



Taking the Bully by the Horns

by Faith Wood

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Introduction

Carly didn't want to go to school that day. She knew that if she showed up, she would have to endure the onslaught of racial epithets hurled at her from girls in her class who thought she wasn't quite good enough. For them, or for anyone else.

Her body ached from yesterday and, as the bruises began to surface and change color from scarlet blotches to a mottled midnight blue, her muscles stiffened with every move. The kicking had been relentless and when the assault ceased and the six girls scattered in different directions, she lay in the snow, too frightened to move.

Carly knew it was her fault and she knew she had to tell someone, but she also knew that no one would care. Why would

they? Three months ago, she reported the bullying to her counselor at school, and all she heard was, “Oh, it can’t be that bad. Just ignore them and they’ll forget all about you.”

But, they didn’t forget.

With her spirit broken and splintered, she tried to curl up into the fetal position and melt into the comfort of her bed. Tears spilled onto her cheeks and, no matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t remember what she had done to deserve Doc Martin’s crushing her face. Even if she could remember, though, it didn’t make any difference.

She was alone.

Sound familiar?

Do you know someone who is the victim of bullying? Are you certain that your children aren’t suffering from the same atrocities as Carly?

As much as we hate to admit it, Carly’s pain, degradation and shame happens every day in our schools and workplaces, and in the lives of countless people. Bullying ‘incidents’ are on the rise

and, too often, we don't even know about them. As a parent, you want to protect your children and keep them safe, but how do you make that happen? How can you be certain that when you watch your children climb onto the school bus, that they will be treated with respect – not only from teachers and faculty, but from other students, as well?

You don't.

My name is Faith Wood. I am deeply entrenched in the practices of changing human behavior, and I have been working with victims of bullying for the past two decades. In order for you to trust me, I think it's important that you know my credentials, and why I'm so dedicated and passionate about improving the quality of life for those who can't see a way out from being the victim of a bully. I will understand your pain and I will offer you solutions.

This is who I am: I'm a fully certified life coach and a highly trained, experienced hypnotherapist. I obtained my Master's Degree in Neurolinguistic Psychology, and I worked for fourteen years as a law enforcement officer. Certified in conflict

resolution, mediation and negotiation, I am an endorsed trainer for the International Consortium for Resiliency, as well as a provider of mandatory conflict resolution training for Alberta peace officers. I also hold specialty-training designations in police leadership and sport performance coaching, in addition to holding a specialty designation for forensic hypnosis. A certification in handwriting analysis rounds out my expertise and experience. I have to tell you, I'm uncomfortable 'tooting my own horn,' but, if you need help, it's important that you have confidence in me.

Are you ready? Let's take on bullying one by one . . .

Section I

Chapter 1

Anti-Bullying Programs Don't Work

Why don't anti-bullying campaigns work? We certainly hear about them frequently within the educational system, but when push comes to shove, the current campaigns are ineffective. And, what about the workplace? Bullying is prevalent throughout corporate environments and all businesses, although you may not be aware of it unless you are experiencing bullying yourself.

To be honest, the levels of bullying behavior are complex (that's putting it mildly!) and I can imagine it's tough for you to wrap your head around all of the concepts that comprise the 'bully personality.' However, before we can begin to address how to fix the bullying problem in schools and within the

workplace, you need to understand why programs currently in place aren't effective.

Several years ago, Canadian psychologist J. David Smith, Ph.D. of the University of Ottawa, penned a paper entitled, *The Effectiveness of Whole School Anti-Bullying Programs: a Synthesis of Evaluation Research*. Whew! That's a big title and, if you're not a psychologist, you may shy away from reading it! Nonetheless, Dr. Smith's findings were staggering and anyone can understand them – 86% of victim outcomes (reports by victims of program benefits) were negligible and negative, while 14% reported a small benefit from the anti-bullying program. For victims who 'self-reported' bullying incidents, 100% reported the anti-bullying school campaign to be ineffectual.¹

When I first read those numbers, I had to read them again to make certain I understood them correctly. If Dr. Smith's figures are even close to being correct (and, I must conclude they are), the anti-bullying programs offered don't mean squat. He believes no one cares.

¹ J. David Smith, Ph.D., *The Effectiveness of Whole School Anti-Bullying Programs: a Synthesis of Evaluation Research*

Can you believe it?

No one cares.

This is where Dr. Smith and I part company.

I care.

If we take the attitude that ‘bullying cannot be stopped’ and, therefore, a ‘why should we bother to try’ attitude, then Dr. Smith is correct. I believe, however, that we, through the power of our intellect and spirit, can achieve great success in all that we do. I believe in our inherent ability to find a path to success.

Chapter 2

‘The Establishment’

Through the Cracks

Perhaps you’re too young to remember this, but way back when, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, adults were considered ‘the establishment.’ Teens balked at taking advice from anyone in ‘the establishment,’ and they strove for a new life – a peaceful existence. The Establishment became ‘a dirty word’ for the teenage and college set and, maybe without knowing it, they charted a course toward disrespect, intolerance and an inability to accept others for whom they are. If you didn’t fit in to the ‘new way of life,’ you were pigeonholed into the establishment. In

other words, outcasts and adults. Although, to be fair, the establishment was mostly adults.

So what does the establishment have to do with bullying? Just this – the bent toward disrespect and intolerance of others’ ideas and beliefs, as well as the right ‘to be different,’ manifests in our younger generation. Their disrespect toward each other is truly staggering, for they feel entitled to mistreat anyone they see fit. Bullying knows no bounds and, unbelievably, bullying occurs within families, too.

Even the love and protection of your family is no longer sacred.

I can tell you the chronological tale about bullying and its metamorphosis since the ‘70s, but I think it’s more important to discuss what’s happening now – today. You already know that incidents of bullying are escalating at an alarming rate – all you have to do is listen to the news a couple of times a week. That’s disturbing enough, but what I find to be even more disturbing is that bullying now crosses gender lines in the sand, and teenage girls are at the forefront of the bullying epidemic. Within the last year, there have been several videos of teen girls ganging up on

one of their peers, beating and kicking her senseless. And do you know what's worse (if there is anything worse)? Many of these bullying episodes included adults egging on the girls who were committing the crime.

Yes. Crime.

Why is there so much rage among young people? Oh, don't get me wrong . . . it's not just young people! Just the other day, I was watching a television show in which an employee was verbally berating another staff member, and those who witnessed the tongue lashing did nothing – clearly, the behavior was common place for that business, and no one had the guts to stand up for the person who was at the receiving end of the bullying.

Or, they didn't care.

If you're wondering why I was watching the television show in the first place, I was channel surfing and that was where I landed. Because of my obvious interest in the topic of bullying, I instantly recognized that the conversation I was watching was nothing but bullying in its finest form. Truthfully, I was mesmerized by the verbal abuse being hurled by the bully – and, I

was as equally mesmerized by the number of people who watched and did nothing.

Watching that television show for no more than five minutes reinforced my knowledge and belief that bullying is an everyday occurrence at home, at school and at work.

Up until the last several years, a teen bully was thought to have low self-esteem and low self-confidence. Now? Not so much. Psychologists now recognize that teen bullies most often have a highly developed self esteem, as well as a sense of entitlement and superiority. In addition, they typically lack self control, compassion and impulse control. They are often cruel, without remorse and they use bullying as an ‘anger management technique.’ In other words, when they’re punching in someone’s face or kicking them into submission, that’s how they manage their anger.

Lovely.

Let's look at the personality traits of bullies, in addition to the traits I mentioned in the previous paragraph:

- a bully has little regard for the rights and needs of others,
- bullies have little regard for the lives of others, especially if they see that person as a threat to them,
- a bully was disciplined inconsistently as a young child,
- a bully may have neglectful, self-centered parents,
- a bully has a lack of social skills,
- a bully rarely, if ever, admits mistakes, and
- a bully believes that 'might makes right.'

There are more, but you get the idea. I think it's safe to say that the bully 'has issues.'

All bullies are not created equal –there are several types:

- hyperactive bullies don't do well in a social situation, and they often react physically,
- the detached bully is wonderful to everyone, except his or her victims,

- social bullies have a poor sense of self, and they are mean and nasty to those around them,
- the bullied bully deals with self helplessness by overpowering others,
- the serial bully destroys lives one at a time, and pair bullies act together to destroy others.

I think it's important to understand the personalities involved in bullies – as you can see, they come from every type of lifestyle, every environmental and behavioral situation, as well as every economical level. You may recognize some of them immediately, or you may be surprised when someone you admire turns on you without warning.

And they're falling through the cracks.

They're falling through the cracks at home, in school and in their everyday lives.

Chapter 3

Bullying on the Rise

Why Now?

Enter cyberspace.

Do you recall what it was like to have to write a letter and send it via snail mail? Or, better yet, Airmail? When I think of the days when stamps were a nickel, it makes me chuckle – I tell my kids, “I remember when I had to walk to school with hot potatoes in my pockets to keep my hands warm!” They know I’m kidding, but they still look at me as though I’m nuts!

