

Bullying Has Many Causes

This is the fourth commentary I have written on bullying, a relatively easy job to this point. However, analyzing the causes of bullying is much more difficult than writing about the kinds of bullying. The causes are complex, and no one cause is solely responsible. Several causes interact to form the disrespectful syndrome that we call bullying.

According to Albert Gonzalez, a relationship expert, the home environment is a major factor in creating bullies. Homes that breed teenage bullies will likely be: void or lacking in adult supervision; single parent homes; in neighborhoods where violence is commonplace; low socioeconomic homes; homes where parents/guardians have little education; supportive of aggression as a way of solving conflicts. I want to comment on some of these causes separately. Before I do, I apologize if I offend anyone by any of these comments, but my thirty plus years of experience in seeing children who are lacking in so many of the nurturing elements of healthy development is the basis of some of my opinions, and I stand by them.

Many homes today have a basic lack of adult supervision. Along with supervision goes the responsibility to teach those children basic values that enable them to respect themselves and others. What we see at school is not so much a lack of adult supervision, but rather a tendency to allow the children to “drive the bus.” I have had calls from preschool parents who tell me they can’t get their children out of bed to get them ready for preschool because they (the children) don’t want to. Yes, I said preschool—three and four-year-olds. A few years ago, a father came to see one of our administrators about the behavior of his son and said to the administrator, “Why don’t you make him get his hair cut?” How ridiculous! I had a mother call me whose daughter wanted to change to another school system. The mother didn’t want her to change, but she didn’t want to tell her child because “she will get so mad at me.” The parent wanted me to be the “bad guy” and tell her daughter no. I could go on for hours with stories like this. Some of them would be funny if they weren’t so sad. When did parents become afraid to be the authority figure because they don’t want to make their children mad at them? I don’t think my parents ever cared if I got mad at them, and if I did get mad at them, I was afraid to act like I was. I hope I was never afraid that my son would get mad at me if I told him he couldn’t do something or corrected him in some way. I didn’t want him to be mad at me, but I knew he would get over it. It was my responsibility as a parent to teach him values, respect for others, keep him safe, and love him unconditionally—even if he was occasionally unhappy with me.

I am not bashing single parent homes; I have a great deal of sympathy of single parents. I don’t have sympathy for divorced parents who fight a continuous war and let their children know it. They criticize the other parent in front of the children, argue with the other parent in front of the children, try to keep the other parent from seeing the children. Children are not supposed to be prisoners of a parent war. Children need both parents in their lives—regularly. Studies show that children of divorced parents fare very well when both parents are civil to each other,

when both parents are involved in their children's lives, when both parents make decisions, and when both parents show their love for their kids.

Single parents have extremely difficult jobs. It is incredibly hard to go to work all day, come home and do housework, get the kids fed, help with homework, get baths and clothes ready for the next day, get up early to get the children up, feed them, get them ready for school, go to work, and do everything all over again, every day. Many single parents are just too tired to be involved with their children's activities, help with homework, etc., etc., etc. But they have a responsibility to their children, and, tired or not, the children are supposed to come first. That's what parents are supposed to do—put their children first, in front of everything else. A parent's responsibility is to know what their children are doing at school, attend school activities, know who their friends are, know where they are, know what they are doing, and be their child's first teacher.

I haven't written about all of the causes of bullying, so I will continue with those next week. You may be wondering what these things have to do with bullying, but I promise I will tie all of them together next week, or the week after that, or sometime. As I said, this is a complex problem with no easy solutions.

Next week—More Causes of Bullying