



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Countercultural Parenting: Part 1 BULLYING AND ANGER MANAGEMENT

Bullies pick on others physically or through verbal threats, insults, name-calling, mean e-mails, cyberspace disrespect, embarrassment, or by systematically ignoring another. Usually the bully suffers from poor self-esteem or has been mistreated and so retaliates against innocent victims out of anger, frustration, or in an attempt to command the respect that he/she does not receive naturally.

Personal power, self-control, and self-respect, are God-given needs planted in our souls. As early as the “terrible twos” children show the desire to be self-reliant. When that need is developed, children grow independent and cooperative and they are able to appreciate others and let others be different from them. If autonomy is not fostered, children either accept powerlessness and minimize themselves or they grow angry and frustrated, often trying to hurt others the way that they themselves feel hurt. Their anger gets directed at innocent others.

Bullies make targets of children who are smaller, weaker or shy, or students who receive recognition for their grades, looks, or achievement. In other words, a bully’s anger, negative self-esteem, and self-hatred does not discriminate. Victims may vary.

Bullies and victims are two of three kinds of students who are hurt by bullying behaviors. Bystanders are also hurt. They are people who aid the bully by (1) omitting the good that they know to do, (2) committing the bad that the bully initiates, (3) standing by, looking away or overlooking, (4) actively encouraging the bully, or (5) ignoring injustice. What is needed is to form children in the ways of discipleship – a counter-cultural exercise! A disciple hears the voice of Jesus, understands his message of love and puts love into action in the particular circumstances of the moment. A disciple is an active witness who (1) stands up for peers, (2) speaks out against injustice and cruel acts and (3) will not condone or tolerate cruel behavior. Defending the defenseless is a counter-cultural value.

PROACTIVE PRACTICES

Parents and teachers foster a healthy sense of autonomy by doing nothing for a child that the child is capable of doing independently and by emphasizing the effort a child is exerting rather than focusing on the result. Other keys to unlock self-reliance include:

- Provide prudent supervision but not intrusion.
- Encourage on specific performance rather than voice empty praise.
- Provide choices and invite age-appropriate input.
- Allow responsible independence.
- Encourage respectful assertiveness.
- Expect accountability for choices and consequences.
- Model self-control.

Parents and teachers foster discipleship when, as a pattern, they introduce children to Jesus and his Gospel and demonstrate respect for the dignity of every person. Counter-cultural parents teach children how to de-escalate tension and to resolve conflict peacefully. Disciples recognize that all people are united in God. Engage children in discussion of the following poem:

**Mary is our mother.
Jesus is our brother.
Jesus is brother of you and me.
Mary is mother of us – all three.
Children of Mary, Siblings of God.
Yet we don't love each other.
Isn't that odd?**

TEN TIPS FOR VICTIMS OF BULLYING

1. Be assertive, calm and confident—but not arrogant. Stand tall, make eye contact, address the bully by name, and express your position calmly and respectfully. (“*It is mean of you to make fun of me.*”) Use “I want” statements (“*I want you to stop teasing me.*”) Then walk away.
2. Do not fight back. Focus on how to avoid violence.
3. Do not trade insults. Ignore it, or agree with the teaser, or make fun of the teasing.
4. Avoid embarrassing the bully.
5. Pre-plan how to talk to the bully. (“*Why would you want to tell me something that might hurt my feelings?*”) Pre-plan to compliment the bully with honest affirmation.
6. Use humor (not sarcasm) to relax a tense situation.
7. Agree with the bully. (“*You’re right! Grades are important to me.*”) Or, if the bully makes an accusation, apologize for the misunderstanding (“*It was not my intention to hurt you. I apologize for the misunderstanding.*”)
8. Be proactive. Before trouble occurs practice ways to respond to a bully. Role play with a parent or trusted person.
9. Get help. Speak with parents and principal, teacher, or counselor. Talk about your feelings. Develop ways to release tension and stress.
10. Seek support resources like:
 - Pacer Center’s Kids Against Bullying, www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org
 - Barbara Coloroso, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*. Kids Are Worth It, www.kidsareworthit.com

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