The point is – in those days, bullying was a ‘closet’ activity. You didn’t hear much about it and, when you did, it was hushed up and pushed back into the closet. Today? With the advent of

the computer and the internet, cyberspace becomes host to a plethora of malcontents – initially meant as a super ‘communication highway,’ the internet, commonly referred to as cyberspace, presents a blank canvas for the bully’s despicable behavior.

Then there’s Facebook. Twitter. Cell phones. Three products of immediate self gratification.

When kids want things, they want it now. They can’t do without a computer and a cell phone, because they represent a real-time lifeline to friends – and, enemies.

Do you recall the story about Phoebe Prince? Phoebe was the teenager from our northern climes, who was cyber bullied, harassed, harangued and tormented every day at school for more than three months and, one day, she decided she’d had enough.

Phoebe hanged herself in the stairwell of her home.

Phoebe and her family emigrated to the United States to Massachusetts, where she quickly became the target of bullies. What made her the target? According to her classmates, she was beautiful and it was her physical and inner beauty that sparked the ire of several female bullies – boys were attracted to her and

she caught the eye of the football captain (he's now facing charges of stalking and statutory rape.)

Long story short – one week before Phoebe's spirit completely broke and she took her own life, she was shoved into lockers and cyber bullies (keyboard bullies) on Facebook encouraged her to kill herself. She was so frightened of being attacked, she walked between friends at school for protection. Court documents indicate that Phoebe approached school officials for help, but they told her that they weren't going to take action.

Phoebe was only fifteen.

According to the high school officials, Phoebe was the victim of 'relationship aggression' – that means that a group of girls turned on Phoebe when she briefly dated the football captain. Apparently, at the time, he was the boyfriend of one of the girls charged in the crime. Phoebe also briefly dated a student who had a 16 year-old girlfriend – she, too, is charged in the case.

I could go on, but there isn't any need. You know what I'm talking about – what do you think? One teacher described the bullying at the high school as 'normal girl drama.' Gee, does

‘normal girl drama’ mean it’s OK to harass someone, push them into lockers, torment them as they walk down the street, or call them racist names? The teacher went on to say, “If you want to label it bullying, then I’ve bullied girls, and girls have bullied me. Her history made it affect her more. It wasn’t the school being terrible. It was really bad; it was one of the worst things I’ve heard of some girls doing to another girl. But it wouldn’t have hurt most people that much.”²

This coming from a teacher?

Something, indeed, is very wrong.

What can we do? Tyronne Jacques, CEO of Remove It Now.com, says the cyber bullying issue has to be addressed from three variables: the victim of cyber bullying, the cyber bully and the parents of the cyber bully. All three are equally important in

² Emily Bazelon, Suicide in South Hadley, Slate, posted March 30, 2010

recognizing bullying, and the recognition of the three bullying components will aid in being able to do something about it.

Remove It Now.com is dedicated to the eradication of bullying by removing harmful content regarding a young person from the first page of Google and other search engines. If requested by parents, the website will send out 'cyber bully alerts' that will let parents know if their son or daughter's name is published on the internet.

Props to Remove It Now.com!

They obviously care.

Phil McGraw, Ph.D., attended the House Committee on Education and Labor's Hearing on Cyber Safety in June, 2010. During his expert witness testimony, he expounded on the details of how cyber bullying is reaching epidemic proportions, as well as how it's a leading cause of suicide of teens who fall victim to the cyber bully.

"We must change our sensitivities, our policies and our training protocols, so we do not let the victims of today's 'keyboard bullies' fall through the cracks. That is why I am here

today to suggest you add language to address cyber bullying to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. A cyber bully in 2010 has the weapons to cause pain and suffering to victims that no other generation has had to cope with.”³

Keyboard bullies. Do you know what that phrase means? It means those who sit at their computers, cowards that they are, tormenting whomever they choose across the expanse of cyberspace.

I think Dr. Phil is right. We must change how we feel about bullies, how we deal with bullies and how we train those who have responsibility for our children – such as school faculty, babysitters and anyone else who may have a position of trust and authority with your child.

Further, Mr. Jacques states:

“I find that the parents of kids who are not being bullied seem to show no interest in the subject until they are directly

³ Phil McGraw, PhD, House Committee on Education and Labor’s Hearing on Cyber Safety in June, 2010.

affected. As a parent, even I had to address my daughter and her friends for isolating one little girl based on the clothes she wore to school. Your child may very well be in the IN crowd today, but tomorrow it could be you calling us to remove insidious comments posted online about your daughter.”⁴

Even with all of my experience with the bullying epidemic, sometimes I can’t believe the cruelty and viciousness in students and adults who bully – the venom that spews from their mouths is unconscionable and I am reminded daily of the need to tackle this social problem head on.

So, let’s do exactly that – let’s tackle it head on.

⁴ Tyronne, Jacques, CEO, Remove It Now.com

Chapter 4

Steel-toed Boots

“My son was bullied by his own brother at school. I was completely clueless as to the animosity felt by his sibling, and I often wonder, had I paid more attention, if I could have done something to prevent it. I don’t know. The emotional scars of the bullying were far reaching, and they prevented him from having a close friend or being included in group activities. The exclusion from companionship caused him much greater pain than the day he was beaten up on the way home from school . . . a boy with steel-toed boots delivered excruciating blows for no apparent reason. We learned later that he was considered a social outcast at school.

The bruises weren't the bad part. As he lay bruised and beaten in the middle of the crosswalk, impatient parents honked their horns in anger in an attempt to get him to move. He was, apparently, holding them up from continuing with their busy days.

And no one stopped to help him.

Except for a substitute teacher who was leaving the school from her first day here."

A social outcast. That's what the bully was – a social outcast. In order to begin to understand a social outcast personality, we have to delve into a little bit of Developmental Psychology. I'm not going to weigh you down with the 'academic-ese,' and I'll try to explain some of it in terms you'll easily understand.

Here goes . . .

A social outcast is an individual who is excluded from social groups and situations, and he or she seeks a 'fringe element' of society in which they feel comfortable and accepted. Once excluded from the norm, they begin to perceive and respond to

their social environment differently. And, such strong rejections are the catalysts for aberrant behavior.

This is interesting – you may not think about it much, but social outcasts have been members of our society for centuries. In the 1800s, individuals of the ‘theatre’ ilk were considered ‘undesirables’ and boarding houses went to extreme lengths by advertising, “We Don’t Let to Theatricals!” in an effort to keep them from darkening their doors. Even though we don’t see such blatant rejection today for fear of being the target of some sort of label, such exclusionary behavior still exists.

However, as with all things, there is another side of the social outcast coin – recent research indicates that neither the social outcast nor the most popular students comprise the majority of bullies. Interestingly, it’s the student lodged smack dab in the middle of the pack.

Robert W. Faris of the University of California, Davis, studied and surveyed students in North Carolina, and he found that ‘middle of the pack’ kids viewed bullying as a tactic to gain

social status.⁵ They, in fact, view bullying behavior as a means to an end and, once they get to the top of the social ladder, the bullying behavior decreases. They no longer need it to achieve their goals.

Too bad it's too late for the victim. The damage is done.

Leigh Anne Kraemer of the Ophelia Project corroborates Mr. Faris' findings:

"It's a myth that it's just the popular kids that bully. It's not the rich kids picking on the poor kids or the bigger ones picking on the little ones," said Ms. Kraemer, the group's education specialist. "If you're looking to gain power and status by pushing others down, that's where we really see a problem."⁶

I think the upshot of the two sets of findings indicates that maladaptive behavior is spread throughout the social spectrum of students – they are omnipresent. And, although, we can tag certain 'profiles' as a high risk for bullying, there will always be

⁵ Robert W. Faris, University of California, Davis, American Sociological Review, February, 2011

⁶ Leigh Anne Kraemer, the Ophelia Project, Education Week, February 8, 2011.

surprises – the kids who come out of nowhere, leaving their mark on their victims.

Marks made with steel-toed boots.

Chapter 5

The Risk is Ours

I mentioned earlier that parents tend not to consider bullying as a ‘risk’ of their children attending school. After all, aren’t their kids supposed to go to school free from the fear that one day the call may come – the call that informs them that their child is in the emergency room? Of course! However, parents’ expectations such as those are not realistic – although, they may be naïve. If you don’t think that your elementary or middle school child is at risk for being the victim of a bully – think again. Take a look at these statistics – they scare the heck out of me:

- Every one in seven children from the ages of 11 – 16 are victims of bullies.⁷
- More than 160,000 children skip school daily, because they feel threatened by another student.⁸
- In Canada, suicide is the 6th most common cause of death for males, and the 2nd cause of death for males and females, ages 15 – 24.⁹
- For every successful suicide, there are an estimated 125 suicide attempts.

The above statistics concern youth in Alberta, Canada, and you and I both know that Alberta probably isn't very different from anywhere else in the world. The problem of bullying is pervasive and it doesn't distinguish between a child from Alberta, or a child from New York or Ohio as being any different.

⁷ Government of Alberta: bullyfreealberta.ca

⁸ National Association of School Psychologists

⁹ Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research

Taking the Bully by the Horns

Steel-toed boots feel the same as they crush your body, no matter where you are.

Chapter 6

What's a Parent to Do?

