



The Bully, The Bullied, and The Bystander
Breaking the Cycle of Violence
by Barbara Coloroso

Breaking the cycle of violence in our homes, schools and communities involve more than merely identifying and stopping the bully. It requires that we examine the why and the how a child becomes a bully or the target of a bully (and sometimes both) as well as the role the bystanders play in perpetuating the cycle. A deadly combination is a bully who gets what he wants from his target, a bullied child who is afraid to tell, bystanders who either watch, participate in the bullying, or look away, and adults who see bullying as teasing, not tormenting, as 'boys will be boys.' not the predatory aggression that it is.

If this combination of relationships is not radically transformed, we have enough incidences in our recent past to convince us that it is not only the bully who can terrorize our community. Some bullied children, whose cries went unheard, whose pains were ignored, whose oppression went unabated and unrelieved, have struck back with a vengeance and sorrow. Others, who reached what they felt was an utterly hopeless and irretrievable point, have killed themselves. Feeling they had no other way out of the pain and torture heaped on them by their tormentors, no one to turn to, no way to tell, they made a tragic and final exit.

It is easy to point fingers; place blame; fortress our schools; push zero-tolerance plans; mandate a bully awareness week; stiffen penalties for bullying; or simply ignore the problem and hope it will go away. It is more difficult—and necessary—that we as individuals, families, and entire communities create safe harbor for all of our children. We must do what is necessary to take the weapons out of the hearts, minds, and hands of our kids. We need to give kids the tools to be able to stand up for their own rights while respecting the rights and legitimate needs of others; to handle conflicts nonviolently; to act with integrity when confronted with difficult situations such as peer pressure to cause harm; and to develop a personal code (inner moral code) that gives them the wherewithal to do what is right in spite of external consequences and never merely because of them. No easy task; no simple answers.

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The Making of a Bully

- A working definition;
- What bullying is not — playful teasing, sibling rivalry, fighting that involves equals with competing claims;
- Bullying behaviors — physical aggression, shunning, verbal aggression, intimidation and coercion;
- Where, how often, who does it involve.

The Bullied

- A working definition;
- The short and long term impact of bullying on the target of the bully;
- When a bullied child becomes a bully.

The Bystander

- A working definition;
- The bystander as sibling, peer or adult and the impact being a bystander has on escalating the violence;
- The impact on the cycle of violence when a bystander becomes a peacemaker — empowered to act with courage and integrity.

Breaking the Cycle of Violence and Creating Circles of Caring

Home

1. How three kinds of families help create bullies, targets of bullies, and bystanders, or children who are responsible, resourceful, resilient, compassionate human beings, who can act in their own best interest, stand up for themselves, and exercise their own rights while respecting the rights and legitimate needs of others, stand against injustices, act with integrity, resist provocation, and resolve conflicts peacefully;
2. What to do if your child bullies;
3. What to do if your child is a victim of a bully;
4. Helping children develop a personal code [inner moral code] integrating knowing, feeling, and acting;
5. Teaching children to be able to discern the differences between telling and tattling;
6. Teaching children to 'own their anger' [no one can 'make' them angry], and develop inner tools to resist provocation;
7. Teaching nonviolent conflict resolution — resolving conflict rather than escalating it or burying it.

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School

1. Teaching the fourth R: relationships;
2. Creating a school climate in which all kids believe they have worth, are capable human beings, are expected to serve and can resolve conflicts nonviolently;
3. Creating 'esprit de corps' — the spirit of devotion and enthusiasm among members of a group for one another, their group, and their purpose;
4. Going beyond values clarification and/or moral reasoning to teach character education — the head/heart/gut connection;
5. Using the arts as significant tools to teach character, ethics, and moral reasoning. [If we don't, the entertainment industry will — and the character, ethics and moral reasoning it teaches might well cause more damage than good. 'Instead of passionate attachment to what is good, noble and just, youth develop passionate attachments to their own needs, wants, and feelings.']
 - a. Creating a community of purpose
 - b. Censorship by omission;
6. Why zero tolerance is zero thinking — and a constructive alternative: mistakes, mischief, and mayhem in proper perspective to causes, conditions, and consequences.

