



June 13, 2009

## Bullying is a major problem

Nearly 20 years ago, I decided that I would take on the issue of school bullying. This all came about after meeting a sixth-grade boy who tearfully told me that he was going to be beaten up on the school bus that afternoon. The slightly overweight youngster told me that he told his teacher, and she seemed annoyed, suggesting that he was tattling and that was not allowed in her classroom. He also told his principal who became angry with him, suggesting that he learn to be a man and take up for himself. This 12-year-old began to sob uncontrollably; the small desk that he was seated in shaking from his sobs.

Two thoughts were blazing across my mind at that time: Why would this child, why would any child, have to go through this kind of agony in school? How could any child actually learn anything, if their young mind is mostly concentrating on what form of verbal and/or physical abuse they will endure that day, and the days to follow?

The latest national statistics suggest that nearly 200,000 bullied children purposely miss school every day in the United States because they are afraid to go. These are children who actually told someone why they skipped school or ran away. Keep in mind that most children, especially boys, do not tell, either out of shame or fear that the adult, out of love and concern, or think that will make their life at school worse.

I remind kids of the importance of telling someone at school, especially your teacher, if anyone is being picked on.

And then I hear, "But Mr. Brown, we do tell them and they don't do anything, or they tell us to quit tattling on people." If I've heard this once from a student, I've heard it a thousand times. I then try to play the devil's advocate and give these overworked and underpaid teachers a little bit of leeway -- suggesting to the child to choose a time when your teacher isn't so busy, and then explain what is going on.

I came to the conclusion a long time ago, that most teachers, just like a lot of adults do not realize the severity of the bullying problem. They grew up hearing the same words that I heard: "Bullying is just a part of growing up." However, I would certainly hope that it is only a very small minority of teachers that tell a child to "quit tattling" when they say someone hit them or someone won't quit calling them names.

Surely, the child has been taught the difference between tattling on unimportant things and telling on things that matter, and in my opinion hitting, unwanted teasing and name-calling should matter.

I also tell kids that if the first grown-up you tell doesn't help, then tell someone else, but whatever you do, don't give up.

But some kids do give up. They give up on the kids that stand around and gawk at their torment without coming to their defense. But more chillingly, they give up on of life.

With guns, pills and rope, bullied children kill themselves. One bullied teen threw himself in front of a moving train while another cried out, "I can't take this anymore" and shot himself in front of his classmates. One youngster called his father and said goodbye, then shot himself. After being trapped

in a locker by a group of high school athletes who would only let him out if he yelled "I'm a fag!" over and over , a boy who had just started middle school went home to his basement and killed himself with a shotgun.

Aspiring band musicians, openly gay students, students wrongly perceived to be gay, kids with deformities, kids with various diseases and conditions, overweight children, kids who excel in learning, and so many more bullied kids from all walks of life destroy whatever it was that God chose them to be because life no longer seemed worth living.

And then there are the hit lists. We have bullied kids who are fed up with their treatment from peers, and sometimes the teachers who they feel do nothing about the torment. All get placed on a list for either planned or fantasized extermination. After all the terrible school shootings, school administrators and law enforcement have to treat hit lists as a real threat.

Some bullied children have turned a normal school day into a living nightmare. What would at one time have been impossible to imagine, is now etched in the darkest pages of history. Make no mistake about it, bullying did play a part in these school shootings.

A comprehensive study by the CIA and friends and peers of the shooters confirms this.

In the locker room, on the bus, in the halls, on the playground, in the lunchroom, kids say that bullying happens all the time.

What they sometimes don't realize, or maybe they do and just don't care, is the fact that they could do something about the bullying problem. The innocent bystanders outnumber the bullies 50 to one, and all it takes is the courage and will to stand up against those who seem to delight in destroying the spirits of others.

Some kids do try to help, and sometimes they end up taking a stand alone, like Max, a boy from Port Clinton, who told his teacher about a teased classmate.

The teacher stepped in and put a stop to the treatment.

"I tell my students that if they ever come to me and say that someone has hurt them or someone else, one of them better be bleeding."

"Bullying is a natural part of growing up."

I've actually heard these comments come from the mouths of intelligent, responsible and clear-thinking adults.

With statements like those, no wonder the school bullying problem is at an epidemic level, and a catalyst for numerous school shootings and suicides involving young people.

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