It's disturbing that we have to acknowledge and consider that many times, bullies gain their confidence and footing in the one place where they are safest – their family. You might think that bullying consists only of physical violence – that's only a part of it, unfortunately. Adult 'serial bullies' are bullies who have come up through the ranks of their families and school, and their predatory and sociopathic behavior graduates into the workplace. They have quite a long time to perfect their dysfunctional and mean-spirited behavior, and by the time they reach adulthood and must function within a corporate society, they target those whom they can control and put down by intimidation. They also prey on

those whom they perceive as ‘weak.’ And, as hard as this is to believe, many adults who are the victims of bullies don’t truly recognize the verbal abuse, backstabbing, criticisms and direct pressure as the *modus operandi* of a workforce bully.

I’m getting ahead of myself . . . clearly the adult bully has to start somewhere, so let’s start at the beginning.

The family.

The first thing to understand about bullies is that young bullies (children) have a different M.O. than that of the adult bully. The young bully isn’t so sophisticated when choosing a target – they may be seeking some form of dominance or individual attention, and an adult bully may be seeking authority, a higher salary or increased social or corporate status. One thing is clear, however, they had a running start on their antisocial behavior.

So, how do you know if your child – your darling – is a bully? How will you handle it, if you recognize some of these red-flag behaviors:

- Your child may exhibit positive views toward violence.

- Your child may be quick to display anger and may be impulsive, as well as frustrated.
- Your child may refuse to play by your rules.
- Your child may have the tongue of a ‘silver fox’ – in other words, they can talk themselves out of anything! (Here’s a useless piece of information that will make you look cool at parties – Sir Walter Raleigh was nicknamed ‘The Silver Fox’ for the very same reason – he could get himself out of any scrape he happened to encounter! Particularly judicial difficulties . . .)
- Your child may display little emotion or sympathy toward one of his or her peers who is bullied.
- Your child may show aggression toward adults – including YOU and teachers.
- Your child may display a need to control situations and dominate others.

No . . . not your child! As you read these signals marking the possibility of a bully personality, really think about your child’s behavior. Do any of the red flags listed above, strike a tinge of

fear in you as you realize you might be in for a rough ride? Are you thinking objectively about your child's actions?

The signs of a bully personality are disturbing, and they beg the question, "Why are some kids bullies?" The theories are many, but the majority of them agree on the following:

- violent video games,
- the internet,
- they are victims of abuse,
- they lack discipline in their lives,
- violence through the media, and
- a pervasive permissive society.

The sad fact is, though, that there really isn't one single cause for a child's antisocial behavior.

So, if your child is exhibiting bullying behavior, what can you do about it? The first thing you must do is acknowledge it and halt the behavior.

It's your responsibility.

Let's say that your child's teacher contacts you regarding your child's bullying another student. What should you do? Above all, don't be defensive! Remember that there are always two sides to every story, and you should afford your child the opportunity to explain his or her behavior. By doing this, you will assure yourself that your child is or is not the aggressor. If you believe your child is wrongfully accused of bullying behavior, it's important that you work with school staff and faculty to come to an acceptable resolution of the situation.

Now let's consider the alternative – you believe your child is exhibiting bullying behavior. This realization will probably be difficult to swallow and, as unpleasant as it will be, you have to accept it. You can't make excuses for your child's behavior – you know it's wrong, and if you make excuses, your son or daughter will perceive and learn the wrong message. What message? This one – bullying is OK in the right circumstances.

You must also make it infinitely clear that you will not tolerate bullying behavior in your home or anywhere else, and that there will be consequences if the behavior continues. You

should be consistent in your rules and their subsequent enforcement, as well as positive reinforcement.

As a responsible parent, be involved with your child's activities at home and in school, in addition to participating in after-school activities. In order for you to know how your child is behaving, you need to know who he or she is chillin' with, and what they're doing during their 'off time.' If your child or children want to spend excessive amounts of time by themselves, encourage them to get involved in more social activities, such as sports, music lessons or school clubs.

Those 'answers' sound good, don't they? But, what if you don't notice any difference in your child's behavior after you've given everything a shot – then, you need to contact a mental health professional for an assessment and possible treatment.

What's a parent to do?

Muster all of your courage and have the guts to get your child help.

Chapter 7

Graduation

Alex works hard for everything he has – he worked his butt off in college to save enough money in the summer to buy a reliable car and, since then, a strong work ethic catapults him up the corporate ladder. At age twenty-eight, he's in line for a full partnership at his law firm – the partners haven't considered someone so young before, but they feel as if Alex will be an ambassador for them. Not to mention the billable hours he'll log . . . if there's one thing he knows how to do, it's make money.

This night wasn't any different than any other Friday night – those left locking the doors well after the dinner hour always met for a couple of beers at O'Reilly's. The relaxed and jovial

atmosphere was good for the soul, and by the time Alex arrived at his apartment door, the day's pressures were beginning to fade.

Life was good.

That is, until Alex's boss called him into his office on the following Monday to let him know that the partners were no longer considering him for advancement. What? Why not? All the managing partner would tell him was, "There are some rumors . . ."

Are you serious? Rumors? Really? What kind of rumors?

No one was talking . . .

Alex had no idea he was the unsuspecting victim of a workplace bully. It never occurred to him that someone would sabotage his promotion. It never occurred to him that someone would purposefully destroy his dreams . . .

Gee . . . the playground bully is all grown up.

For years, we've been hearing about sexual harassment in the workplace – it has, however, been 'supplanted' (for lack of any

other word) by ‘workplace bullying.’ Over the last couple of decades, we worked hard to bring the recognition of sexual harassment to the forefront and, because of the concerted effort to eradicate it from our companies and corporations, anyone who sexually harasses another will be the recipient of swift and, perhaps, harsh consequences.

So what’s the difference between sexual harassment and workplace bullying? It’s simple – workplace bullying isn’t illegal.

In March of 2008, the Seventh International Conference on Work, Stress and Health presented its research findings targeting bullying in the workplace. As startling as it may be, workplace bullying is more difficult on employees than sexual harassment. Workplace bullying victims must fend for themselves, and there is no avenue for help.¹⁰

Coauthors Hershcovis and Julian Barling of Queens University of Kingston, Ontario, studied bullying in the

¹⁰ M. Sandy Hershcovis, University of Manitoba, The New York Times, Health, March 11, 2008

workplace, and they identified different types of workplace aggression:

- incivility includes being rude, either in action or words,
- conflicts with co-workers usually ending up in an argument,
- yelling and hurling insults, gossiping and excluding coworkers from office functions or activities.

I think it's interesting that workers who experience bullying in the workplace are much more likely to quit their jobs, as opposed to the person who experiences sexual harassment. Bullied coworkers are less happy with their jobs, as well as their bosses. They're also less committed to their jobs.¹¹

Well, who wouldn't be? So, why does workforce bullying go unreported and unnoticed?

Because if they complain, they will sound petty and whiney.

¹¹ Hershcovis and Barling, The New York Times, Health, March 11, 2008

Workplace bullying is difficult to get a handle on, as well as to prove. Many times it comes down to ‘one against the other,’ and those who are bully victims view reporting the abuse as a futile effort.

Unfortunately, they’re right.

So, what are some of the signs of workplace bullying?

- Being left out from work-related social events
- Coworkers storming out of the work area when you enter
- Others regularly arriving late for meetings that you call
- Being given the ‘silent treatment’
- Not being given the praise you think you deserve
- Being treated rudely or disrespectfully
- Coworkers refusing to help when you ask
- Spreading rumors about you that aren’t true and that nobody denies

- Being given little or no feedback about your performance
- Others responding slowly to requests that were important to you
- Being yelled or shouted at
- Receiving put-downs about your intelligence or competence
- Your telephone calls or other communications are ignored
- Your contributions are ignored
- Someone interferes with or sabotages your work
- Being the recipient of mean pranks
- Being lied to
- Being denied a raise or promotion without a valid reason
- Being given bigger workloads or shorter deadlines than coworkers
- Being accused of making a mistake on purpose

- A coworker throws a temper tantrum when you disagree with him
- Being put down in front of others

Gee, is that all? Every time I see these types of findings, I'm amazed at how many small, seemingly harmless actions impart stress, frustration and fear on the victim. And, while men and women may be seeking the same result, their bullying tactics vary. Men tend to be more physical in their bullying technique, while women prefer the more backhanded approach.¹²

Just as there are several types of juvenile bullies, there are different types of adult bullies:

The narcissistic bully. The bully who always thinks about him or herself. Self-centered. Not empathetic. Typically, they don't think too much about consequences

¹² Research from the State University of New York and Wayne State University

of their actions – it's all about themselves. For the narcissistic bully, it feels good to put someone down.

The impulsive bully. This type of adult bully doesn't really plan his or her bullying – they have a difficult time reining in their behavior, and they don't consider the consequences. Many times, they will bully someone because they are stressed or, perhaps, frustrated.

The physical bully. This is one instance when the adult bully is different from the juvenile bully – most of the time, the adult bullies aren't physical in their inflicted torment. They may not physically harm the victim, but they may use the 'threat' of physical harm.

The verbal bully. Words hurt. And the verbal bully knows it. This type of bully will start rumors about a victim, or use language that will demean and humiliate his or her victim. Even though verbal bullying is very difficult to document, the damage it causes to the victim's psyche and spirit is very real. The emotional and psychological impact of the Verbal Bully can easily result in poor job performance and depression.

