both control and judgment. How do you achieve a balance between the anger that makes you tough and the control that prevents you from being too rough?

Part of the solution is considering what “tough” and “rough” really mean. To be tough, in my vocabulary, is to be able to “take it.” To be rough, in that same lexicon, is to “dish it out.” To most people, *rough* is preferred for the above stated reasons: better to be the giver than the taker, but being *tough* (able-to-take-it) implies self-control, a hard hide, mental tolerance — the first and perhaps most important phase of self-defense. If you could not take it, you’d be dishing it out every time someone crossed his eyes at you.

The second phase of self-defense is still not “rough” as yet: it is simply fending off aggression. You have to be *tough* to do this, to be sure, but you don’t have to necessarily return the aggression. That is the third stage, the counter-aggressive stage where your tough resilience must be turned back on the opponent. There is a level of *roughness* here, but not necessarily a level that equals that of the aggressor.

So, even at the third level of self-defense, only a modicum, perhaps as much as a third-measure, of roughness is implied. That means it is possible for you to protect yourself without having to get too rough, without having to lose control, perhaps without having to get angry.

In the dojo, I use the word “intensity” and “intent” a lot. A beginning student may find that anger helps intensity, but an experienced student understands that anger may actually cloud her focused intensity and intent. As mentioned above, anger is the emotion most easily accessible and convenient to use — it is not necessarily the most efficient.

There is a distinct difference from wanting a child *to be able* to do something and wanting him to *do* it. We want our nation to be able to go to war if necessary and have aggressor nations think twice about crossing us, but we don’t actually want to go to war. We don’t even want to actually swing our weight around too much because threats, even without action, are still aggression. This balancing act between self-control and action,

ability to deal with aggression and actually being aggressive is called “martial etiquette.” If you wonder why your child is required to be on time, wear a clean uniform, line up quietly, and bow respectfully, it is because he or she is being taught to deal with aggression, not the bully’s necessarily, but his own.