



MELINE KEVORKIAN AND ROBIN D'ANTONA

101 Facts
about

*What
Everyone
Should Know*

BULLYING

101 FACTS ABOUT BULLYING

What Everyone Should Know

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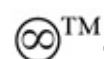
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INTRODUCTION

Today educators, parents, grandparents, social workers, law enforcement officers, psychologists, and all those involved in the lives of children and young adults are faced with issues of bullying. Along with the life pressures that our students face today, bullying ranks high on the list of tremendous challenges facing kids. This challenge has a great impact on their academic achievement, social interactions, and overall well-being.

Given the stakes, bullying prevention is a key responsibility for all adults. Educating and protecting kids from the abuse associated with bullying must be a priority. Learning environments should be designed with a focus on bullying prevention. The key to bullying prevention is creating a caring and positive school culture.

The first and most crucial step to bullying prevention and promoting peace is to separate the myths and facts and to gain awareness of what research says about bullying and its prevention. While there is an abundance of information on bullying, not all of it is based in quality research. In order to set the example for kids and to make any bullying-prevention plan successful, there must be a fundamental belief that bullying is a serious problem.

In addition, the stakeholders must feel empowered to act when bullying behavior is encountered. This book is designed to break down what the research says about bullying, including cyberbullying and its effects. It is our hope that this book will give you the practical information to reduce or even eliminate bullying.



MYTHS AND FACTS

Fact #1 Bullying is a reality! (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Acknowledging the fact that bullying is a serious issue confronting our children.

Research has suggested that many students are and will continue to be bullied. We live in a social world, and this is especially true in schools. One hundred percent of children are touched by bullying as a victim, perpetrator, or bystander. Bullying is a reality that must be recognized and addressed. Bullying and teasing are not simply a part of growing up.

These behaviors should not be tolerated or dismissed, especially when their consequences reach far beyond the classroom. The research is consistent that bullying and teasing create a fear and concern for safety that retards and stops the learning process and may have long-lasting negative effects.

In a recent study, 77 percent of students said they have been bullied, and 14 percent of those who have been bullied said they have experienced severe reactions to the abuse. According to *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (2001), in a national sample, 80 percent of boys and 79 percent of girls said they have been bullied.

Approximately 76 percent of this was nonphysical and approximately 60 percent was under the teacher's nose. More than half the students want to know how to stop it. Fifty percent of kids have received comments about their sexuality. Third graders through high schoolers say "faggot," "you're so gay," and "homo," with little or no regard for the pain they may cause. Such verbal abuse has become far too tolerable and often dismissed as kids' jargon.

Fact #2 Many children are bullied in school.

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Think about the fact that 55 percent of eight- to eleven-year-olds tell us that bullying is a problem, and then consider the children in your life.

According to a study conducted by Nickelodeon (2001), 74 percent of seven- to eleven-year-olds and 86 percent of twelve- to fifteen-year-olds indicated that children were bullied or teased in the schools. Additionally, 55 percent of eight- to eleven-year-olds and 68 percent of twelve- to fifteen-year-olds said that bullying was a “big problem” for people their age.

We seem to have full agreement that talking about drugs, alcohol, and peer pressure is a must for our youth. Our children are very vulnerable and can be overwhelmed and intimidated by general peer and school pressures. When bullying and teasing enter the equation, schools become a place of survival rather than a place of learning. Too often, our children are feeling like nobody can help when it comes to bullying. They often see it happening and don't know what to do to resolve the problem.

We have all seen infomercials and ads that talk about the importance of talking with our children about drugs and alcohol. We must do the same thing when it comes to protecting their self esteem, overall well-being, and sense of belonging. Bullying involves both physical and mental components and has the potential to cause long-term damage equal to or greater than the effects of drugs and alcohol. In many cases, drugs and alcohol may be utilized to escape from the hurt and torment associated with bullying and teasing.

