

BULLYING

■ by Doug Van Til, MSW, Licensed Clinical Social Worker



Part II: Prevention & Change

In Part II of my thoughts on bullying, I will talk about some guidelines or premises regarding bullying, and follow with some suggestions for the prevention and remediation of the problem of bullying.

1. Even responsible and “mature” adults should remember that as human beings we’re all capable of using our influence, power, and control, and thereby enter into some level of bullying - sometimes without even realizing it. It follows then that we, at times, could even inadvertently and unconsciously engage in bad modeling.
2. Maladaptive behaviors are often learned early in life. Parents need to look for tendencies and characteristics of bully and victim behavior even before the children are of school age. Obviously if emotional and or physical abuse occurs between father and mother and siblings, the proclivity of the child to develop patterns of bully or victims behavior is high.
3. Parents need to discern the difference between sibling rivalry and destructive imbalance and exertion of power among their children. If parents become the experts on the developmental stage and the unique sensibilities of each child’s personality, they will be more equipped to know when to intercede.
4. Children tend to bring lots of energy and tenacity to do either good or bad as they interact with each other. Therefore, those whose responsibility it is to intervene, namely parents and teachers, need to somehow match this energy with quick, strong, and sustained effort on intervention. In the home setting, sometimes this means a combined effort of more than one adult. In the school setting it means an organized and systemic use of resources, which include the various roles within the educational system. Often parents and school systems give up too early or think they’ve changed inappropriate behavior before they actually do.
5. Schools have the ability and responsibility to judiciously and tenaciously “gang” up on the bully. The system has to observe the level of aggression and damage the bully or bullies exert on the victim or victims as they bring a commensurate amount of consequence to the situation.
6. The aggression, abuse, and damage that bullies perpetrate will usually escalate over time unless there is certain and comprehensive intervention.
7. Intervention must include both consequences and reeducation by appropriate authorities at home and school.
8. The child that bullies needs to accept responsibility for mistreating someone else. This means that the most important part of the consequence is that the bully needs to be made to say they are sorry to the victim. Unfortunately this concept is often overlooked by parents and school authority. By apologizing the bully is forced to acknowledge wrong. It also quickly restores more appropriate balance of power in the relationship. Repentance doesn’t have to be sincere or heartfelt to begin the process of repairing damage and changing behavior.
9. After the child that bullies receives consequences, apologizes, and stops bullying the authorities need to give lots of positive attention, praise, and reward early and often. The key idea is for parents or school to put as much effort in rewarding the changed behavior as they did in identifying, stopping and punishing the bad behavior.
10. Victims of bullying need empathy and protection, together with regular effort to teach and encourage one how to not be victims. Often victims are enabled, and victimhood is allowed to continue. At some point it becomes the responsibility of the victim to not be a victim anymore.

I would like to conclude this article by way of a reminder of the profound responsibility we all have to live in relation to each other as God’s image bearers, with the call to humbly seek and practice mercy and justice as Christ’s servants in His world.



In Part I of this article (Sep|Oct Pressing On), Doug proposed a Christian perspective and response to bullying attitude and behavior. All past newsletters/articles can be viewed on our website.
<http://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org/newsletters.html>

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