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- Home
- About Us
- Blog with editor Carrie Wattu
- Feature Articles
- Calendar
- Giveaways
- Contact

- SHOPPING
- PARTY PLANNER
- BULLETIN BOARD
- SCHOOLS & INSTRUCTION
- CAMPS
- ADVERTISER INDEX



## Ooch

A Super-POWER Against Bullies  
**BY lauren passaretti**



When Brett Outchunis was a boy growing up in Wareham, he was picked on for his unique last name. The kids turned Outchunis into, "Oochy-koochy," but it was when Brett started taking dance lessons that he recalls, "That was it." Brett was *bullied*.

While Brett had a loving family to support him, he realizes now that he was also sheltered and naïve. "I was confused why I was the target of teasing because I enjoyed dancing. I just wanted to be famous growing up," he says.

Fortunately for Brett, he was able to find ways to fight off some of the taunting and bullying with the help of Tae Kwon-Do and an unexpected defense...

One summer before heading off to summer camp in Maine, where he would be the new kid amongst regular returning campers, his dad handed him a yo-yo and told him to bring it along. "That was it for me," says Brett, "I was the only kid at camp with a yo-yo. I figured it out there... all the possibilities... and it was one of the best weeks I ever had. That week defined me, made me different."

Now, at age 34, Brett realizes that not everyone is as lucky as he was to have found an outlet to build his self confidence and handle bullies, even if it was as simple as a yo-yo. This is why Brett has dedicated his life to empowering kids through interactive and inspiring performances that combine his skills as an entertainer, motivator, dancer, DJ, and of course, "yo-yoer." "I can take a yo-yo and apply it to a real world concept. My delivery is unique," he says.

Brett travels to different New England schools speaking to students on topics ranging from positive life choices to academic excellence. His new performance entitled, Super-POWER, is designed specifically to address the topic of bullying.

### Someone NEEDS to Stand Up and Do Something

After researching bullying and speaking with specialists, Brett was further convinced of the need for anti-bullying programming. "Building up our ability to fight bullying is so important for kids during the fundamental years," he says, "we only have a small window of opportunity to try and build confidence in kids, to get to them while the cement is still wet."

Super-POWER is a 60-minute performance for children in grades 1-6 to help them focus on the great power each student can develop by using his or her own unique qualities and talents, i.e., superpowers. These "superpowers" are then applied to common bullying scenarios.

A superpower is "something about you that people notice as cool. Something you are good at, a talent you are proud of," explains Brett, "I believe everybody has something."

In fact, Super-POWER is now one of Brett's favorite performances. "Kids want to know 'why am I getting bullied and how can I avoid it?' That's what they are interested in, not statistics," he says.

When asked how recent bully-driven teen suicides, Pheobe Prince, age 15, from South Hadley, and Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, age 11, from Springfield, have affected him and his performances, Brett is hit hard. Putting his head down, he answers, "It can make me feel helpless but at the same time motivates me more. Someone needs to stand up and do something, and if that someone can reach out to kids then let it be me."

### Not Your TYPICAL School Assembly

As Brett makes his way around a cafeteria filled with Franklin Middle School students, he tosses Goldfish in his mouth, chatting and laughing. There's a zing in his bright orange step (he wears legendary orange shoes for all his performances). It doesn't take long to see the powerful connection Ooch has with kids. Eager hands shoot into the air hoping for the chance to answer one of his questions.

As he begins his "Doing What You Love and Succeeding: Too Good For Drugs" program, the music bumps in the background, Black Eyed Peas in fact, and Ooch fist-pumps his way around the room. This is not your typical assembly as Ooch climbs on stage and captivates the crowd with words like "sweet, sketchy, and snap!" The laughter is immediate.

Brett is not here to preach about the deadly reasons why one should avoid drugs and alcohol; he is here to be real. As someone who has never had a sip of alcohol in his whole life or smoked a cigarette, he acknowledges to his audience that "you won't meet too many people like me." While he fully admits this is a tough decision to make, he tell kids that they don't need drugs and alcohol especially if they want to be like him. And why shouldn't they? After all, he says, "I wake up at 12, go to Dunkin' Donuts, and then I meet with my clients, a.k.a, you guys!" His fingers points to the crowd. "I have fun anywhere I go."

And sometimes Brett thinks he has more fun on stage than the kids in the audience. "I have always treated kids like my peers, like my friends. Take the age out of it. Just respect them and let them know I am there for them," he says.

This respect and energy is what makes 5th grade boys come up and hug him after an assembly. In the days of confusing "role models" such as Miley Cyrus and Tiger Woods, this is to be cherished.

But, there is something else, something deeper that makes Brett's programs so successful. "I'm them," he says, "I'm every kid out there."

With performances booked through the summer, Brett couldn't be more psyched about his rise in popularity, "I feel ready. I've always wanted this, so it seems like it is the right time, everything is starting to click. I can't wait to see what the future brings....BRING IT ON!"

Lauren Passaretti is a frequent contributor to baystateparent Magazine. She lives in Holliston with her family.

For more about Ooch, his company, Ninepoints Entertainment, and his performances, visit oochworld.com.

### WORD-Proof Your Child Against Bullies

While an anti-harassment/bullying law has made its way to Beacon Hill, it will most likely be some time before the bill becomes an enforced law in Massachusetts schools. Until then, Ooch shares the following tips on how your child can combat bullying.

#### The POWER of the Bystander

Kids need to inform an adult or teacher about the bully. This can be a scary thing, and no one wants to be the "tattle-tale;" however, when bullying goes unnoticed, that's when it becomes a problem. Parents can tell their children, "If you don't take any action against bullying, then you are in essence almost giving the bully permission to carry on in such a way."

Research has shown that 50% of the time when someone stands up to a bully, he or she will back down. Sometimes saying something funny will surprise the bully and catch him offguard. Not to mention, this often deems the child who stands up to the bully a hero.

Remind your child that she should never call more people over to watch a bullying situation. This only makes it worse by giving the bully more attention from a bigger audience.

#### Learn the Rules of What IS and ISN'T Bullying

Kids may think that they are just "teasing" when in fact they could be engaging in hurtful behavior that can turn into bullying. Talk to teachers and school officials about what constitutes "bullying." Make sure you and your child know.

#### POWER is in Numbers

Nobody has to deal with bullies alone. Whether your child is sticking up to a bully or reporting them, he should do it in a group or with his friends.

#### The IMPORTANCE of Family

"Good family values give kids a strong sense of self and confidence/security to fight bullying. They know where their love is coming from," says Brett.

"The bottom line," Brett says to families, "is to do what you need to do to feel safe!"

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The purpose behind my mission is to give kids something like Mr. Rogers gave kids: a sense of self," says Ooch, "When they leave my shows I want them to feel cool and know that there is something about them of value. Just as a kid watching Mr. Rogers, I felt like he was talking to me, just me. " " There is nothing like that anymore and I want to provide that.