One of the best things that we can do to combat bullying is to ask kids what they think. When we ask them about their school day we must ask about the unstructured part of the day. Ask questions such as, Who did you sit with at lunch? How often are kids bullied in your school? What happens to kids who are bullied? What happens to bullies?

There are so many pressures on educators to help children succeed in school and reach their potential. Yet, the key to success in school is eliminating bullying and building a culture of respect where all stake-holders are valued and diversity is embraced.

Fact #3 It happens in front of adults! (Hazler, Carney, & Granger, 2006)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Be aware that most bullying incidents happen in less than a minute and often in front of adults.

Hazler, Miller, Carney, and Green (2001) analyzed adult recognition of what constitutes bullying in schools. The results showed that physical conflicts were more often rated as bullying, even if they do not fit the definition of bullying, and that the repetitive nature of bullying is easily overlooked if it is perceived as a fair fight.

Educators and all those involved in education must receive the proper training to be able to identify what differentiates bullying from normal fighting or childhood banter. Bullying is a purposeful action that is intended to injure and involves both physical and mental components and imbalance of power.

Administrators and teachers tell us that classroom discipline and sustaining a school culture where all children can learn and grow emotionally and intellectually is a difficult task. The challenge is to foster a culture of respect by being an example of how to treat others; this is often lacking in teacher education programs. We become masters of the curricular and pedagogy but may not get the details necessary to promoting the highest character and motivation for academic success.

Parents are the first and principal teachers of children. Research supports the need for a successful relationship between schools and parents. Bullying prevention requires that all stakeholders be involved. It is very difficult for educators to confront parents when a child's academics or discipline plummets. Just imagine how difficult it must be to discuss the possibilities of a child being a victim or bully.

Additionally, it is going to take everyone working together to help bystanders, both children and adults, to have the courage to and know how to intervene. Parents must also really listen to their children and take the time to entertain what they are saying, investigate the circumstances, and support their children when they reach out for assistance. "Just ignore it" does not assist a child who is suffering silently at the hands of others.

A child's reaching out is not always verbal. We must be aware of the signs that a child may be suffering. Evidence of bullying may not come home on a test paper or a progress report. You must check your children from head to toe and inside out for signs of abuse, which may come in mental and physical forms. We hear too often that kids didn't reach out to adults because they were ashamed or afraid, or knew there was nothing the adults could do.

Fact #4 Both boys and girls are involved in bullying. (Brinson, 2005)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Understand that both genders engage in social bullying behavior.

Both boys and girls involve themselves in the unfair treatment of others. Girls often tend to be hurtful and band together to isolate certain students.

The days of thinking little girls are all “sugar and spice and everything nice” are long gone. Girls share the ability to bully and tease their classmates with their male counterparts. Additionally, we must steer away from the belief that boys will be boys and demand that all classmates treat each other with respect and dignity. The rates of girls involving themselves in fighting and violence are on the rise. Hence, the “picture” of a bully is fuzzy. Exclusion, gossiping, and teasing seem to be some of the favorite pastimes of our girls.

While we hear of these incidents mostly from girls, we need to understand that it can happen among boys as well. Choosing to exclude another child from a group can be devastating to the victim regardless of gender. Boys tend to do it in according to group (i.e., athletes and nonathletes), while girls tend to bully according to their social status (i.e., popular vs. nonpopular).

Spreading rumors is another way that children bully their peers. With the easy access to electronic communication, this form of bullying has become quite prevalent. The anonymity of electronic means such as the computer and text messaging make it very easy to bully another unsuspecting student.

Having a strong defense is a requirement for getting through the school day. The last thing you want to be is a tattletale, so you hone in on your “nasty” skills to be able to avoid being the victim. It has been said that “nice girls” will not and don’t survive very long. Part of the middle school and high school transition is learning how to come back when someone attacks you verbally.

The fear of becoming the next victim engenders girls to isolate the girl being targeted. This leaves the victim feeling targeted, isolated, and alone to suffer the hurt and humiliation. These behaviors of exclusion and humiliation toward another student can leave long-term emotional scars. Feelings of isolation and a lack of confidence are often rooted in social bullying.

