

Awareness is the first step. Prevention is the key.

Submitted by Cindy Robles, Prevention Coordinator, Mountain Crisis Services

None of us want to see our children harmed in any way. Even when we believe that our children will talk to us when something is wrong, we may miss things that are crucial. There are dynamics to bullying that as adults we may not understand. For example, when a child is being bullied he may want to tell someone. He may want to tell his teacher or his parent. But this child, even though in the middle of the situation, does not understand. He only knows that if he does tell, the bullying will get worse. The bully will retaliate and in many cases the retaliation can be far worse than the initial bullying.

Retaliation is very real. If you have ever heard someone say, “Why didn’t he just tell someone?” This may very well be one of the many reasons. If anyone has ever been on the receiving end of, “Boy, you just wait-you’re going to get it”, he or she knows full well what that message means when it comes from a bully. Another reason might be that they have told someone in the past and no one has helped them. This sets the child up for believing, “Why tell? They aren’t going to help me anyway.”

In the previous article it was mentioned that there is a belief system that is generally followed. Some of the beliefs that were mentioned were, “Kids will be kids”, “This has happened for years-we all went through it”, and “It [bullying] will toughen them up”. Another familiar belief is “It’s part of the growing up”. We have all heard this one, and again, it relates to our belief system. If our own attitudes and beliefs stay the same will we see the change that we need?

In the last week, I have had the opportunity to talk with adults that have had incidents in childhood regarding bullying. Some talked about how it affects them still today. Some have told me of their own guilty feelings for being the bully and how as an adult they now realize the hurt they have caused. Many have approached the people who have hurt them or who they have hurt and they are able to move beyond the past.

Today there is extensive research on the topic of bullying. There are many testimonies of how devastating bullying has been in peoples’ lives and unfortunately the reminders from the media that the violence is not stopping. So what will make a difference? Do we know?

What we are looking for is a shift; a shift in our knowledge, a shift in our attitudes, a shift in our beliefs and ultimately a shift in our behaviors. A safe community, of caring and respectful youth and adults.

For more information about Mariposa County Project Respect, or how you can prevent 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.