

FROM PAGE 7

Schooling —

The administration must ensure that complete cooperation from parents is a prerequisite for admission at the institution. Schools must equally realise that parents can expect the same.

Children should always grow up in an environment where they have full assurance that parents, the teachers, and the administration are all ready to help. This can help them define their character and set their own rules; knowing well they all they need to do is ask in moments of crisis.

A child who is bullied definitely faces long lasting negative effects, but a child who is a bully and grows into adulthood unchecked, can face unwanted repercussions later in life. And both makes it possible that their insecurities are handed down to their next generation — a very frightening consequence that just may become reality.

Part Three: The fertile grounds

Over the years the nature of harassment children experience at school in the hand of their peers has changed; it is important we re-assess the situation based on its current nature.

Bullying is a worldwide phenomenon affecting a significant proportion of children and adolescents. According to a report by UNESCO it is estimated that 246 million children and adolescents experience bullying in school at some point every year. School children in our country are also not spared of this predicament.

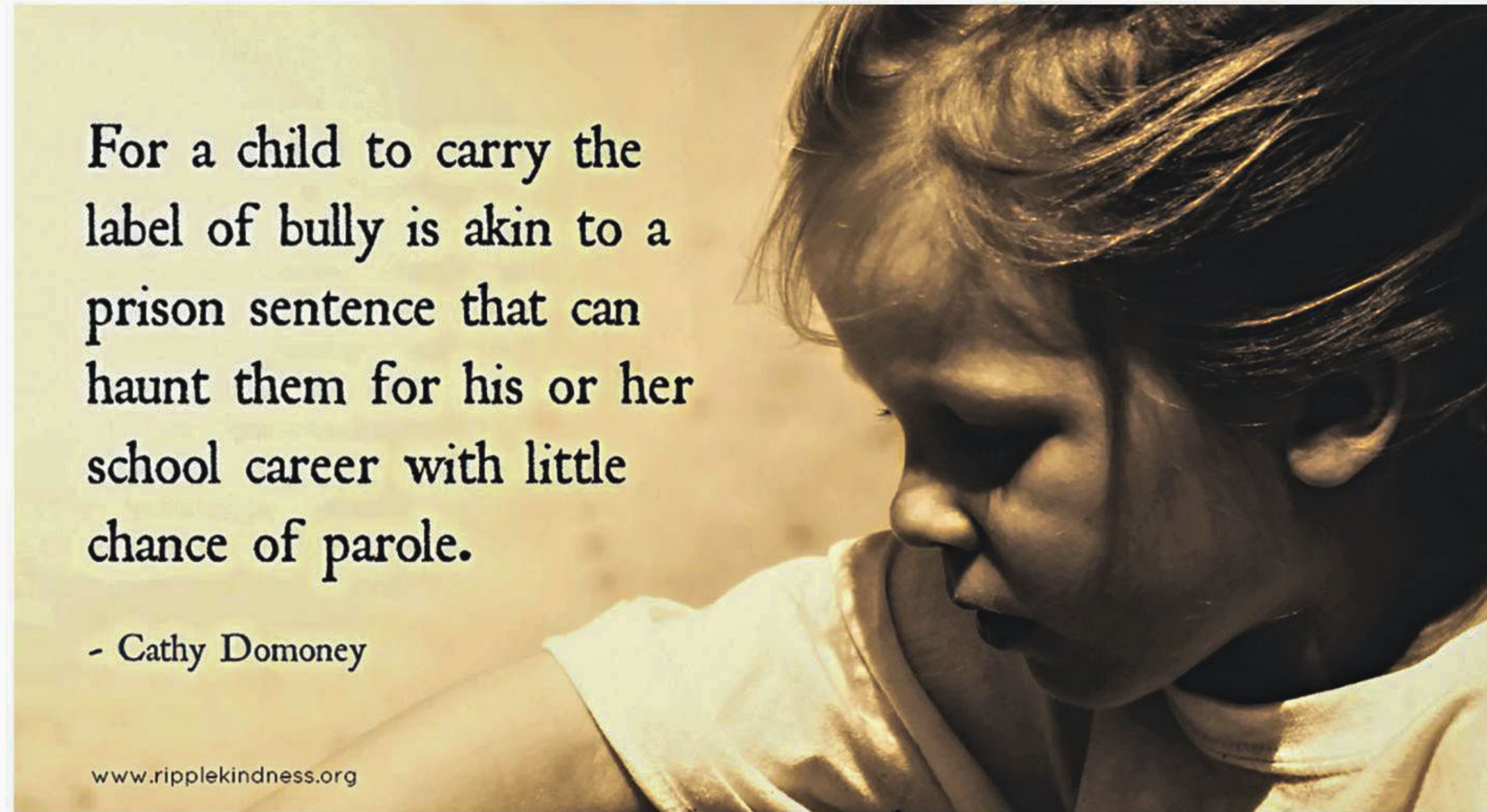
Sabera, a mother of two, came to Dhaka with her children and was ecstatic when they got admission in a reputed school of the city. But soon she noticed that her elder child started developing certain unusual traits.

