

A Brief Look at the Differences Between Teasing and Bullying

Excerpt from the book- Turn Up The Music by

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I am very passionate about this topic, as I know so many of you are. So many adults who were bullied as kids can be brought back in time to the place the bullying occurred and the people involved just by asking them the question, “*Were you ever bullied?*” We all have an opinion about this topic because we all have contributed to the process. Each of us has been or continues to be a bully, a bystander, or a target. To understand what bullying behavior is, we must first define teasing behavior.

***Teasing* is acceptable when:**

- We use teasing and roasting as a way of fitting in or talking to our friends and everyone involved is getting an equal share of the teasing. (Kids are not ganging up on one person.)
- People are not making fun of someone’s disabilities, ethnicity, faith, or other characteristics that are out of the person’s control.
- The teasing is not repeated over and over again. It is one thing to be called short, but it is another to be called short on a daily basis. That gets old.
- It is not meant to harm you in any way, and if you asked the person to stop, they would.
- It is done by someone you have a close relationship with. There is always the possibility friends can take teasing too far and end up in a fight, but usually bullying is not involved.

Bullying behavior occurs when these three characteristics are present:

1. **There is a pattern of behavior established.** An example of bullying behavior is saying mean and hurtful things to one person or several people on purpose and for no reason at all. This may include making threatening comments or actions toward one or more. I realize that *mean* and *hurtful* words and interpreting *threatening* comments and *actions* are subjective. What is *mean* and *threatening* to one young person may not be to another. The important concept here to remember is establishing a pattern of behavior.
2. **The bullying behavior has a negative impact on the target\victim.**
3. **An imbalance of power is established.** An imbalance of power occurs when a person feels threatened by someone’s words or actions and their perception is that they won’t be able to protect themselves. We must believe the young persons perception if we as adults are going to help them.

Many times I will hear from students that some of the most popular kids in a school are the same kids who bully others. Some people think that kids (or for that matter adults) who bully have low self-esteem, and that may be true for some. However, many who bully have an inflated ego. They have a destructive appetite for power and control. The ability to stop the bullying behavior in a school or community comes from bystanders who represent the majority of the student body. There is power in numbers. Besides telling an adult that someone is being bullied, there are several strategies bystanders can use to help support those being bullied:

- ***Distract the bully.*** If you are with a friend who begins to tease someone else, quickly distract your friend by changing the subject or asking him a question. You would be keeping your friend out of trouble, but, more importantly, helping the person who is being teased or bullied.
- ***Support the person who is being bullied privately.*** If you could not get the person or persons to stop the bullying behavior, for whatever reason, go back to the person who was being bullied and support them privately. You could say “*I am sorry for what my friend said, or those other kids said, and I will talk to them about it to see if I can get the bullying behavior to stop.*”
- ***Support the person who is being bullied openly.*** I only recommend this strategy to kids who feel confident and have a certain amount of respect among their peers.
- ***Do not feed into the bully behavior.*** Don’t laugh at their jokes if they are humiliating someone, and do not promote or attend a fight. As bystanders, it is your responsibility to de-escalate the situation, not feed fuel to an already hot fire.
- ***Go to an adult that you trust***
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If you have a child or teenager being bullied, please contact your school counselor and set up an appointment to discuss the situation. The administration and other adults may need to get involved in making sure the bullying behavior stops. The biggest issue in getting help for the child or teenager who is into bullying behavior often is breaking through the parent’s denial that their child or teen may be a bully. It is important that we identify and label the behavior as bullying behavior. The chances of being successful with intervention strategies are great, especially when the behavior can be identified at an early age.

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