Fact #5 Bullying is a worldwide problem! (Kuntsche et al., 2006)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Discuss what could happen elsewhere to gain insight into your child's world.

Unfortunately, research illustrates that bullying is prevalent not only in the United States but throughout the world.

Children everywhere involve themselves in and are exposed to bullying. Whenever and wherever children and teens gather together, you will unfortunately find bullying. As active organizers of an international conference on the best practices of bullying prevention, it is astonishing to hear from colleagues around the globe seeking the “magic formula” to bullying prevention.

The stress associated with this epidemic shatters all borders as well as socioeconomic classes. Educators, parents, and students may feel like they do not have anything in common with people from other parts of the world, but when it comes to bullying they do. Additionally, where we are from, our customs and traditions, religious beliefs, and the color of our skin may be used as a reason to bully.

International researchers have demonstrated that bullying in schools is universal. In every nation peer pressure exists, but it doesn't always have to be negative. If we could turn peer pressure around it could teach tolerance and place the pressure to accept and even elevate diversity. Parents and educators play an important role in this, because the influence of adults goes a long way.

We know that parents who are alcoholics have a greater risk of raising children who are alcoholics. Similarly, parents who use drugs have a greater risk of raising children who use drugs. In the same vein, children who are exposed to jokes and innuendoes regarding race, religion, gender, and sexual identity, to name a few, will most likely carry these beliefs into their daily lives, in and out of the classroom.

Talking with children about bullying in other parts of the world can be helpful. Often through these conversations you can better understand the child's own personal experiences with bullying.

Across the globe we must have consistent bullying prevention standards for the treatment and respect of others.

Fact #6 Bullying is serious, even at a young age!

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . From the youngest ages, children need to be taught to be kind to each other. This is the best protection against bullying.

In 2006, Finkelhor, Turner, and Ormrod examined the presumption that victimizations involving younger children are simply the result of child's play that has gotten out of hand. Surveying and interviewing children and youth aged two to seventeen and their caregivers revealed that peer victimizations between young children are no less serious than older youth peer victimizations. Trauma symptom levels were high with all types of victimization .

Preschool teachers and administrators tell us they are shocked at the number of incidences linked to bullying in the preschool years, such as children as young as two asking if they are ugly or fat. These behaviors not only can have serious long-term effects but they also escalate as the child grows older.

We must be certain that we model kindness and respect for rules. The stress and anguish related to bullying is not just for middle and high school students. Preschool students have come home upset about being left out or ridiculed by their peers.

One of the main goals of preschool is to instill a love of learning and an excitement for school. Through play, children can explore and learn about their environment. The classroom is their micro-society where children learn to navigate socially. It is important that the classroom be a safe place for children to try out various roles. Patterns set here are often the roots of lessons that, once learned, inform behavior in later life.

It is distressing when young children are preoccupied with worries about "getting picked on." Research supports that children establish their attitudes toward school in the first nine years of life. Bullying may impact their view of how they belong in school and the effort they will employ in the future in their educational career. It is most important that children's first years are nurturing and provide a sense of belonging in their school. The educational setting should foster their self-esteem, cater to their sense of curiosity, and motivate them to learn.

Fact #7 ~~Bullying is violence and a human-rights issue. (Kirman, 2004)~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Recognize that bullying is not child's play and should never be dismissed as such.

Some sociologists recognize that bullying is a human-rights issue. The notion that all students must feel safe in school is one that can be addressed by focusing on constructive values, knowledge, and attitudes.

Research suggests that many children skip school for fear of being bullied or teased at school. These staggering statistics indicate the immensity of the problem of bullying. Every child has the right to attend school, have a sense of belonging, and feel safe. When children miss school for fear of being bullied, they miss opportunities to learn. Additionally, when students are unable to focus on their academics out of fear for their safety and the risk of being bullied, they are also robbed of the opportunity to learn. We know that as adults, when we are preoccupied with fear and anxiety, we are unable to focus on the other aspects of our lives. Children are no different.

