

A Testimony of How Bullying Can Affect a Child Into Adulthood

Submitted by Toni Southwood, Mariposa Mother's Against School Hazing

Bullying can affect a child forever; leaving behind it a residue of anger, depression, and fear for those who experience it. Whether it is the victim or the instigator it will affect their life forever. I know this from first hand experience having been on both sides of the fence.

As a child I had a speech problem, I got all my clothes out of the free box (for those who don't remember the free box was a wooden box in town where the less fortunate could go get used clothes for free). I also had very religious parents who strongly believed in not sparing the rod. To top it all off my parents drove around in a big van that said, "Jesus loves you" all over it. So as you can imagine I was often the recipient of teasing at school. I'd then go home and often be beaten and belittled for no reason. I remember one day in elementary school I locked myself in a bathroom stall and threatened to kill myself. All I could think about was ending the pain. Suicide continued to be a thought I fought for many years to come. I was about nine when I turned to drugs trying to dull the pain I felt inside. Anger, depression, and drugs were something I struggled with until I was twenty-five. All because of the abuse I suffered not just at home but at school. When I was in sixth grade I finally snapped over a small incident. A boy at school took my shoe and I took the swing I was on and hit him in the head with it. Such a small thing and it pushed me over the edge. With this incident I came to the realization that if I beat other people up first, they would leave me alone. So in this thought I became the bully.

The anger I felt lasted well into my adult life sometimes still affecting me today. Being a person who's interested in psychology I strove to learn why I was treated the way I was at home and school and why I became a bully myself? This is what I have learned.

There are three major roads an abused child can take. One, they can become an abuser themselves. Two, they can continue through life being depressed, suicidal, and angry often turning to drugs to ease their pain. Or three, some one sees their pain and hears their cries for help. They get the help they need and live a productive life. Often the people who have obtained help end up confronting the person who teased them and telling them how they feel. This helps them move on, boosting their self confidence and getting control of their life back.

What most people do not understand is that a truly abused or bullied child does not usually tell on their abuser. They act out screaming for help in a silent way. Either they withdraw becoming depressed and suicidal or they strike out at some one looking for a sense of control over something in their life. The worst result of bullying is what I call the Columbine affect. This is when a child hits puberty still under an abuser's thumb. They become dead inside and after years, they finally stand up to their abuser, destroying their abuser and often themselves.

What can we do to change the circumstances in our town? We as adults can get involved; we can stand up for what is right. We can stop and ask why a child is acting out instead

of labeling them a “bad child” and telling our kids not to play with that “bad kid” which only alienates a child worst causing them to act out more. We can pay attention to the child playing by themselves away from the group and we can take the time to stop and listen and see how our children are treating each other.

In conclusion I’d like to say, “It takes a village to raise a child”. The more involved we as adults become in the issue of the abuse of our children, whether at school, home, church, or in our community, and the more we stop backing down and start fighting for what’s right.....then and only then can we change the statistics of depression, suicide, and domestic abuse in our communities. Our children have the right to live abuse free. Let’s make sure they get to!!!!

For more information about Mariposa Mother’s Against School Hazing contact Toni Southwood at 966-2826 or southwoodtoni@yahoo.com . For more information about Mariposa County Project Respect, or how you can get involved in preventing bullying, go to www.mariposarespect.org or contact Cindy Robles or Chevon Kothari at Mountain Crisis Services at 742-5865.

Mariposa County Project Respect is a community-wide effort to end bullying in Mariposa County.