The secondary bully. They join in the party, so they won't become victims of bullying themselves. It boils down to self-preservation.¹³

Here's the rub. There's very little you can do about an adult bully. They aren't in it for compromise or working things out.

They're in it for power and domination.

Those are powerful motivations, and the adult bully victims many times are left to fend for themselves. Of course, you can work within the parameters of the law and company policy and, maybe, you can find relief through the judicial system. Don't count on it, though. You have to document everything, and that can be a Herculean task.

If you're the victim of an adult bully, then what can you do?

Adult bullies prey on your emotions – so, if you take the 'emotional quotient' out of your coping process, do you think that might work? Here's what I mean . . .

¹³ BullyingStatistics.org

The behavior exhibited by the workplace adult bully isn't because of you – most of the time, the behavior has little to do with you. It has everything to do with them – the bullies. They are insecure, perhaps anxious and/or depressed, and they inflict terror or pain that is exhibited through their own aggression – it has nothing to do with you or anybody else. If you can compartmentalize the bully's behavior and remember that the bully is emotionally crippled, you can see how pathetic they truly are.

That makes sense to me. Your matter-of-fact approach to their bullying rather takes the wind out of their sails, doesn't it? In other words, don't take it personally!

It's their problem, not yours!

In the U.S., it's estimated that 80% of the workplace bully victims are women – and, current statistics indicate that one out of every six workers is bullied at work. Those are some staggering statistics! And, as if those stats aren't enough, 71% of workplace bullying is carried out by bosses!¹⁴

¹⁴ Sixwise.com, Are You Being Bullied at Work? 12 Telltale Signs and What to do About It

The victim of the workplace bully doesn't have the character that you may think – i.e. the workplace victim isn't weak or vulnerable, or a simpering, whining, gutless employee. They're just the opposite and instead of weakness, the workplace bully victims display courage, motivation, drive, performance excellence and they're well-liked. All of the things that the bully hates . . .

Due to the dog-eat-dog and cutthroat environment of the workplace, it becomes a breeding ground for the bully. He or she believes, and acts on those beliefs, that they have to manipulate, degrade, defame and strong arm coworkers in an effort to climb that corporate ladder. The sad thing is that those who are responsible for offering promotions (bosses) reward such despicable behavior by salary increases, etc.

Are you ready for a few more disturbing stats? I think it's important to recognize and understand that, if you believe you are a victim of workplace bullying, you are not struggling by yourself.

- 41% of workplace bully victims become depressed.

- 31% of female workplace bully victims suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- 21% of male workplace bully victims suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Unbelievable!

There's one more victim of the bully that we don't think about much – the company or corporation. It's so easy to consider only our personal responses to bullying, that we don't give much credence to the non-personal aspect of the bullying epidemic. However, workplace bullying costs companies and corporations really big bucks!

Why? Victims of bullies often feel as if they 'can't take it anymore' and they don't report to work. The victim's inability to deal with their tormentor takes its toll on the company by increasing absenteeism, increasing healthcare costs (physical or mental) and, perhaps most important to the company, losing productivity. A recent survey of 9,000 Federal employees indicated that 42% of women and 15% of men were bullied over a two-year period.

Such statistics make me wonder why corporations don't take a stronger stance on the problem of workforce bullying. Are they sticking their corporate heads in the sand and simply refusing to deal with it? Do they cognitively recognize that the corporation is losing money? Do they care that they're losing money? That same two-year survey found that workplace bullying led to \$180 million in lost revenue and productivity.

Don't you think it's about time that companies wake up and smell the proverbial coffee? I certainly do – and, it's why I'm bringing my knowledge and expertise to you.

There was a movie many years ago, entitled *Network*, and there is a famous line from the character Howard Beale. "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

Well, I'm mad as hell! Are you? Are you sick and tired of being a victim? Are you ready to do something about it?

I am.

So, let's work together.

First things first. Whether you are a victim of bullying, or your child is a victim of a 'schoolyard bully,' you must recognize it, understand it, embrace your fear and then begin to do something about it. If you stick your head in the sand, such as the corporations do, you'll always be a victim.

I think that bears repeating.

If you stick your head in the sand, you'll ALWAYS be a victim.

It's time to rise and have your voice heard – heard not only by the bullies, but also by the 'powers that be' who have the means to change your circumstances.

I'm writing this series of books to help you become strong. You once were, you know. I'm sure that before a bully targeted you, you were confident, happy and strong. You must be thinking that it's not fair.

You're right! It's not fair!

Just remember that I'm right here with you. The first book in the series (this one!), focuses on bullying within the school

systems and the family. I think we need to have a firm grasp on when and why bullying behaviors take root – if we don't tackle the bullies and protect their victims from the inception of their deviant behavior, we can't begin to rectify the typical results.

It's important that if you're dealing with bullying in your family, that we become experts at recognizing the signs and red flags. In the first pages of this book, I discussed this topic briefly – however, we need to go into much more depth in order to effectively confront and deflate the bullying personality.

Are you with me?

Excellent! Remember that I told you I'm deeply entrenched in efforts to change human behavior? I'm ready to change the bully's behavior – and, yours, as well.

Let's get started . . .

Chapter 8

They used to be so cute . . .

Every parent in the world remembers what it was like to bring their son or daughter home from the hospital. I know I do. You're probably like me in that you hoped and planned the best for your child – you knew in the depths of your soul that you would do everything in your power to protect the beautiful child you carried in your arms. And, by the time that 'bundle of joy' was ready to hit the kindergarten scene, you felt as if you were launching a child toward a successful life.

Then, at your first parent-teacher conference, you learn that your darling is exhibiting a few 'behavioral issues.' What? What

does that mean? Naturally, the teacher spoke to you in a voice that was barely a whisper – her fear of being overheard manifesting in a volume so low that no one could possibly hear it without straining.

“Now, I’m sure it’s nothing to be alarmed about.” As you stare at her, her voice sounds eerily condescending and you wonder what that was about.

“But, I thought you should know. When Ellie is on the playground, I’ve caught her twice shaking another student so hard that her head was snapping back and forth.” The teacher punctuates the word ‘snapping’ and waits for your response.

But you don’t have a response. You’re trying to process, make sense of and visualize what the teacher is saying – it just doesn’t make sense.

Of course, she has to be wrong . . .

It’s disturbing to think that bullying can surface in someone so young. I think the natural response is to conceal and bury the

possibility of a young school age child exhibiting bullying behavior.

Ah, but they do. Simply because of their age, kindergarten bullies don't mistreat their peers with the intent of being 'mean' – they just learn that their behavior warrants reward, and they continue their ruthless assaults. It gets them noticed. After all, who doesn't love attention? And, while we wish to believe that innocence is without chinks in its armor, the truth is staring at us smack between the eyes. Research from many countries indicates that bullying in kindergarten occurs at the same rate as first, second and third graders.¹⁵ The elementary school set.

Kindergarten bullies exhibit much of the same behavior as their older counterparts. And a child who has to endure the endless and repeated verbal barbs or physical assault quickly comes to the conclusion that they should 'sit down and shut up.' It's the safest way to go.

So, based on the limited vocabulary a kindergartner has, do they say mean things such as, "You're ugly!" or "You're stupid!"

¹⁵ Bullying in Kindergarten, Education.com

Yes. But, the bullying manifests in other ways, as well, such as hiding the victim's shoes or refusing to sit by the victim in group situations. Young bullies are really rather cagey . . . they quickly figure out who they can bully and whom they can't bully. Once that delineation is made, the 'weak' target becomes the source of constant negative attention.

Let's look at the kindergarten victims of bullies first. Here's a stat that you'll find troubling – a recent study finds that 10% of kindergarten students are bullies.¹⁶ That same study reflects that 6% of kindergarten students are 'passive victims' . . . a passive victim is the child who is the target of a bully and just takes it . . . and takes it . . . and, takes it. Never a single retaliation. Very often, the kindergarten passive victim has a tough time making friends, they play by themselves and they aren't well liked by their peers.

It doesn't stop there. In addition to passive victims, there are aggressive victims, children who are assistants to bullies and

¹⁶ Bullying in Kindergarten, Education.com

children who are witnesses to bullying. I think an in-depth understanding of each type of victim is in order.

I already mentioned the passive victim. So what about the aggressive victim? Well, the aggressive victim exhibits somewhat aggressive behavior and they constitute about 8% of kindergarten students. The aggressive victim is impulsive and prone to outbursts when they are the target of a bully – in fact, that’s what makes it interesting to the kid who is doing the bullying. They know exactly what buttons to push to achieve a certain violent response from the victim. The truth is, kindergarten bullies are not typically violent or physically aggressive – that’s why the aggressive victims have a category all of their own. They can’t be lumped in with the passive victim because of their tendency to be physical.

O.K. What about children who are assistants to bullies? When hanging together in a group, these are the children who don’t really take the initiative to start the bullying – they decide it’s much better to chime in after things start getting good. They

assist and augment the torment of the victim, and they feel much safer in a group atmosphere.

