

The Ring of Valor: Responding to those who bully

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Fact Sheet #4

Origins

Research on children who bully often reveals a history of physical punishment at home. They have learned to strike out physically when in conflict. They are often rewarded for aggression by positive and negative attention. Their parents are often uninvolved and cold. They typically have little anxiety and possess a distorted sense of confident self-esteem. They are impulsive and dominating and have an emotionally intense temperament. They have no empathy, guilt, or remorse. During adolescence, they are below average in popularity. They belong to small peer groups.

What has happened to them to make them so angry and indifferent to suffering? Children learn from observation and experience. Bullies are often the targets of other bullies. Someone at home may be victimizing them. They may have been the target of frequent emotional outbursts. They may be the targets of older children in the neighborhood.

Parents should never ignore or dismiss bullying. Repeatedly making someone feel miserable and finding pleasure in his or her sadness and fear is a sign that something is seriously wrong in the wrongdoer. Bullying is not a normal part of growing up.



In this *Bullying* series:

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If you have any questions or comments, you can contact the author at casmith@ksu.edu.

Response

Parents are in a position to determine and possibly correct the underlying causes of bullying. However, since bullying is chronic, the solutions are neither simple nor immediate. There is no quick fix for bullying.

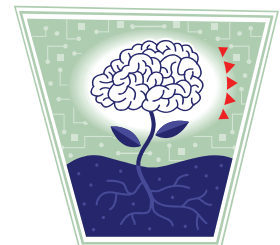
Is our discipline effective? Have we set clear and reasonable limits for our children's behavior? Do we enforce our limits fairly? Do we depend on punishment instead of guidance? Have we taught children to respect others? Do we hold them accountable for their actions?

Have we made an investment of love in our children? Have we taken time to share enjoyable activities and have we expressed affection in a recognizable manner?

Schools and parents should work together for the benefit of children. We should avoid applying labels like "bully" to a child. Does a child *become* a bully by doing something cruel? Labels that define a child distract us from the task of changing behavior. "You have hurt someone" is preferable to "You are a bully" because the child is more likely to change behavior than identity.

Teachers and school administrators should provide mental health services for children who have a history of bullying. Family counseling provided outside of the school can be critical to involve parents.

If we resolve the underlying misery that provokes a person to bully then we reduce bullying at its source. If we are not this child's parents, finding a way to heal this pain may be an impossible task. We may be left with setting clear and decisive limits and control with consequences. In that case, we have to depend on removing the other two legs in the three-legged chair: the target and onlookers.



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