Communities

1. Comprehensive, multi-institutional, community-wide solutions that address the violent behavior of young people, while redressing the social conditions in which the violence flourishes;
2. Anger management programs that work and those that don't;
3. Reconciliatory justice on a community-wide scale as an alternative to punishment and vengeance;
4. The power of forgiveness.

If creating more caring, more compassionate, less alienating, less violent communities is a goal, we must give up our desire for swift revenge and retribution, stronger punishments and stiffer sentences. When the main goal is to make children 'pay dearly' for what they have done and serve as examples for others who might think of doing the same, hate and bitterness find rich soil in which to grow. How bullies are treated will influence what kind of people they will grow up to be and what kind of lives the rest of us will live. If we don't help them reconcile with the community, we could well condemn ourselves to a lifetime of fear, distrust, and mayhem. When an entire community is committed to reconciliatory justice, the young offenders are invited to rise above their misdeeds and violent acts. The goal is to mend and restore rather than isolate and punish. The search is not for vengeance but for ways to heal people and heal relationships.

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teasing/taunting

Teasing

1. Allows the teaser and person teased to swap roles.
2. Isn't intended to hurt the other person.
3. Maintains the basic dignity of everyone involved.
4. Pokes fun in a lighthearted, clever, and benign way.
5. Is meant to get both parties to laugh.
6. Is only a small part of the activities shared by kids who have something in common.
7. Is innocent in motive.
8. Is discontinued when person teased becomes upset or objects to the teasing.

Taunting

1. Is based on an imbalance of power and is one-sided: the bully taunts, the bullied kid is taunted.
2. Is intended to harm.
3. Involves humiliating, cruel, demeaning, or bigoted comments thinly disguised as jokes.
4. Includes laughter directed *at* the target, not *with* the target.
5. Is meant to diminish the sense of self-worth of the target.
6. Induces fear of further taunting or can be a prelude to physical bullying.
7. Is sinister in motive.
8. Continues especially when targeted kid becomes distressed or objects to the taunt.

four most powerful antidotes to bullying

Strong sense of self, being a friend, having at least one good friend who is there for you through thick and thin, and being able to successfully get into a group—and get out when it does not serve you well.

if your child is bullied

Don'ts

1. Don't minimize, rationalize, or explain away the bully's behavior.
2. Don't rush in to solve the problem for your child.
3. Don't tell your child to avoid the bully.
4. Don't tell your child to fight back.
5. Don't confront the bully or the bully's parents alone.

Do's

1. I hear you; I am here for you; I believe you; you are not alone in this.
2. It is not your fault.
3. There are things you can do.
4. Report the bullying to school personnel.

how to report

1. Arrange a meeting for you and your child with the appropriate person at the school.
2. Bring to the meeting the facts in writing—the date, time, place, kids involved, and the specifics of the incidents—and the impact the bullying has had on your child as well as what your child has done to try to stop the bullying that didn't work.
3. Work with your child and school personnel on a plan that addresses what your child needs right now in order to feel safe, what she can do to avoid being bullied and to stand up to any future bullying, and whom she can go to for help.
4. Find out what procedures the bully will be going through and what kind of support the school is expecting from the parents of the bully.
5. If you feel the problem is not being adequately addressed by the school, know that you can express your concerns and let the teacher and/or administrator know that you will take the next step to the school district board office and if necessary—especially in the cases of serious abuse and racist or sexist bullying—to the police.

caring schools

1. Gather information about bullying at school directly from students.
2. Establish clear schoolwide and classroom rules about bullying.
3. Train all adults in the school to respond sensitively and consistently to bullying.
4. Provide adequate adult supervision, particularly in less structured areas, such as on the playground and in the lunchroom.
5. Improve parental awareness of and involvement in working on the problem.

re-writing the script

The bully, the bullied, the bystander—the interactions involved in such role-playing, though commonplace in our culture, are not healthy, not normal, certainly not necessary, and in fact are devastating to the children playing them. We as parents and educators can rewrite the script and create for our children alternative, healthier roles that require no pretense and no violence. With care and commitment, we can rechannel the behaviors of the bully into positive leadership activities; acknowledge the nonaggressive behaviors of the bullied child as strengths that can be developed and are honored; and transform the role of the bystander into that of a witness, someone willing to stand up, speak out, and act against injustice. A daunting task, but a necessary one.



