

Bullying Intro for Students

It seems that, along with pimples and more homework, the middle school years are filled with kids being mean to each other. While elementary school has its fair share of teasing, exclusion and petty fighting, these tend to be more isolated and contained incidents of bad behavior. In recent years a great deal of attention has been focused on bullying: what it is, the forms that it takes and the reasons why some kids bully and others get bullied. The hope is that by understanding bullying, we might be able to prevent it or, at least, lessen its prevalence. It's likely that your school has encouraged assemblies or class discussions about the prevention of bullying. Maybe you are even tired of talking about it.

Before the advent of social media, the typical case of bullying involved face to face verbal taunting or threatening or the infliction of physical harm. Leroy and his friends, all of whom are successful athletes, might start picking on Luke, a small quiet "nerdy" kid who spends his time reading about quarks and gluons. They call him names, booby-trap his locker, steal his lunch, spread rumors about his sexuality and threaten to beat him up. Eventually, they corner him after school, punch him in the face and the belly a few times, and leave him crying and bleeding. Lots of other kids see what is going on. Maybe some of them think that the booby-traps are funny and that Leroy and his friends are cool. Maybe some of them think that Leroy is out of line. But nobody interferes. They just don't want to get involved. Even telling a teacher or a parent seems too much like a little kid "tattle-tailing".

You might be familiar with some of the stories that appear in the news about kids whose experience of bullying is so extreme that they commit suicide. Often these cases involve a relatively new phenomenon called "cyber bullying" where social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are used to extend or intensify bullying behavior that may have started in school. Maybe the online bullying is directed at a new girl, or a girl whose clothes aren't cool or a girl who is suspected of trying to "steal" someone else's boyfriend or a girl who is accused of being too sexy or maybe not sexy enough. One person might start the nasty postings but

then others chime in. And what might start as mere playful teasing somehow escalates into deliberately hurtful taunting.

Whether or not the bullying is online or face-to-face, one question to think about is why some kids seem to get pleasure from being mean. And then there are questions about ethical responsibility: should you try to stop bullying when you see it happening? Are there better and worse ways to discourage bullying? Should parents and teachers be involved or is this a matter best left to kids? Think about your own relationships with your peers. In what ways does your own behavior resemble or differ from that depicted in the film clips?