Bullying and teasing are roadblocks to learning that deny the right to a safe place to learn. School culture must be developed to foster respect and provide barriers to destructive behaviors like bullying by providing core values that clarify what is acceptable treatment of peers, teachers, and all members of the school community. A child's character must be nurtured and developed just as their intellect. We must foster empathy in our children. The exposure to acts of kindness, charity to those in need, and tolerance and patience for the differences in everyone must equalize the negative exposure to violence and lack of respect depicted too often in the media.

Community service is a step in the right direction, but we must help our kids experience the joy, happiness, and fulfillment associated with giving, sharing, and helping. Attention should be focused on those that do the right thing and set the example, rather than on those who do not. Unfortunately, the negative things are given too much attention, even when negative consequences are involved.

Fact #8 Even friends can be bullies. (Kevorkian, 2006)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Talk about the definition of a good friend as well as the difference between acquaintances, buddies, and true friends.

Bullying behavior is not confined to the “class” bully. It can occur within a child’s circle of friends. Hence, children need guidance in fostering positive relationships and selecting friends.

The group of kids that a child surrounds themselves with determines a lot of their happiness and a lot of their tears. We must discuss the qualities of a friend and the possibility that not everyone fits into that category. As children grow and develop, their friends play a crucial role in their lives. What happens between classmates and peers determines how they feel about school and themselves. How their peers see them is often how they see themselves.

Children and teens can be very cruel at times. Helping children surround themselves with happy, supportive friends will help them feel happy and supported. The expression “you are known by the company you keep” seems to be pretty accurate.

This is the same when it comes to kids who bully others. If a particular child is constantly upsetting and ridiculing another child, it would be most wise for an adult to intervene and suggest a new friend or circle of friends.

Conversations about being and determining friends should be held on a regular basis. Parents should know who their children’s friends are, and teachers should pay attention to the dynamics in the classroom and unstructured time. Educators should diffuse themes of friendship into the classroom whenever possible. Children should be taught to differentiate between constructive criticism, friendly advice, and outright bullying.

Our children need to understand that a friend that makes them cry is not a friend. They should also understand the difference between peer pressure and outright bullying, although sometimes it may be just a fine line. Cite examples from your childhood and experiences that will shed light on your child’s circumstances. Remember our children are only children, and at times we must define and explain things so they can understand the true nature of friendship. This is how they learn.

Fact #9 ~~The average episode of bullying lasts only thirty-seven seconds. Teachers notice or intervene in only one in twenty-five incidents.~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Teach bystanders to recognize and respond to bullying incidents.

Bullying does not have to be prolonged or elaborate. Observations of children on a playground noted that not only did bullying take less than a minute but also in most cases teachers hardly noticed and, for a variety of reasons, rarely intervened.

A few moments may have a profound impact on a child or young adult's self-esteem. Teachers must be given the tools and feel empowered and prepared to step in and assist. Many educators are unaware of bullying plans and policies and are uncertain of their role in intervention strategies. Since bullying incidents happen so frequently it is understandable that adults are often not aware of what is happening. Children and teens have reported that bullying is a big problem that happens "right under the teacher's nose." They have shared that they don't tell adults because they don't think the adults can actually help or may even make it worse.

Bystanders, both adults and peers, are afraid to step in and assist the target being bullied. We have witnessed classrooms where students have been humiliated and students and the teacher pretended not to hear. Educators need training on bullying prevention to increase their ability and confidence to intervene and set the tone that bullying will not be tolerated without retribution. Additionally, educators must be trained to recognize the signs that a student has been bullied and to provide critical supervision in these unstructured times.

We as parents are guilty of the same. Haven't you ever witnessed your teenage child hang up the receiver after a one-minute phone conversation and storm off into their bedroom? Then we approach them and ask what is wrong and they say "nothing." We must watch for reactions and changes in mood and inquire further. It is time for teachers, parents, and others involved in the lives of children to take a stand and make a difference. Intervening and reacting are two different things, and we must learn to react and intervene because staying silent is like giving a seal of approval.