Then there are the kindergartners who are witnesses to bullying. These are the children who never bully their peers and/or they aren't attacked by their peers – but, they do witness it. When they do see a bully at work, they typically feel sad or angry, and many times they try to help the victim. Do you think they innately feel those emotions, or are they taught to feel them? Kindergarten students are very open to learning and they can easily learn that if they see a victim of a bully, they can be compassionate and try to help.

Man. That's a lot to heap on a kid who is only five years old. I think it's important, however, to realize a young child can be coached and taught to 'go get the teacher' when they witness a bully at work on the playground, in the bathroom or maybe on the bus.

It's all well and good to talk about the traits of kindergarten bullies and how to recognize them, but the main thing is to know what to do about it. How can you tell if your five or six year old

is the victim of a swing set bully? What signs should you be looking for?

As a parent, you know how your baby reacts in different situations. Are you noticing a change in behavior? Does your child seem stressed? Are there any psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches? Is your son or daughter afraid to go to kindergarten? Or, maybe they seem depressed . . .

Think about this – kindergarten bullying concerns the whole class, in addition to the teachers and parents. That’s pretty much everyone in a child’s life. They like victims much less than non-involved peers – and, sometimes even the bullies!

Victims also lack the friends who can protect them.

Let’s face it. Peer rejection can last a long time – a lifetime – and the emotional scars refuse to heal. But, they’re just children! How can they possibly have the emotional tools and sophistication to deal with a bully. The answer is simple. They can’t. Based on a kindergartner’s age alone, they must have someone in their life who will go to bat for them – an adult. That means a teacher or parent.

So, what can teachers do?

- Educate themselves so they can recognize the difference between actual bullying and the usual conflicts that reflect normal behavior
- Gain a complete understanding that early intervention is critical
- Talk to the entire class in an effort to instill in students that bullying behavior is unacceptable
- Teach the students what is acceptable and non-acceptable behavior
- Create a sense of safety for each student in the class

With such young children, prevention becomes all about ‘the tools.’ A young child molds to his or her environment and it’s up to the parents and teachers to provide the training that will serve them well during their years in school and with the family.

So what of the kindergarten bully? Now you know about the damage a kindergarten bully can heap on a victim, but what are the indicators that a young child is a full-fledged bully or even beginning to show the signs of bullying behavior?

We touched on it briefly – they exhibit aggressive behavior through name calling, they lack a moral compass and they often exist in a family environment that is fraught with conflict. They lack social skills and social problem-solving skills and bullying is often a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions.

If you recognize out-of-the-norm behavior in your young child, be proactive and realize there are reasons for that behavior. Confront it, deal with it and continue targeted psychological training. Remember and hang on to the fact that they are young and malleable – if you catch bullying behavior early, there's a much better chance that you can do something about it. If you choose to ignore the warning signals, you also choose to be in for a possible rough ride – because everything might start to go south and, before you realize it, your cute little kindergartner has graduated to bigger and better things.

Which brings me to my next point . . .

Chapter 9

It's elementary . . .

Want to know some hard facts? Nine out of ten elementary school children are bullied by their peers. If I were in your shoes, I'd have a hard time wrapping my brain around those numbers. Nine out of ten! I find that statistic to be almost incomprehensible and enormously sad at the same time. Even more troubling, six out of ten elementary students admit to taking part in bullying behavior – this according to researchers at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital and the Stanford University School of Medicine.¹⁷ Their researchers devised a simple questionnaire that is designed to determine kids at risk, as well as a way to

¹⁷ School Bullying Affects the Majority of Elementary School Students, sciencedaily.com, April 12, 2007

monitor the success of bully prevention programs at the elementary school level.

The questionnaire and survey attempted to explore and understand the two types of elementary school bully – the *direct bully* (one who inflicts physical harm) and the *indirect bully* (one who excludes the victim or spreads rumors). The survey also served to corroborate the thinking that victims tend to suffer from depression throughout their lives and that there needs to be a change in perception that schoolyard bullying is a part of life and the victim needs to suck it up and take it. The questionnaire includes questions such as, “I never play with friends at recess,” and each participant is required to answer never, sometimes or often. The researchers found it interesting that bullying persists over a period of time and that indications of bullying and victimization occur at very young ages.

Unfortunately, previous and current studies show that a child who bullies in kindergarten, likely bullies throughout elementary, middle and high school. Not to mention the workplace – we mentioned that briefly in the first pages of this book and that topic

is discussed at length in the second book of this series. The bully who makes a career out of threats, mental and physical abuse travels through life with a metaphorical club always at the ready.

There are two things you can count on with bullying – there is always a bully and there is always a victim. The bully has a higher probability of enjoying the accommodations provided by the state later on in life and the victim sometimes looks forward to an untimely, self-inflicted demise.

One of the reasons I'm writing this book is to help parents and/or students recognize the indicators of the bully and the bully victim. In that vein, I'd like you to answer the following questions honestly – think about the question, and then think about if it applies to any of your children. Or, perhaps you can recognize some of these 'symptoms' in yourself:

- Has your child stopped going over to a certain friend's house?
- Has your child stopped participating in an activity they once enjoyed, such as sports or group get-togethers?

- Have your child's grades taken a dip or a nosedive?
- Does your child have violent outbursts at home?
- Is your child more listless than usual?

Well? Do you recognize any of the above behaviors present in your child? If you do, I hope this book serves as a catalyst for action – you can't wait and hope the situation resolves itself.

Chances are it won't. There's a good chance your child is being bullied somewhere in his or her everyday life, and the sad fact is they simply aren't equipped to deal with it. That falls to you – their protector and champion.

So what should you do?

- Be willing to take the time and talk to your child about school.
- Watch their reaction – do they try to change the subject?
- Let them know frequently that you are there to help them.

- Empower your child to talk to a teacher or school administrator.
- Empower your child to identify the bullies.
- Schedule a meeting *immediately* with your child's teacher and the school's principal to discuss the problem.
- *Demand* that they take action!
- Don't believe that the problem will eventually 'work itself out.'
- Become and stay involved in your child's school.

No matter how old your child is, you must let them know that you care about them and you will protect them. Teach them consequences and rewards for behavior, as well as what constitutes acceptable behavior. Remember that it's not too late to effect change.

It's elementary . . .

Chapter 10

Middle School. It's Brutal.

An interesting thing happens when children reach the age to enter middle school – in some regions, middle school is only seventh and eighth grades, while in other regions middle school is sixth, seventh and eighth grades. To be honest, I'm a little conflicted about the sixth grade thing – a sixth grader is only eleven years old and I don't like the idea of their being lumped in with older kids. It may be naïve of me, but I prefer to hang onto the sweetness of youth for as long as I can. Not mine, of course. I mean my child's sweetness . . .

If you have a son or daughter in middle school, have you had the opportunity to do a little 'people watching' when you're

sitting in your car waiting to pick them up? I have. I've watched girls group together – girls who flip their hair the same way, dress the same way and act the same way. I've watched them glance in all directions to see if someone is looking at them. And I've heard them, too; the flagrant disrespect and intolerance of those who are not like them is the norm.

And they're only thirteen years old.

These girls are considered 'main stream' students – they probably get good grades, they come from 'good families' and they're considered 'popular.' But according to the U.S. Surgeon General, by the time your eleven, twelve or thirteen year old is entrenched in middle school, 20% of the students say they've been drunk at least once. And according to the Partnership for a Drug Free America, 73% of middle school students say the stress of school causes them to drink and take drugs. I guess it isn't too much of a stretch to realize and understand that if the kids are engaging in adult behavior at such a young age, they have no compunction regarding targeting a classmate whom they perceive to be weak.

Unfortunately, bullying is a socially learned behavior. Behavior learning continues when your child enters school and when they are witnesses to bullying behavior and they see it regularly, it begins to manifest and rub off on students who may be struggling in other areas of their lives. Perhaps there is discord at home or some sort of abuse in the student's environment, and the results of that dysfunction begin to simmer when the child realizes that bullying behavior creates a powerful consequence to the victim. The sad fact is that bullying often makes the bully feel good.

So why does bullying increase when a student reaches middle school? Although there are several schools of thought, one reason remains constant – students transitioning from fifth to sixth grades find it necessary to establish a level of dominance in order to cope with new surroundings, new friends and a bigger school. Once that dominance is established and the student feels moderately comfortable with the new environment, bullying tends to recede in most students. However, for those students who enjoy the feeling of power and the adrenaline rush that goes with it, they carry on the aberrant behavior and their bullying episodes

escalate and it begins to take shape in a new form. What started out as a physical assault in earlier grades, the bully begins to learn and practice bullying on a mental level – they strike at emotions, and the self confidence and self esteem of their victims begins to erode. Very often, bullies who continue to target victims never feel secure in an environment with their peers.

Studies show that when children enter early adolescence, there is an increase in aggression while they search for new friends. Boys tend to bully more than girls do in fifth and sixth grade, but girl bullies are on the rise and their bullying tactics include threatening, innuendo and teasing about clothes and makeup. The venom that spews from their mouths damages and wounds their victims, and it doesn't stop when school lets out in the afternoon. Bullies continue their assaults (especially girl bullies) in cyberspace, and Facebook, MySpace, emailing and texting offer forums for emotional assaults on a daily basis. And camera phones escalate bullying to a whole new level . . .

