

THE WHAT, HOW AND WHY OF BULLIES

What is a bully?

Have you ever heard about how animals can “smell” fear? Bullies can do the same thing. They are operating from a primal survival brain place and can sense or “smell” when someone is fearful or insecure or vulnerable. They tend to target someone who is perceived to be vulnerable or different in any way.

Some examples of bullying behaviors are:

- space invading
- chest bumping
- hurtful words
- cruel humour
- shoving
- shut-outs and silence
- looks that communicate disgust
- threats

Some bullies are impulsive, loud and aggressive, some are insidious and strategic and play under the radar of the adults in the room.

How can we tell if we are being bullied?

Do you....

- consistently feel bad about yourself when you leave this person’s presence?
- feel insignificant and diminished in some way?
- feel invisible around this person?
- feel angry and powerless?
- fantasize about causing harm to this person?
- find yourself fantasizing how you could get this person to pay for the things they have done/said to you?
- feel frustrated/humiliated because you can never think of a “come-back”?
- feel anxious when you anticipate being in this person’s presence?
- believe there is nothing you can do that will make it stop?
- feel there is no one to talk to that will understand?
- resist telling anyone because you feel ashamed that you are being targeted and don’t want to admit you are a victim?

What is the difference between being a “victim” and a “target”?

We are not victims of bullies. We are targets. We are usually chosen as a target because we are perceived to be vulnerable in some way. Anyone who hasn't been taught skills to stand up for them selves can be seen as an easy target. Just being different in any way can increase our risk of being targeted for verbal or physical violence.

So what is the difference between a victim and a target? The difference is, a target can choose to “move” when arrows keep coming from the same direction. We can use strong eye contact (“the look”) and literally walk away. We can also step back into a different frame of mind, a space where we can be objective and “witness” the other person’s behaviours and see them for what they are. We know that only damaged and powerless people try to hurt other people in this way. When we know this it can help us feel less afraid. When we pay close attention we are more likely to see it coming and we can clearly and firmly hold our power and speak your truth.

After a while you might notice that the arrows that do hit only go skin deep or bounce right off. Be prepared because the arrows may keep coming for a while, and when we are assertive, chances are, they will eventually slow down and stop. Also know that there is nothing we can do to control another person’s behaviour. We can only control our own reactions to them.

Victims on the other hand, have learned to believe that we deserve the abuse coming at us. A victim tends to stay in the same place and hope it will stop. The most commonly used skill of victims of abuse is, trying to ignore it. A victim tries to “suck up “ and dance a little harder to try to get the bully’s approval. A victim is reactive and bites at everything thrown at them.

With effective skills and lots of practice we can all choose not to be a victim. It’s also important to remember that some violence is unavoidable and whatever happens, it is vital that we know that it wasn’t our fault ~ no matter what we did or didn’t do.

Have you ever been a bully?

Have you ever been a bully – even if it was just one time? Or perhaps there is a voice in your head that bullies you? Try to go back to that moment and remember how you were feeling inside when you lashed out at someone else - or at yourself. You may recognize feelings of powerlessness, frustration, anger or just a sense of diminished / small inner ‘self’.

The use of humour as a form of bullying:

“Hey, it was just a joke...where’s your sense of humour?”

Do you use humour as a way of making digs at people? Did you know that is a common form of bullying? Even tickling someone too much can be a form of bullying. Here are two points we can all try to remember:

If it’s not funny to everyone in the room. It’s just not funny.If something said or done tickles your funny bone, that doesn’t make it ok. Be sure tickle-games don’t go too far.

One-liners that we can use with bullies:

We can use simple assertiveness skills and respond with clear eye contact and adopt a neutral tone and body posture with simple statements. It can be useful to begin your response with, "I". It can be effective to repeat our statement up to three times.

"I don't like the way you are treating me right now and I'm leaving."

"I don't appreciate the jokes you make about me."

"Other people can't make me feel bad about myself."

"I can see you need to put me down. That really has nothing to do with me."

"I just don't get how not wanting to do drugs makes me a loser."

"That is so not true about me."

"That is neither useful, kind or true."

"When we fully own who we are, bullies can no longer use who we are against us." – Anita Robert