Fact #10 ~~Bullying does not build character; it is not just a part of growing up.~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Kindness, not hurt and humiliation, builds character .

This is an age-old attitude that has fostered bullying behavior. It is important to move beyond this conception and consider the research that shows that children who are continually victimized by bullying become socially withdrawn.

Character education is about increasing respect for self and others. There is no place for bullying in character building. Children need role models that foster honesty, trust, kindness, appreciation, tolerance, and respect.

The days of dismissing bullying as “boys will be boys” or “girls are just mean” are over. When we dismiss bullying as child’s play we are leaving children and schools unprotected. The effects from bullying may be long-term and devastating. Children have the right to be in school and feel safe and that they belong. Adults may be held accountable for deliberate indifference to and failure to protect someone who has reported suspicions of bullying. Reasonable precautions must be made to protect and prevent bullying. Remember, bullying is purposeful and intended to injure, is carried out repeatedly, and has the potential to cause long-term damage.

You have probably heard the quote “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” which is absolutely untrue. What bullying does is tear down your self-esteem, make you question your self-worth, and, in some cases, make you want to give up on life. Bullies leave you feeling a loss of control in every aspect in your life, which in turn affects sleep patterns, eating habits, school work, social activity, and life in general. Perpetrators must be stopped and taught empathy. Our children need to be rewarded for kindness; being good and doing the right thing should get as much attention as disciplining negative behaviors is given.

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BULLYING DEFINED

Fact #11 Bullying is different than “normal” childhood teasing! (Hazler, Carney, & Granger, 2006)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Teasing and taunting are bullying when the behavior is not reciprocal.

Sometimes bullying is viewed as harmless and a normal part of growing up. However, it is not part of normal child conflict and should never be dismissed as such. Essentially, bullying occurs whenever it lowers another’s self-esteem and is one-sided. Research supports the idea that bullying interferes with the learning process and may have long-term negative effects.

Bullying should never be tolerated, and we must do everything possible to prevent and minimize bullying at school. There has been increasing attention on bullying because of acts of school violence around the country. We shouldn’t wait for some tragedy in the news but rather should bring awareness to the prevalence and seriousness of bullying in our schools. The consequences associated with bullying are far too grave to ignore.

Many adults are unable to recognize what is bullying versus normal conflicts among students. We can no longer believe that sticks and stones will break our bones but names will never hurt us. The consequences in the school may be school violence as well as suicide. Remember that bullying is done with intent to harm and is done repeatedly with an imbalance of power. Children dealing with bullying are at risk for long-lasting and negative effects.

If a seventh grader walked into a classroom and pulled a beer out of their backpack, I’m certain that any adult who witnessed this would take immediate action to confiscate the alcohol from the student and make sure that the student was sent to the office to face severe consequences. Unfortunately, when students bully and humiliate their peers, most often there is no action taken by the adults and no consequences from the school administration. There are some schools where educators and parents believe that bullying has been around for a long time and it is just kids being kids.

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . When a child is constantly called derogatory names, the child may believe that the names are accurate.

Name-calling that makes a child feel anxious, angry, or unworthy may diminish a student's drive for education. Many times this will happen in front of their peers. Teasing can have severe and even lifelong consequences. Exposed to this type of abuse for a long time, these children may become incapable of reaching their potential. They actually feel like they deserve to be picked on. Kids are left feeling like they are not important and don't belong in the school. Physical fights are short lived and a few bruises will eventually heal, but name-calling and mean acts have a lasting impression. The names may spread rapidly in the virtual world. With the click of a button, these words may be spread to an entire class or through the school in moments.

These victimized kids don't know where to turn. When bystanders—kids or adults—stand by and take no action, it reinforces to kids that no one can help. These children are left feeling unworthy and too often blame themselves for the actions of the bullies. Adults need to learn how to respond and how to assist children who may be victimized by name-calling. We could all benefit from the old saying "if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." In fact, this would be a great school rule. Constant reminders about respect and the treatment of others should be part of the daily routine.