Middle school bullies (and bullies of all ages) engage in *direct and indirect bullying styles*. Direct bullying includes

pushing, punching, spitting and tripping, while indirect bullying includes teasing, spreading rumors and shunning. Over the last two decades, bullying that causes severe injury is rising and taking weapons to school is becoming more commonplace. Middle schools struggle to address the bullying component of learning by implementing anti-bullying campaigns; however, many teachers and parents tend to disengage by commenting that the bully's behavior 'isn't that bad' or 'it's just a phase.' And, while teachers and administrators may voice that their campaigns are effective and working, the students believe otherwise. Sadly, many teachers and parents stick their heads in the sand by not acknowledging the seriousness of the bullying behavior, and they dismiss the fact that bullying in early grades often leads to violent behavior as the bullying student proceeds through school.

So much for stats. I can blow numbers at you all day long, but nothing has the impetus for action more than a true story . . .

Meet Ryan. When Ryan was entering school as a kindergartner, he struggled with language development and motor skills. He received special education services up until fifth

grade and by the time he was ready to enter middle school, he was on target and at grade level. He worried, though, and as he began his middle school education, he had to work harder in an effort to complete his homework on time. Ryan recognized that he wasn't 'as smart' as many of his classmates and he was hard on himself, no matter how much his parents tried to quell the academic pressure and anxiety.

Ryan was a sweet boy – teachers loved him because of his warm, caring personality. Peers, however, targeted his academic and physical weaknesses and they were relentless in their pursuit. In fifth grade, he wasn't physically bullied, but was the recipient of hurtful words hurled by other students. His parents advised him to 'walk away' and even engaged in counseling and, by the end of fifth grade Ryan's troubles seemed to diminish.

Then came middle school. The transition from fifth to sixth grade proved to be traumatic and, as a young sixth grader walking through the halls with bigger eighth graders, Ryan grew increasingly uncomfortable and reticent. The schoolwork got harder and he slipped back into a state of struggling just to get through the mountains of homework the teachers heaped on all of

the students. He expressed concern that he would have to go back to 'special ed' and he was keenly aware of the consequence of that possible solution. He knew that there would be a giant bull's eye on his back . . .

Sure enough. The bullies continued their game, and as Ryan edged through sixth grade, his parents maintained the thought that the bullies were just 'being kids' and that learning to withstand the onslaught of piercing words was just a part of being in middle school.

But by seventh grade, the bullying got much worse.

By the middle of the year, the bullying escalated to a significant level and Ryan suffered a meltdown. Tears spilled. He wanted to move. He wanted to be home schooled.

All of this came as a shock, because his parents thought everything was just fine. Apparently, though, Ryan kept his misery close to his heart and finally he couldn't take it anymore. Ryan's dad wanted to take it to the principal, but Ryan begged him not to – he knew that the consequences of that action would make the torment unbearable.

Ryan wanted to learn to fight. He begged.

It was clear that, for some reason, Ryan didn't trust the school officials to deal with the situation. In retrospect, his parents wished they had picked up on that clue and dug into it more.

But they didn't.

They did, however, invest in a Taebo kickboxing video and Ryan and his dad worked on it every evening after dinner for nearly two months. Ryan became more self confident and even though his dad was careful to instruct him not to start the fight, he gave his permission to 'wail on him' if he were in a situation where he felt threatened. And the occasion came when Ryan had to use his newly honed skills – shaken, scared and triumphant all at the same time, he felt as if he stood up for himself and succeeded in the effort.

Ryan's parents thought they were doing everything right. They gave Ryan latitude with the internet, but in the same breath they advised that those privileges would be gone if he broke the house rules. His dad stressed that if he discovered secret passwords, his internet days would be over. Ryan knew his dad

meant business and he obeyed the rules, because he loved the social networking sites where he and most of his friends hung out.

His enemies, too.

It wasn't until after the funeral that his dad discovered the reason Ryan took his own life – the instant messages saying he was gay, messages from a girl who 'befriended' Ryan online and then called him 'a loser' when she finally met with him face-to-face. Oh, yes. She and her friends thought it would be funny to make him think that she liked him. Yet, despite all of this, Ryan's father doesn't blame any one person or a singular event that caused Ryan to commit suicide. He believes it's a compilation of things with the primary factor being cyberspace – the forum for bullies. In the end, Ryan suffered from depression that was brought on by a number of factors and it was that depression that prompted him to end his own misery.

During the first quarter of 2009, stories of middle school suicides began to hit the airwaves. Three pre-teen suicides

happened in February, 2009 in Illinois, and a fourth suicide took place in Springfield, Massachusetts.

All four deaths were linked to bullying.

As strange as it may seem, the young victims who committed suicide were targeted as being gay – it appears that targeting the victim’s perceived gender preferences is one of the main ‘hits’ hurled by the bully. But why would a bully choose one victim over another to be the target of the gay epithets? One reason – appearance.

I have a friend who is a private music teacher and the majority of her teaching practice is comprised of middle and high school students. Recently, she told me about a student she teaches via web cam and who is loaded with talent. “He’s as cute as a bug’s ear,” she said. Then she told me that he’s being bullied at school and kids are calling him gay because he enjoys the performing arts. At lunch, the principal approached the table where a group of boys were sitting, including my friend’ student, and he announced that there were too many kids at the table and one of them would have to move. He left it up to the boys at the

table to determine who would be ousted from the group. Guess who it was? My friend's student.

When the day rolled around for the boy's web cam lesson, my friend noticed immediately that he was different. Something had changed since last week and she asked him if everything were O.K. He said everything was fine, but he really wasn't very convincing. My friend wouldn't let it go and finally the tears brimmed in his eyes and he spilled his guts and relayed the story of the lunchroom.

He probably couldn't tell, but her eyes were teary, too. She asked him what he wanted to have happen and he said he didn't want anything to happen. At first she wondered why, but after she thought about it for a bit, she realized that her student believed that if his parents went to the school, the ramifications would be far worse than the lunchroom scene.

Unfortunately, he's probably right.

So, now you know. You know that bullying begins at a very early age and it continues as your children go through middle school. It gains strength and, as it continues, the bullying behavior often causes irrevocable consequences. And while the

thought of high school should be exciting for the eighth grader, it's also filled with reluctance and fear.

Because in high school, the bullies are just getting started . . .

Chapter 11

The Birthplace of the Professional Bully: High School

Toward the end of the '90s, high school kids started to change. A 'nice clean-cut boy' became a thing of the past and skater clothes were the dress choice of the day for many – you know, the baggy, loose jeans that have a waistband that hangs halfway down on the butt – God forbid if any of those boys have to run. They'd make it about ten feet before losing their britches! And girls aren't much better. Necklines plunged and skirts were so short that sitting down in class was a problem. It was during that time that I saw high school students' behavior change and they

were no longer children – they had morphed into a no man’s land between a kid and an adult.

One friend of mine told me that her seventeen-year-old daughter bounced to the dinner table sporting a plunging neckline (my friend didn’t even know she owned the top) and her brothers’ eyes just about bugged out of their heads. Their Grandpa tried not to look. Her mom nearly dropped the poached salmon when she rounded the corner and saw her daughter in all of her glory. Needless to say, the glory didn’t last long because the daughter was ordered to ‘put on something decent’ in about two seconds flat. She flounced and bounced from the room, muttering all the way to her bedroom.

After the grandparents left, my friend explained to her daughter that her choice of clothing wasn’t appropriate – not just for a family dinner, but for anytime. If I recall correctly, my friend got the silent treatment for several days . . .

Of course, dressing like a streetwalker or skater doesn’t really have anything to do with bullying – it does, though, show how a child’s self perception changes when they begin to feel a

sense of power and freedom as they get older. I can't imagine a parent who hasn't gone through the high school stage of their child or children thinking they know everything and they, as parents, don't know squat.

For the high school student who seeks acceptance and popularity, bullying seems a good place to start. Since the late '90s, the rise in bullying is exponential – it's always been present, but it's now at the forefront of the news and it inserts itself into everyday lives. Since Columbine, there is a realization that bullies and teenage malcontents need to take out their frustrations on weaker students because of their inability to exist within the social norms. High schools bullies seem to have a greater level of sophistication in their tactics and subliminal bullying works well; and, it may well be the pre-cursor to workplace bullying. When I talk of subliminal bullying, I mean the insidious nature of the bullying that takes an 'under the radar' approach. It's often difficult to name and identify – and, it's often difficult to complain about it. It seems as if the bullying is something you can't quite put your finger on, but you know it's happening. Victims of subliminal bullying often choose not to say anything

about the abuse, because it can't be readily defined or identified. Spreading rumors, shunning, exclusion from social gatherings and being lied to are just a few abuse choices a high school bully makes, and they are eerily similar to the workforce bully's choice of torment.

High school bullies still choose to inflict physical torment on their victims, as well as psychological torment. It becomes a rite of passage, and one in seven high school students suffer at the hands of a bully.