Illustrations by Joey Coloroso © 2002

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the bully

Bullies come in all shapes and sizes. Some are big; some are small; some bright and some not so bright; some attractive and some not so attractive; some popular and some disliked by almost everybody.

Bullying is a conscious, willful and deliberate hostile activity, intended to harm.

The Four Markers of Bullying

1. An imbalance of power
2. Intent to harm
3. Threat of further aggression
4. When bullying escalates unabated—terror

Bullying is not about anger, or even about conflict. It's about contempt—a powerful feeling of dislike toward someone considered to be worthless, inferior or undeserving of respect. Contempt comes with three apparent psychological advantages that allow kids to harm others without feeling empathy, compassion or shame. These are:

1. A sense of entitlement—the right to control, dominate, subjugate, and abuse another human being
2. An intolerance toward difference
3. A liberty to exclude—to bar, isolate, and segregate a person deemed not worthy of respect or care

Seven Steps to Stop Bullying

1. Discipline (including the three Rs: restitution, resolution, reconciliation)
2. Create opportunities to “do good”
3. Nurture empathy
4. Teach friendship skills
5. Closely monitor TV viewing, video games and computer activities
6. Engage in more constructive, entertaining, energizing activities
7. Teach ways to “will good”

the bullied

The one thing that all kids who are bullied have in common is that a bully or a bunch of bullies has targeted them. Each one was singled out to be the object of scorn, and thus the recipient of bullying, merely because he or she was different in some way.

The Warning Signs

1. Shows an abrupt lack of interest in school, or refuses to go to school
2. Takes an unusual route to school
3. Suffers drop in grades
4. Withdraws from family and school activities
5. Is hungry after school
6. Steals money from home
7. Makes a beeline to the bathroom when arriving home
8. Is sad, sullen, angry, or scared after receiving a phone call or email
9. Does something out of character
10. Has torn or missing clothing
11. Uses derogatory or demeaning language when talking about peers
12. Stops talking about peers and everyday activities
13. Has physical injuries not consistent with explanation
14. Has stomachaches, headaches, panic attacks, is unable to sleep, sleeps too much, is exhausted
15. Plays alone, or prefers to hang with adults

Why Kids Don't Tell

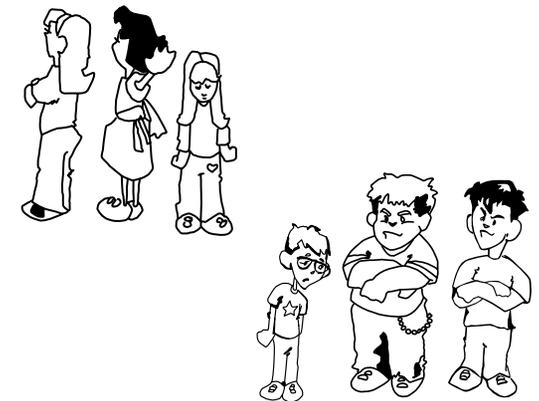
1. They are ashamed of being bullied
2. They are afraid of retaliation
3. They don't think anyone can help them
4. They don't think anyone will help them
5. They've bought into the lie that bullying is a necessary part of growing up
6. They might believe that adults are part of the lie—they bully too
7. They have learned that “rattling” on a peer is bad, not cool

the bystander

Bystanders are the third group of players in this tragedy. They are the supporting cast who aid and abet the bully, through acts of omission and commission. They stand idly by or look away, or they can actively encourage the bully or join in and become one of a bunch of bullies. Injustice overlooked or ignored becomes a contagion that infects even those who thought they could turn away.

Standing Up and Speaking Out

Bullying is challenged when the majority stands up against the cruel acts of the minority. Establishing new norms, enforcing playground rules, and increasing supervision are policy decisions that can help reduce the incidents of bullying. Since much of the bullying goes on “under the radar of adults,” a potent force is kids themselves showing bullies that they will not be looked up to, nor will their cruel behavior be condoned or tolerated. Kids need not be bystanders. They can become active witnesses, standing up for their peers, speaking out against injustices, and taking responsibility for what happened among themselves.



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