Adults serve as role models, and we must make sure that we are sending the right messages in everything that we say and do. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents who interact with children every day must be certain to model kindness. They need to become familiar with identifying when children are playing, joking, and fighting or when bullying is occurring. We must pay attention to the difference.

Somehow when children enter about fourth grade, the word "gay" becomes a favorite. There seems to be little concern given to the fact that calling a peer that name is hurtful and wrong. By fifth grade the improper and rude vocabulary grows. We must teach children that what they see is just as important as what they do. Children believe what they hear repeatedly, and if they hear over and over again that they're stupid or that they don't belong, they will believe it.

~~Fact #13 Adults must watch for the signs that a child is being bullied! (Kevorkian, 2006)~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Children who are being bullied may seem withdrawn, depressed, and nervous and may show changes in behavior.

Educators should watch for signs that indicate a child may be bullied and provide the support and guidance needed to break the destructive pattern (Schnohr & Niclasen, 2006; Hazler, Miller, Carne & Green, 2001). Parents are the first and most essential teachers.

We must really know our children and watch for any signs of stress. Sometimes they are so occupied worrying about what's going to happen in the school day that their concentration suffers and grades go down. Other bullied children appear ill and request to stay home.

As adults, stress makes us feel uncomfortable, nervous, unsafe, and mistrusting. We cannot think clearly and often feel anxious. We become restless, lose sleep, and behave quite irritably. We may experience phantom aches and pains, have stomachaches and headaches. Children experience many of the same feelings. The difference is that they do not have the same frame of reference as adults. They do not understand that these feelings are part of life and need not necessarily be permanent.

Children are resilient; however, they need to understand that a situation that is causing difficulty will pass. Essentially, children often don't understand the connections between their unsettling emotions and physical symptoms. They do not realize that their feelings can be the cause of the physical symptoms, moodiness, and ill temper.

Make sure that a child feels good about coming to school and that they feel confident that they belong and are worthy to be in the school. Educators should be trained in the signs that a child is under stress, as well as how to differentiate between bullying and other forms of youthful play. It is good to know your children's friends. When needed, ask your child's teacher who he/she spends her time with. We must help children academically, as well as socially, and help them find their place in the school.

Fact #14 It is important to know the difference between bullying and other types of conflict between children. (Bullock, 2002)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Not all conflict is bullying—and adults as well as children need know the difference!

Children have a lot of interaction and, in fact, in the first years of schooling spend a lot of time learning about sharing and getting along. In fact, we spend a lot of time reinforcing those lessons in kindergarten, but those lessons disappear from the curriculum as children move to the upper grades. It is imperative that we fit reminders at every grade to help children understand conflict and how to handle it.

Children and adults need to understand what bullying is, how to identify it, and what can be done to prevent it. If adults and children understand what bullying is, they have a better chance they will recognize it when they see it or experience it for themselves. Right now there are children being bullied that don't even know it, and adults are watching and, by their lack of action, are giving the stamp of approval without even knowing it. True efforts for bullying prevention require action on the part of bystanders, both adults and children. If they can't identify bullying from normal kid conflict, it will retard any prevention efforts. The overall culture of the school will be compromised; academic achievement will suffer and perhaps even weaken school safety efforts.

For any bullying-prevention effort to be successful, there must be a belief among all stakeholders—school administrator, teachers, counselors, parents, and students that bullying is serious and wrong under any circumstances and will be addressed. When everyone is trained in what to look for, we have a better chance of identifying bullying versus regular kid confrontation and putting a stop to it.

Fact #15 Sibling violence is as serious as peer-on-peer violence. In other words, when the violence between siblings, regardless of age, it can be as traumatic as if it involved a peer. (Finkelhor, Turner & Ormrod, 2006)

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Research clearly indicates the importance of parent education in reducing bullying among children. Parents need to be diligent regarding the nature of the interpersonal relationships of siblings.