If your high school student is a victim of bullying, you may be interested in these stats:

- 22% of 4th through 8th graders report lower grades due to bullying.
- 160,000 students miss school daily due to fear of bullies.
- Boys are more likely to bully physically; girls typically taunt and spread rumors. Bullying victims face increased mental health risks, some for life.

- By age 24, 60% of children who bully will have had a criminal conviction.¹⁸

It's staggering, isn't it? And, as you can see, the stats include numbers for students fourth through eighth grade – it really brings home the fact that bullying spans all grades in our educational system. School becomes a social jungle and it is one many students fear to navigate.

As recently as a couple of weeks ago, an article came out about one of pop music's icons – Lady Gaga told her story of being bullied when she was in high school.

"The boys picked me up and threw me in the trash can on the street, on the corner of my block while all the other girls from the school were leaving and could see me in the trash."

She tried to fight back the tears, because she didn't want her tormentors to see her break.

"Everybody was laughing and I was even laughing. I had that nervous giggle . . . I remember even one of the girls looking at me

¹⁸ *Anti-Bullying Tactics*, MNAdopt.org

like 'are you about to cry? You're pathetic.' That's what it felt like, you're pathetic."

"It didn't sink in with me how bullying affected me until later in my life. I knew that it affected me deeply, but it wasn't until a little bit later that I realized how much it affected me and how much it was still very present."¹⁹

Really think about that. What would it feel like to be physically stuffed into a garbage can – or, a locker? The humiliation must be horrific and the sense of ‘feeling like a piece of garbage’ must cut to the bone. When I hear or read the stories of victims of bullies, one thing is infinitely clear: nothing is going to change until we face the problem head on. Parents and teachers, brothers and sisters must unite to squelch the hold bullies have on our schools and our workplaces.

It’s clear to me that in order to minimize the number of bullies in our society and in our schools, prevention must begin at home. Even though the word ‘indoctrination’ has a negative

¹⁹ *High School Bullies Threw Lady Gaga in the Trash Can*, Popeater.com, May 20, 2011

connotation for many, it may be worth considering indoctrinating our children against the principles of bullying from an early age. If we begin teaching our children from the time they are old enough to learn right from wrong, we stand a chance of defeating the stranglehold bullies have on our family members and peers.

We stand a chance of winning a very tough battle.

If you're waging the battle, here are tips that may help you as you struggle to save your child:

- Teach your child self-respect and nurture confidence.
- Help your child learn to express anger, especially to you since letting your child stand up to you in an appropriate manner helps him/her stand up to a bully.
- Practice showing confident body language with your child, including making frequent eye contact and using deep breathing to bolster assertive words.
- Talk with your child about the consequences of casual violence seen on television, in video games, and possibly in the neighborhood. Extend the discussion into

purposeful violence such as the recent terrorist attacks on America.

- Encourage friendships since both victims and bullies tend to be loners.
- Teach your child how to solve problems, using praise when he/she follows through.
- Help your child express himself/herself clearly, using “I” statements. Children who express themselves without putting others on the defensive tend to gain friends.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your child (frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use can be signs of serious problems) and immediately get help from a counselor or therapist.
- Listen to your child if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as a school psychologist, principal, or teacher.

- Rent a video of a movie that explores intolerance (*Mask, The Elephant Man, Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame, My Bodyguard, The Man Without A Face.*)
- Hold up the mirror to yourself and to your child's teachers. Adults who demean, talk down to and constantly demand unquestioning obedience from children, foster bullying and being victimized.²⁰

While it's widely thought that bullies and victims tend to be loners (as in the list, above), remember that it's becoming increasingly apparent that bullies, especially girls, are more in the mainstream and they are guided by a desire to be popular. Mainstream bullying is taking a stance and as it gains in focus and popularity, the problem will continue to escalate.

Up to this point, you've learned about bullying and the various styles of bullying, as well as some of the atrocities the bully's victims must endure. The remaining pages will speak to

²⁰ *Anti-Bullying Tactics*, MNAdopt.org

the psychological damage that occurs to our children when they are at the hands of a bully.

And the feeling that there is no way out . . .

Section II

Chapter 12

The Psychological Damage

When your kids are at school, they're witnesses to bullying – they see it every day, and the majority of them choose to ignore it for fear of obvious repercussions. What they witness, for the most part, is the 'observable behavior' of the bully and the victim. Observable behavior is readily apparent by:

- Intimidation and threats,
- Name calling, insults, and comments about disability, gender and race,

- Teasing about personal characteristics or sexual harassment,
- Physical assault, tripping, hitting, pinching and other physical abuse, and
- Destruction of property, demanding money or other possessions.

But what about the ‘secretive behavior?’ Bullies often engage in threats that serve as undercurrents of torment:

- Rejecting, excluding, and isolating victims from others,
- Spreading rumors and other public humiliation,
- Manipulating friends and relationships,
- Passive aggression,
- Passing damaging notes or posting [threatening or damaging emails](#) or web material, and
- Blackmailing, harassment and dangerous dares.²¹

²¹ *Preventing School Bullying and Protecting your Child*, About.com

While I intellectually know and believe that both styles of bullying are prevalent, for some reason the secretive bully strikes a creepy, unsettling chord. It seems more insidious and subliminal when the bully knows that the victim will have a difficult time proving any of it. There always seems to be a “You can’t prove it,” element to the bullying – and, that kind of thinking comes from one with high intellectual capacity. They think about what they’re going to do and then they set plans in motion. And, before long, the advanced bully doesn’t even have to think about what sort of torment to inflict – it just comes naturally.

Even though bullies do have a strong level of intelligence, they possess only a lower Emotional Intelligence, known as EQ – in other words, they can’t empathize and relate to others’ points of view. But here’s the scary part – they also have a highly developed Social Intelligence, which allows them to read and manipulate people easily. It’s like buttering a piece of toast in the morning – they really don’t have to think about it much and it’s merely a means to an end.

Because of the lack of EQ, it makes me wonder if bullies are wired differently than normal people. Can bullying be genetic, or is it only learned behavior?

Let's check it out . . .

Research suggests that children who are victims of bullies are at risk for developing emotional problems, including depression. However, not *all* children who are bullied develop emotional struggles, so that suggests that genetic predisposition may play a part in how a victim deals with the torment from a bully. Or, how a bully comes to be in the first place.²²

It comes down to a Nature vs. Nurture thing . . .

So, let's look at some of the psychological impacts the bullying has on its victims – will those impacts last a lifetime, or are they short lived?

Josh hated riding the bus. Even though the bus ride was only about fifteen minutes, he hated every second of it. Oh, not

²² *Bullying, Genetics and Emotions; New Research Shows Link*,
Neurosciencenews.com

because the bus was kind of smelly, especially in the spring when most of the kids had P.E. in the afternoon right before school let out – he hated the bus ride because of Ty.

Ty was a big kid. Josh wasn't puny by any stretch of the imagination, but Ty was big, strong and about six feet tall. He could beat the crap out of anyone – and, he did. He loved the feeling of flesh buckling under his knuckles and the tingle as the feeling crept back into his hands. He loved the look of fear as he stared into the eyes of his victims and he never felt sorry for them when they cried.

He never felt sorry for them at all.

Ty thought that if someone were so weak, they deserved everything he could dish out, and he learned a long time ago that if he used his fists, no one could touch him.

Yep. That's what he thought.

He learned it from his dad.

Ty's mom always thought of him as a sweet boy – she loved

the way he'd offer to take the garbage out so she wouldn't hurt her hands. She was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis three years earlier, and sometimes the meds didn't work so well. There were days when she could barely tie her shoes, so Ty always tried to take some of the pain away from her. She really had no idea that in his spare time, he was punching kids who were smaller than he was, and that he was stealing money they had for lunch or snacks at school.

She had no idea that he was pummeling kids just for fun.

Ty's dad, though, he knew the score. On his way home from work one day, he caught a slight movement out of the corner of his eye and when he saw Ty pushing a kid up against the side of the Jeep that was in the driveway two doors down from him, he felt a deep surge of pride.

Turns out that Ty was a pretty quick learner.

So, what do you think? Do you think Ty was genetically predisposed to violent, bullying behavior or do you think he

learned it from his dad, who didn't mind beating the . . . well . . . you know . . . out of him?

Check out the rest of the story . . .

Josh cringed every time Ty got on the bus, and he prayed that if he scrunched down in his seat enough, Ty wouldn't see him. Sometimes it worked, but at least once a week Josh couldn't avoid the inevitable. He'd make a beeline for the house, but it was up a hill and down the block a little – and, since Ty had five or six inches on him, Josh seldom could outrun him.

Every so often Ty and the other kids would tag team him – throwing him to the ground and kicking his face. Then they'd leave him in a crumpled heap in the grass, laughing as they went their separate ways.

Rumor has it that time heals all wounds. For Josh . . . not so much. He's about forty-five now and the pain washes over him every time he sees a story about bullying on Fox News or some other station. He relives the crushing blows as if they happened

the hour before, and it takes a hot shower and a stiff drink of scotch to subdue the ribbons of memories.

Josh was never the same after his freshman year of high school.

He just couldn't quite get it together . . .

It's amazing, isn't it? Here it is thirty-one years later, and Josh still remembers the bullying as if it just happened.

