they the best ways to protect kids and others from the worst forms of bullying? For them to have a fighting chance, let’s first dispense with a few popular fallacies about getting picked on in America.

Myth 1: Most Bullying Now Happens Online

Cyber-bullying has received enormous attention since the 2006 suicide of Megan Meier, an eighth-grader who was bullied on MySpace. The suicide of Rutgers freshman Tyler Clementi—who jumped off the George Washington Bridge near Manhattan in September [2010] after his roommate streamed video of a sexual encounter between Clementi and another male student online—also grabbed headlines.

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As tragic as they are, these high-profile cases should not distract from more traditional—and more prevalent—forms of bullying. Whether battling rumors about their sexual orientation, enduring criticism of their clothes or getting pushed around at recess, kids are bullied offline all the time. While it’s hard to stereotype bullying behavior in every school in every town in America, experts agree that at least 25 percent of students across the nation are bullied in traditional ways: hit, shoved, kicked, gossiped about, intimidated or excluded from social groups.

In a recent survey of more than 40,000 U.S. high school students conducted by the Josephson Institute, which focuses on ethics, 47 percent said they were bullied in the past year. But, according to the 2007 book Cyber Bullying, as few as 10 percent of bullying victims are cyber-bullied. Meanwhile, a
study of fifth, eighth and 11th graders in Colorado that same year found that they were more likely to be bullied verbally or physically than online.

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Of course, with increased access to computers, cellphones, and wireless Internet—not to mention the exploding popularity of social media sites—cyber-bullying will be on the rise in the coming years. But for now, traditional forms of bullying are more common.

Myth 2: Bullies Are Bullies and Victims Are Victims

Actually, it is common for kids who are bullied at home by an older sibling or abused by a parent to become bullies themselves at school. Domestic violence and bullying feed each other. Researchers have found that elementary school bullies are more likely than non-bullies to have witnessed domestic violence during their preschool years. According to a 2007 study of bullying in Japan, South Africa and the United States, 72 percent of children who were physically abused by their parents became a bully, a victim of a bully or both.

But taking out their frustrations on kids at school doesn’t help bullies. Researchers have found that bullies who are bullied themselves have higher rates of depression, anxiety, anger and low self-esteem than kids who are only bullies, only victims or who are not involved in bullying at all.

Myth 3: Bullying Ends When You Grow Up

Bullying is negative, mean, repetitive behavior that occurs in a relationship characterized by an imbalance of power. It can happen in a middle school—but it can also happen in an of-