Parents need to really take a good look at their children and the behaviors they display. One of the main jobs of being a parent is to know what's happening in their children's school and social lives. Additionally, we must serve as the constant reminder of our expectations for their character and nurture their value system, moral development, and general manners. When our children hear us being sarcastic and rude to other people, they are certain to follow.

We must exemplify what we want in our children, because they are always watching the adults they come in contact with. They learn how to disagree and otherwise how to treat others by the way that we treat people. When we treat others with kindness and compassion, they are likely to do the same. When we treat others poorly and belittle others, they are likely to do the same; when we allow them to treat siblings and family members with disrespect, and do not intervene when siblings belittle others, they see it as okay. Remember that children are always watching adults. Adults should model how they want their kids to treat others, especially in the home.

When they see how you talk to other members of the family, they learn how to communicate. If they see you yelling and screaming in a demeaning manner, they will also do the same. It is very difficult to be a parent or an educator, because we must always walk the walk and talk the talk. Remember, kids are always watching and absorbing how we interact and behave in various situations. Children follow in the footsteps of their parents. We have heard the expression, "the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree." Make sure the fruit you produce is sweet, kind, and nurturing.

Fact #16 ~~Bullying can be direct—hitting, pushing, kicking, and general hurtful threatening behavior and gestures—but it always involves an imbalance of power. (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000)~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Always consider balance of power when determining if you are dealing with bullying, roughhousing, or just fighting.

Kids can be very creative in the ways they choose to hurt one another. They can give wedgies, push with their backpacks, use bathroom time to push, shove, peek, poke, and verbally humiliate. Just ask the kids to talk about ways in which kids clash, and they will stun you with the extent and creativity of their arsenal.

The definition of bullying says that negative behaviors need to be repeated and with the intent to do harm. But any negative and hurtful behaviors become bullying when there is an imbalance of power. This happens when a student is being victimized and cannot defend himself or herself.

Not all bad behavior is bullying. Kids can still mix it up and get involved in a fight. If they are truly equal peers, this is not bullying behavior. In these instances, they begin as friends and have a disagreement that escalates into a fight. This can be anything from physical fighting to threatening a fight. But the difference here is that these disputes can be resolved. Once that happens, the children continue to be friends.

In the same manner, kids can roughhouse. This behavior, also known as horseplay, is generally physical jostling that occurs when both students willingly participate. The children are of equal power. They begin as friends and end as friends. This is not bullying. Rather, it is friendly playful behavior. Roughhousing is something that happens on playgrounds everywhere and is a normal part of childhood. However since this behavior can easily escalate into fighting, it is advisable to closely supervise children. Some teachers talk with children about roughhousing and ask them to set some basic ground rules. That will give them the opportunity to think about the difference between roughhousing and fighting and to set some acceptable parameters to avoid escalation into fighting.

The imbalance occurs when one student is more powerful than the other. For instance, when one student is older, larger, smarter, and more popular than the other, there is an imbalance of power. Basically, it is about a playing field that is not level, enabling one student to unfairly take advantage of the other.

~~Fact #17 Bullying can be indirect—gossip, rumors, and damaging another student’s reputation. Indirect bullying includes getting someone else to bully a victim. (Leckie, 1998; Wheeler, 2004)~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . While this form of bullying is very difficult to pinpoint, indirect bullying needs to be taken very seriously.

Indirect bullying can include:

- Getting another person to assault someone
- Spreading rumors
- Getting someone to deliberately exclude someone from a group or activity
- Cyberbullying by second parties
- Mean gestures such as rolling of eyes or averting eyes to ignore someone
- Getting someone to steal or hide a person’s belongings

It is very common for kids, particularly in groups, to isolate a peer and to bully them indirectly. This is also an example of the “seven-second bullying”—that is, the average time it takes for a student to be victimized. It can happen in an instant, and the teacher or adult present never sees a thing. Just imagine how quickly a roll of the eyes or a sharp look away can happen. The end result is devastating for the target from being repeatedly snubbed and insulted.

