

BULLYING = POISON

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Bullying is an epidemic that has been widespread in our society for a long time. It is a factor in the lives of about 95% of the young people I work with in therapy who come to me for treatment of depression, anxiety, ADHD, self-esteem issues, and self-harm or suicidal ideation. Schools and communities have tried different types of interventions and consequences, but none seem to reduce the prevalence and harmful effects of bullying. To my shock and dismay, even pediatricians, teachers, and coaches are culprits of bullying behavior.

Several of my clients have discussed how a negative comment continues to traumatize and deleteriously impact their wellbeing today, even if it occurred years ago. In my therapy sessions, I help people to heal and overcome the adverse effects these difficult and painful experiences have produced for them. The concept that communities need to focus on in order to eradicate, or at least effectively reduce, this issue is to teach, model, and practice a culture of respect and kindness, beginning in preschool and continuing through high school and beyond.

Many people struggle with the definition of bullying whether or not they have seen or experienced it firsthand in their daily lives. In my mind, bullying is any comment or behavior that would be considered rude, demeaning or insulting to another individual(s). If kids see the adults in their lives treat one another in this manner, they perceive it as normal and will begin to treat their peers the same way.

Most human beings have a conscience or moral compass that helps guide them in their actions and decisions. When young children are parented well, they learn there are unacceptable to say or do, even if the anger and frustration they feel is valid. This same zero tolerance should be carried over into the school environment where kids understand certain comments or behaviors will not be tolerated and need to be extinguished immediately.

It seems to me that in this day and age, young people are becoming more sarcastic and “dark humored” with one another. I hear how horrific insults and casual comments like “I want to kill myself” or “kill yourself” have become the norm. Not only should this concern adults, but it should prompt them to want to do something to stop it, teaching more respectful (both to self and others) ways of communication and expression. Young people should be taught that topics such as weight, body type, skin color, ethnicity, academic functioning, IQ, athleticism, rape, abuse, suicide and homicide are topics that should NEVER be commented on in a sarcastic or hurtful manner. It astounds me that this concept isn’t supported by -everyone.

My passion for this subject stems from personal, familial and professional experiences of being the victim of the violence of bullying. The result is a ripple effect that destroys a person’s self-esteem and social and/or academic functioning, which often ignites or exacerbates issues with mental health. As I mentioned above, there are a plethora of ways that the everyday functioning and well-being of the victims are negatively impacted. Those who were subjected to chronic bullying over a number of years at primary school were nearly five times more likely to self-harm six to seven years later in adolescence.

The scars from bullying never seem to fully heal and a lifelong struggle with self-esteem, depression, anxiety and much more can ensue. If treated by a professional in the mental health field, the prognosis for these lasting issues is greatly improved and many times “cured.” The sad part to me, as a clinician, mother, and human who prides myself on compassion and empathy, is

that it is rarely ever the bully that I am helping in treatment. As long as individuals continue to be blind to their own destructive behaviors and refuse to take responsibility for their actions, bullying will continue to exist and poison the world in which we live. I'd like to see clinicians routinely asking children about bullying, whether it be name calling to more physical acts of abuse. The importance of this early intervention should not be understated. If we were able to eliminate bullying, while other exposures remained constant, there would be a potential to prevent 20 percent of all self-harm cases.

"The way people treat you is a statement about who they are as a human being. It is not a statement about you." -PositiveOutlooksBlog.com

Bullying Statistics:

- 70.6% of young people say they have seen bullying in their schools.
- 70.4% of school staff have seen bullying.
- 62% witnessed bullying two or more times in the last month.
- 41% witness bullying once a week or more.

Signs That A Young Person Is Struggling with Bullying and/or Depression:

- Comes home with unexplained injuries or with damaged or missing clothing or other belongings
- Has a change in appetite or eating habits
- Makes excuses not to go to school
- Complains of headaches or stomach aches
- Has fewer friends or no friends
- Avoids certain places or playing outside alone
- Feels like they are not good enough/exhibits low self-esteem
- Has body image issues
- Self-Harm
- Blames themselves for their problems
- Bullies siblings or other friends who are "weaker" than they are
- Long lasting sadness or irritability, including unexplained outbursts of crying or anger
- Sudden loss of interest in activities the person usually enjoys
- Withdrawal from others
- Changes in sleep patterns, either sleeping a lot or not being able to sleep
- Always feeling tired or slow
- Being restless, anxious, or worried
- Not being able to concentrate or think clearly
- Feeling worthless, guilty, helpless, or hopeless
- Aches and pains with no obvious physical cause