Mean vs Bullying

Bullying is mean but being mean doesn't mean bullying.

Scenario One

Sophie was in the worst mood ever! She was wondering how she got flung into this nightmare. In less than 24 hours she,
flunked a major test,
broke up with her boyfriend,
fought with her parents;

the one thing she couldn't wait for was solitude. Maybe she could get her thoughts together at lunch... She sat in class watching the clock slowly make its way to her lunch break. It seemed like eons had passed, before "Ring, Ring" "Finally!" she thought. Sophie gathered her items and headed to the cafeteria. She found a table in a secluded corner and slipped into the chair. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes, but only for a second before her moment was interrupted by the sound of a clanking tray hitting the table.
Sophie opened her eyes and glared at the strange girl that was getting ready to sit near her. Feeling somewhat awkward, the girl smiled "Do you mind if I sit here?" she asked meekly. Sophie felt no compassion for the stranger and snapped "Actually, I do. Can't you see I want to be left alone? Now, kindly pick up your crap and remove yourself from my sight!"

Scenario Two

Isabella hated Chloe with a passion. Ever since she came to "her" school she had been nothing but trouble. She had even stolen her lead role in the drama production! She could take her pretty little self and go back to where ever she came from. Didn't she know she was on her turf? Well, it was time she found out.
Isabella decided she needed to put Chloe in her place and make her regret ever coming to Wells Cove HS. So, she started gossiping and spreading derogatory rumors about Chloe. She even had a party at her home and intentionally invited everyone in the drama class except for her. Chloe's once bright light had begun to dim.
She started missing a lot of school. Dark circles and bags had begun to form under her ocean blue eyes, evidence of the toll the stress was having on her body. When she did come to school she was a hermit, wandering the halls like a lost soul searching for refuge. Isabella felt no compassion for Chloe and took pride in knowing that she was hurting. "This is great" Isabella thought, "with any luck Chloe will get the picture and move back to where she came from!"

Can you see a difference between the two scenarios above? If you take a close look you can. One is an aggressive intentional action meant to single out a person. It's deliberately and methodically planned to harm and hurt another person. Can you guess which scenario it is? If you said two, good job. Scenario two is a perfect example of bullying. Scenario one, however, is the result of lashing out in frustration. No one was singled out, the girl just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sophie would most likely react that way regardless of who sat beside her. She did not deliberately single out the girl and her reaction was impulsive and spontaneous. Both scenarios are very different, the only vague similarity between the two is that both Sophie and Isabella are being "*mean*" to another person, but other than that, scenario two is much more serious because it constitutes bullying.

Bullying has been getting a lot of national attention lately. It seems everywhere you turn there are anti-bullying campaigns, ads; even entire months have been devoted to putting an end to bullying. The attention bullying is getting is welcomed as we are trying to teach our children to be kind to one another as well as cognizant and empathic to each other's feelings. But are we using the bullying term too

loosely? Is there a difference between being mean and bullying? You bet there is. Personally, I think we could all agree that bullying is *mean* but being mean doesn't necessarily mean *bullying*.
The following words have often been associated with the term "*mean*":

- Selfish
- Nasty
- Despicable
- Unkind
- Cruel
- Spiteful
- Malicious
- Ignoble
- Disgraceful
- Miserly
- Stingy
- Inferior
- Wretched
- Disagreeable
- Unpleasant
- Ill-tempered

We all can probably think of someone who has been mean to us. We can probably even think of someone that we've been mean to, but that doesn't make them or us a bully. Does it? Dealing with mean, rude, or unkind people is a part of life that we all have to learn how to deal with. Bullying, on other hand is a different matter and it needs to be addressed immediately.

Most experts on bullying define it as the use of force or <u>coercion</u> to <u>abuse</u> or <u>intimidate</u> others. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- An intentional act to hurt or harm someone
- An imbalance of power
- Repetition

The following words have often been associated with the term "*bully*":

- Tormentor
- Persecutor
- Oppressor
- Tyrant
- Intimidator
- Aggressor

Bullying can be done through many different outlets. The most common ways bullying occur include:

- Spreading rumors
- Tormenting victims
- Verbal <u>harassment</u>
- Physical harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Threats
- Gossiping
- Outing
- Misappropriate use of technology to hurt another
- Intentional exclusions from peer group

Why do people bully? People who bully do so for a variety of reasons. They often find someone who will not stand up to them and target those who have low self-esteem (hence the imbalance of power). They keep poking fun of and hurting the victim without remorse. Some of the most popular reasons for bullying include:

- Appearance
- Race
- Religion/Beliefs
- Nationality
- Sexual orientation
- Jealousy

Regardless of the reason, bullying can have long-term side effects and problems for the victim. Bullying is more than just being mean; it's hurtful and cruel. People who have been victimized by bullying carry with them the scars of the past. The brutal words and actions create an impact on the heart. Many victims don't reach out for help, but there are signs to look for. Does a student...

avoid activities that he used to love doing,
make up excuses to avoid going to school,
miss a lot of days from school,
seem more irritable and moody,
appear to be more stressed out and anxious,
not sleep enough or sleep too much,
eat more or less than usual,
prefer to be alone and avoid friends and family;

if you have noticed any of these warning signs and suspect your child is being bullied, it may be time for you to get help. Knowing what to do if your child is being bullied may prevent future occurrences.
When we are mean to someone it's important to make our wrong right. So how does Sophie's story end...
Later that day, Sophie felt horrible about snapping at the stranger. The next day at school, she went in search for the girl and found her sitting alone at a table. "May I have a seat?" she asked. The girl looked up and shrugged. "Thanks, I'm Sophie and I need to apologize for my behavior yesterday. I had a bad day and wasn't myself. Regardless of the situation, I shouldn't have taken it out on you..."
Hopefully, you can see there is a clear difference between *bullying* and being *mean*. It is important that we don't misuse or loosely use the term or it'll lose its effect. Bullying is very serious and we all have a part in ending it.

There is no excuse for bullying or being mean. If we find that we are at fault of something an apology does go a long way...