Another common form of indirect bullying is stealing or hiding another student’s belongings. When this occurs, the bully’s defense is that it was just a joke to hide the object and to watch the outcome. But jokes at the expense of another, particularly when the target is repeatedly singled out, are bullying.

One of the most insidious forms of bullying is spreading rumors. Today this is most often done on a cell phone or the Internet. They can buddy chat with a group or instant message (IM) to a cell phone and the means of communication grows almost daily. Along with the ability to have secret communication comes increased opportunity to gossip and spread rumors.

Under the cloak of privacy, anything can be said, and there is no way to see the result of those actions. These communications are completely anonymous, and with that anonymity comes a lack of empathy. Reduced or even a complete lack of empathy is the cornerstone of bullying behavior.

~~Fact #18 Physical bullying is the most common and most likely to demand a response from adults (Stewart, 2007)~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . When bullying becomes physical, it comes to the attention of adults. The key to reducing this form of bullying is to intervene long before that happens.

Bullying most often is an escalating experience. It can begin with a look or gesture or perhaps an indirect act such as deliberately avoiding contact with another student. These activities, when unchecked, will most often escalate into physical bullying. In addition, and more importantly, allowing these behaviors erodes a school's safe climate.

School becomes a fearful place for not only the target of this behavior but also the bystanders. They know that with any small turn of events they can become the target. This impacts their behavior so that they often will follow the lead of the student who chooses to bully.

At the same time, as long as the nonphysical bullying goes on unchecked, it will, as we have noted, escalate. This will lead to actually hurting another. The process of acceleration often is gradual which, at the same time, it erodes the bully's feelings of empathy. This makes the bullying more satisfying and rewarding.

There is no impetus for the bullying to stop. This becomes the basis for the continuation for this behavior. It is often much more complex than the single incident of physical bullying that is brought to the attention of a teacher or other adult.

Jeremy was a seventh grade boy who was not adept in gym class. He was usually the last one chosen for teams. Kids in his class would mimic how he handled the basketball, and his teammates they would play "keep away" so he would not get a turn with the ball. The teacher told the kids to play fair—they all were equal parts of a team. But Jeremy began to hate to go to gym. At first he would ask to go to the nurse, then he would develop physical symptoms to avoid school altogether.

Then the bullying became physical. One boy deliberately hit him in the face with the ball. Jeremy was so angry, he hit the boy back. At that point the teacher intervened, but the emotions were running deep, and this was much more than the single exchange that brought the teacher into the mix. If there had been intervention at an earlier point, all of this could have been avoided.

~~Fact #19 Verbal bullying goes to the core of how we treat each other. (Freedman, 2002)~~

Gaining the Peaceful Edge . . . Verbal bullying begins when children and people in general do not treat each other with respect. The key to handling this is for adults to model positive behavior. Examples are a very powerful way to send a message.

Verbal bullying includes name-calling, insulting, making racist comments, and constant teasing. Verbal bullies use words to hurt or humiliate another person. This type of bullying is the easiest to inflict on other children. It is quick and to the point and can occur in the least amount of time available. Its effects can be more devastating in some ways than physical bullying, because there are no visible scars.

We need to talk to children about how they respond and react to their peers by stressing the value of respect. Talking and acting in respectful ways helps to give children the opportunity to recognize and value respect. This can be pointed out to them in many different ways, but the most powerful way to teach children is by our own example.

This brings us to a very delicate point that adults may find hard to hear. We have to examine ourselves before we can judge children about their behavior. When adults bully each other they are setting a negative example for children. Under those circumstances, all the words of wisdom regarding the virtue of respect are overshadowed by destructive modeling.

Adults can also bully kids when they are dealing with bullying behavior. While this sounds absurd, it happens when adults use threats and intimidation to deal with these situations. We have to think of what we want from a child and then behave in that manner. It is common sense, yet, in the heat of the moment adults often misuse their power and essentially bully the child who is a bully. Therefore we always must be mindful of how we respond to others, as it will impact children and their future relationships.

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