

## Bullying – Power Play Which Knows No Age Limits

I get sick to my stomach every time I hear about another incident of bullying in schools and online. The numbers of news reports on bullying, of parents getting involved when schools do nothing, and "bullycide" are staggering. The problem is epidemic. It's so bad that there was one incident in the U.S. where a news team went to a school to interview a kid who was being bullied and *a bully chased the kid away while the camera was rolling.*

What is wrong with this world? Why are people so mean? What was going on in the bully's brain (or lack of it) which would prompt him to defy all common decency *on camera*?

Bullying is found everywhere, not just in schools. It occurs all the time in the workplace, in neighborhoods, in families. Bullying is a power play which knows no age limits. Bullies target people who are "different" or they feel jealous of or are mad at. They pick on the weak. They tease, assault and manipulate to get their way or gain a sense of power while destroying their victims' sense of self-worth. They even try to murder a 15-year-old girl who spoke out for educating girls in a misogynistic culture.

And that's what it's about, isn't it? Bullying destroys people. No wonder people snap and inflict violence on others because of the stress and fear precipitated by bullies.

I've experienced bullying. The first bully was a kid who threatened to beat me up in school. "Go ahead. Do it," I shot back because I knew he wouldn't dare hit me with a teacher nearby. I'll never forget the look on his face when I called him on his threat and all he could do was sit there muttering and scowling because he's been shown up by a girl. The next was my narcissistic, psychopath spouse who bullied me and his family by caused scenes and lying and verbally abusing and manipulating us to get his way. The third bully was an ego-maniac former boss who was more interested in controlling people than building a successful company. Most people around him let him have his way because there was no point in saying anything to the contrary. I did speak up one time and – I kid you not – the man was so offended that the next morning he called me into his office before I reached my cubicle and for an hour told me what a bad job I was doing.

How does it start? Where does the hate and vitriol come from? Many bullies learn their trade in their own homes. Parents who belittle and abuse kids are bullies. And then there are parents who defend their bully kids when they get caught as if their little angels are the victims.

So what's the answer? What can be done to solve this bullying issue? For starters, parents, watch what you say about people in front of your children. When you make fun of someone for being "different" you send the message that it's okay to mock and scorn and ultimately, hate. Secondly, schools should enforce their zero-tolerance policies against bullying and not discipline the victim for fighting back because ultimately they are fighting for their lives. Bullies should be expelled from school or submit to corporal punishment (yes, I know that's not politically correct to say, but do you have a better idea which works? Please share). Thirdly, kids should be taught to defend themselves. If a bully picks on someone thinking there won't be

consequences, they need a reason to think again. When they grow up, they will carry the skills of standing up for themselves into the workplace and the "real world."

When it comes to standing up bullies in the workplace, it involves multiple persons and departments and office politics and people doing what they can to not get fired. Do your research and know what steps you need to take and what resources are available to support you. The bullying may not be blatant (i.e. physical) but it is just as real and detrimental. It may take YEARS to get relief from the machinations of a bully so be prepared for a fight.

Bullies don't respond positively to pithy quotes from inspirational speakers and historical figures on living at peace and harmony with everyone— at least not the bullies I know. Bullies respond to punishment. If you don't know what that is, that means a good whooping. If you don't believe me, read the "Reader's Comments" after a bullying article and you'll learn how when people inflicted physical pain on bullies that the bullies finally left them alone - not in all cases, but in a majority of them.

Right now I'm thinking of two movies which feature bullying. One is *Shallow Hal*, a story about an obese woman who the hero of the story can only see as skinny. While walking around she's verbally assaulted, made fun of because of her weight. She does nothing to defend herself. The next movie is *Back to the Future*, where George McFly has the choice to walk away from a bully, Biff, or to fight him (and for the girl he loves). He rises to the occasion and cold-cocks Biff, winning the girl, some self-respect and admiration from others – a choice which changes his life.

We can't afford to do nothing when bullied or when someone we know is bullied. Standing up for yourself and others is the right thing to do. Not the easiest or safest thing, but the right thing.