



#PERSPECTIVE

Bullying: the evident menace and how to deal with it

Bullying is a form of emotional or physical abuse that has three defining characteristics which separates it from conflict, namely, intention, repetition and power imbalance.

The perpetrators are called bullies, and they carry out their actions with the sole purpose of hurting someone physically/mentally. Power imbalance refers to the difference of the social class/position in the hierarchy that distinguishes them. In other words, the bully sees the victim as vulnerable and thus considers them as suitable victims of cruel practices. Last but not least, bullying is repeated over a period of time. For many perpetrators, this becomes a habit that they must carry out like a ritual.

Different forms of bullying

Bullying can take many forms. However, it can be categorised in four major types — physical, verbal, relational/indirect and cyber bullying.

Physical bullying includes direct physical contact and harm. Poking, pushing, hitting, kicking, slapping, snatching away someone's belongings, beating up, etc. all are examples of physical bullying.

Verbal bullying includes yelling, taunting, name-calling, insulting, threatening to harm. Some experts consider verbal bullying to be more baleful than physical abuse since they often lead to mental issues.

Relational or indirect bullying is a form of bullying when the bully boy carries out the abuse without coming to direct contact with the victim. Examples of indirect forms of bullying include ignoring and the withdrawal of friendship,

isolating, excluding, malicious gossip and spreading rumours, and abusive or oppressive graffiti, getting others to hurt someone, etc.

Cyber bullying used to be categorised as indirect bullying by many specialists, but with the recent popularity of social media and Internet usage going through the roof, cyber bullying should be considered separately and dealt with accordingly because the number of cyber bullying cases are rising without showing any sign of declining.

Underlying cause

Bullying has been embedded in the society, and it is difficult to eradicate it instantly. However, in order to deal with it, it is imperative that we seek out the key points that are tipping the scale. We approached a specialist and discussed the issues.

Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed, Associate Professor, Dept. of Child Adolescent & Family Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health is a renowned figure in the country and points out the salient variables of bullying.

"Bullying is a behavioural feature and it is heavily influenced by family, parents specially. These behaviours are often learned from immediate environment. For example, if a child sees that his parents are abusive towards each other, there is a high probability that he might turn out as a bully," he pointed out.

"It's not always family crisis. Sometimes it's just embedded in their personality because they see it from an early age. Verbal abuse as well as physical abuse, either way the aggressive behaviour is

the main feature that tips the behaviour towards such actions," he added.

Often the bullied victims are of a different race, ethnicity or have a disability which makes them different from the norm. However, it must be kept in mind that different does not mean vulnerable and it certainly does not make it okay for someone to pick another person because they are labelled as 'weird' or 'different.' Many researchers believe that bullies are often from a troubled background and their crude behaviour is their cry for help.

How to deal with it?

As a victim of bullying, one might feel vulnerable, not just at school but all the time. The aggressive behaviour leaves a shade on the victim and in most cases, they spend their time in constant fear of abuse. In such cases, the first thing the victim should do is seek help of another friend or teacher or guardian. There is nothing wrong with asking for help when one needs it. In fact, it shows strength since asking for help requires you to recognise your own limits. If you feel uncomfortable talking about it, you should write about it in a note or letter and send it to someone you trust.

The key is to stay calm. The more you get worked up, the more it fuels the bullies. Stay calm, quiet and if possible, brush it off with humour. Never engage in a physical retaliation or arguments. They usually make things worse. And when you are a victim of cyber bullying, call it a time out and get off the Internet. You may also opt to get legal help.

What should parents do?

Of course, if you are bullied, there are

certain things you can do about it yourself. But the people who can do more about it and who should do more about it are the parents.

What can you do if you find that your child is the bully?

"We call it responsive parenting. The parents should pay attention to their kids and know when they are deviating from normal behaviour. Parents have to teach empathy and good manners from home. Children who show signs of conduct disorder have a higher rate of bullying. This can manifest as a bigger issue. If a parent finds out that his child is showing such symptoms, they should consult a specialist," said Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed.

Another tendency that is often found amongst parents is blaming their own child for being bullied. This is called victim blaming. It must be noted that victim blaming, accompanied with bullying can leave a permanent scar in the victim and can lead to clinical depression. These young adults often suffer from social anxiety which leads to poor social skill. Parents and authority figures should keep an eye out for such issues and try to assist them as much as possible.

It must be remembered that to a bully victim, most things are hostile and sometimes it might take some time for the parents to get through to them. Patience is key. Instead of pressuring them, they should be allowed the space they need to recover and accept the help that they need.

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