From a psychological point of view, bullying can be regarded as a purely narcissistic act. Narcissists don't give a damn about anyone but themselves – they act purely in their own self interest, and they tend to treat others as objects to be used and abused as they see fit. A narcissistic bully uses his prey for self aggrandizement and self gratification, and if that isn't a great reason to hit the psychiatrist's couch, I don't know what is!

Simply by the nature of our bodies, physical pain eventually diminishes, although permanent physical scars may be left as a daily reminder of a bully's torment. Unfortunately, that's not the way of psychological and emotional scars – they are, many times, permanent and, without counseling, many victims carry the torment with them and deal with the scars for the rest of their lives. The upshot of this is there are short term psychological impacts, as well as long term psychological impacts . . .

Victims of bullies often internalize the pain they experience caused by the bully – in other words, they feel sadness, anxiety or stress. They may also experience somatic symptoms, such as headaches and stomachaches. Not only that, victims may also experience depression, diminished self esteem and self confidence, as well as insecurity in myriad situations. Yep – there's more. Victims of bullies may experience a decline in grades or an inability to function at school or work, as well as an increased inability to learn. The worst, of course, is the person who cannot handle life anymore and they choose to take their own life. Suicide. The ultimate act of giving up. The ultimate, final result of bullying.

Victims may *never* get over being bullied. Think about that statement for a sec . . . if you're bullied, you may never get over the torment unless you seek psychological counseling and help. I think I need to add something here:

If you are the victim of a bully, seek help.

Seek help from a licensed psychologist. And, if you don't have the monetary means to pay for that help, there are always organizations ready to offer help with a sliding fee scale or, perhaps, for no cost at all. Please don't let money stand in your way!

O.K. – back to the short and long term impacts. Studies show that students who endured bullying in school, often go on to experience psychological problems after graduation.²³ That takes care of the victims, although enough can't be said about what they must endure. But what about the short and long term impacts on the bullies themselves? It doesn't take a genius to figure out that

²³ Boyle, D.J. (2005). Youth Bullying: Incidence, Impact, and Interventions. *Journal of the New Jersey Psychological Association*, 55(3), 22-24.

if a young person is demonstrating aggressive, bullying behavior they need

psychological help through counseling. When they are allowed to take part in aggressive behavior at an early age, they are at significant risk for aberrant behavior later in life. They also exhibit other conduct disorders, such as vandalism, theft, ditching school and substance abuse. When such behavior is left unchecked, it can easily escalate into a full-blown personality disorder, such as Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD). This is especially true if the bully is a serial bully.

In order to understand fully the dynamic of a bully, I think it's important to understand the difference between a 'psychopath' and someone who suffers from 'Antisocial Personality Disorder.' While they have similarities, they are not the same. *Antisocial Personality Disorder* focuses on the antisocial acts of the individual in question, while *psychopathic behavior* focuses on personality traits such as no remorse, lack of guilt or lack of conscience. A 'psychopath' may have attributes of Antisocial Personality Disorder, in addition to a proclivity for

violent behavior and they express that dysfunction through physical violence. While many psychopaths may exhibit the symptoms of Antisocial Disorder, not all of them do. Conversely, those diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder do not necessarily exhibit the attributes of a psychopath.

To make it easy for you, a '*psychopath*' is a person with many of the characteristics of APD and they exhibit dysfunction and violence through physical violence. A '*sociopath*' is one who has many of the characteristics of APD, and they express their violence psychologically – i.e. by undermining, constant criticism or sidelining. As you can imagine, both of these psychological definitions apply to bullies.

Here's another interesting distinction between a psychopath and a sociopath – the psychopathic ADP person many times comes from a poor socio-economic background, urban settings and they exhibit lower intelligence. The sociopathic ADP individual is exactly the opposite – highly intelligent and from a 'good family.'

It's interesting, isn't it, that only one filament of bullying can spin an entire web of pain, deceit and emotional distress. In my mind, bullying truly is one of the most insidious behaviors that can literally change lives . . .

Forever.

If you're a parent reading this or a student who is experiencing bullying, remember that *reporting* the bully, or bullies, is critical to beginning to manage the problem. As a parent, you may not know that your child is experiencing what it's like to be the target of a bully. He or she may not tell you or any responsible adult, because they are embarrassed or they fear the bullying will get worse. And, even if you ask your child, "What's wrong?" you may not get a satisfactory answer, so you must keep in mind their fear of unbridled reprisal.

I have kids and instead of approaching a tough question with a question, I try to gain the information that I want to know by simple conversation. What do I mean by that? Well, it goes

along the lines of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. When you ask someone a closed-ended question, such as, “Did something happen at school today?” you run the risk of getting a yes or no answer – and, that’s all you’ll get. That answer doesn’t do much, does it? So, when you ask an open-ended question, you’re opening the door for additional information. Take the closed-ended question, “Did something happen at school today?” and turn it into, “What’s going on in your life? What’s happening at school?” As you can see, a yes or no answer isn’t appropriate, and you’ll get far more information if you ask your questions in a less intimidating manner.

When my children were in school and I needed to find out information from them, I’d phrase it something like this . . .

“I was talking to Mary’s mom at the store yesterday, and I was really surprised to hear that Mary is being ridiculed at school. Her mom thinks that she’s being bullied, but she’s not 100% sure. Geez – I can’t even imagine what that would be like. If that’s the case, who would do something like that?”

Then I'd shut up. I'd pay attention to my child's body language or notice if they'd start squirming in their chair – I'd look for any type of indication that they know something or they are uncomfortable with the subject matter. Then, depending on my level of satisfaction with the answer, I might follow up with, *“I haven't seen her for a long time, so I doubt if I'd notice if anything were different. What do you think?”*

It may take a couple of rounds of non-threatening questions but, eventually, you may gain much more information than you thought possible when you approach a conversation this way.

The key is to get your child talking.

Chapter 13

What to do . . .

So, it comes down to this. All of the knowledge in the world about bullies doesn't do a whole lot of good, unless you have the tools to do something about it. I'm not going to sugar coat it – you're probably in for a rough ride.

You will need to be vigilant, proactive and strong.

You will need to be persistent. You'll need guts. You'll need to pull on every ounce of spirit you have in your body.

But, you can do it. I know you can.

Recognition. It's the first of many steps to successful intervention. Here are some things to look for:

- torn, damaged, or missing belongings
- unexplained cuts, bruises, or other injuries
- social isolation
- fearfulness of going to, and avoidance of school
- loss of interest in school work
- decrease in academic performance
- somatic complaints such as headaches and stomach aches
- difficulty sleeping and/or nightmares
- depressive symptoms
- anxiety and/or low self-esteem
- passivity

The fact that bullying takes place in a social system, such as school, indicates that interventions must target the *system*, as well as the victim. The reason is because most of the students (victims) have little freedom to control their environment – i.e.

they can't control who is in the school, so it then becomes the task of the school to keep its students safe.

One of the finest anti-bullying intervention programs is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (olweus.org). A recent study showed that Virginia schools implementing the Olweus program, realized increased standardized test scores in English, math, science and history for schools that immersed themselves in the Olweus program. Schools that participated but did not commit fully to the program, also realized increased standardized test scores.

Changes found in bullying prevalence and teacher initiative included:

- 63% of schools reported decreases in the frequency of children being bullied
- 75% of schools reported decreases in the frequency of children bullying others
- 31% of schools reported increases in teachers speaking to students about bullying behaviors

- 81% of schools reported increases in teachers actively trying to counteract bullying in the classroom²⁴

Those are impressive stats – but what do they mean to you? They mean you should approach your school to find out what, if any, anti-bullying programs and campaigns your school implements. If they aren't proactive against bullying, it will be in every child and parent's interest to make them wake up and smell the coffee. Provide your school's administration with anti-bullying campaign options – teach them what's out there to help them with their commitment to stop bullying. If your administration is as overworked as you are, they will appreciate that you have 'done your homework' by exploring all of the applicable options. And, if it means that they don't have to expend salaried hours searching for those options, they may be much more inclined to listen. And act.

²⁴ *Virginia Study Shows Reducing Bullying Behavior Increases Academic Performance*, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, www.olweus.org

For the student enduring the bullying, you may want to consider ‘assertiveness training’ – i.e., teach your child how to respond with the appropriate assertiveness for a situation. Or, your student may benefit from ‘social skills training’ – training by which your child will learn how to overcome social communication deficiencies such as autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorders and other psychiatric conditions or learning disabilities that may be associated with social stress and difficulties.

Granted, these are just a couple of ideas – if you really want to change the face of bullying, be creative and think of ways to effect change that work for you and your personality.

- Focus groups
- Bully prevention meetings with other parents
- How to make a ‘buddy system’ work for your victim of bullying

Above all, make a statement! Let your school administration know that you’re not going to take it anymore!

And . . . most important. Let your child know you are in their corner.

Let them know that you will do whatever it takes to protect them.

One last thing – remember that you aren't alone in this mess. Hopefully, this book will help you understand the dynamics of schoolyard bullying – and, I hope it will give you hope and strength to confront the situation head on.

If you wish to learn more about bullying, I'm carrying on with *The Graduating Bully*, which will help you understand bullying in the workforce.

I wish you the best of luck!

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