"I always make it a point to discuss how my child's day at school went. Around just a few months after joining, my son started sharing isolated incidents that took place in school where other boys were ganging up against him, not selecting him for games, and even making fun of him because he was a little plump.

"For a long while I kept asking him to ignore all this hoping that the children will eventually become friends. But one day he came home crying from school saying nobody wanted to be his friend. That was when I knew ignoring the situation was no longer an option," said Sabera.

Subsequently she went and spoke to school authorities and even though they addressed the issue and had talks with the children, Sabera still feels it was not handled well.

"It was not that the school authorities did not want to help, in retrospect I now understand that they did not know how to handle it. In order to resolve the situation, they ended up singling out my boy and things only got worse. Even after repeated complaints no stern action was taken against the bullies, some of whom were from influential families which could be a reason for the school's leniency," she



added.

Despite this situation, Sabera kept counselling her son to not pay heed to the bullies, but after a few years of incessant bullying the child could not take it anymore. She realised that her son's self esteem was really suffering and he was withdrawing into a shell. That is when she decided to change his school.

"My son is doing well in this new school. If his old school had proper anti-bullying policies in place he would not have suffered so much. I also regret not having told my son to stand up for himself even if that meant he would have to be orally

the betterment of their students.

Khondkar said, "Every school should ideally have a professional counsellor who knows how to deal with issues like bullying. Unfortunately, most of the schools in our country do not have one; therefore it is essential that at the minimum some teachers should be trained in every school to deal with bullying."

Farida Reza, counsellor at the senior section of a renowned English medium school said, "Our school has a very friendly environment. Children are very comfortable with the teachers and are encouraged to approach us if they face any kind of problems."

However, students of most other private schools in the city are not too fortunate.

When asked if they have taken any anti-bullying initiatives she said, "We make regular announcements during the school assembly where we promote a no-bullying environment and we also have a slogan, 'Hands to yourself, don't hug, don't push,' through which we discourage our children from bullying. Our teachers are trained to always offer constructive criticism to the students and never to ridicule them in front of their peers. We also have a Wednesday counselling session for children where we encourage them to open up to us about any problems they could be facing in school."

However, she does agree that some kind of training programme should be organised by all school authorities for their teachers to handle such matters, as it would definitely help every school deal with issues of bullying better.

SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY

Schools should ideally integrate themes of anti-bullying into their curriculum, such as regular classroom discussions on bullying or organise an anti-bullying day to bring about awareness amongst the student about bullying behaviour and how to handle it.

Taking immediate action on bullying incidents is crucial. For recurring cases

parents of both the bully and the bullied must be involved. Even though counselling the children should be the primary course of action, in severe cases schools should not shy away from taking sterner actions as it is imperative to send a strong message to all the student that no form of bullying will be tolerated by them.

Schools in general need to ensure that their teachers are more vigilant as bullying generally takes place in areas of the school that are minimally supervised. They should also prevent children from mistreating each other by timely intervention. All the children should be encouraged to report any bullying incidents that they may witness and also to help the child who is being bullied.

Many schools in other countries have installed bullying boxes within their premises wherein children can anonymously report things that have happened or bullying they have endured or witnessed.

Just as parents, teachers in school should be setting the right example for the students. If teachers misuse their power to embarrass or ridicule the students then their actions act as a validation for bullying.

In order to provide the optimum environment for children to learn, children need to feel safe physically and emotionally in school. Bullying in school by teachers or peers makes not only the children who are bullied but also the bystanders afraid to go to school, it affects their ability to concentrate in class and participate in school activities.

In some cases children may play truant or drop out of school altogether which in turn hampers future employment prospects of the individual apart from the emotional scarring.

Whether our schools are doing enough to counter bullying is debatable. What is not debatable is that it is high time school authorities across the country took this problem seriously and stopped sweeping it under the rug.

Photo: Collected



aggressive with his bullies," Sabera felt.

Situations like Sabera's are not unheard of. According to Laila Khondkar, Director, Child Right Governance and Child Protection, Save the Children, Bangladesh, unlike many other countries, there are no specific anti-bullying policies laid down by our government for schools to follow. With this kind of a scenario schools need to voluntarily take anti-bullying initiatives for