

Parenting and Bullying: Are you giving your kids the tools they need?

I call parenting the toughest job you will ever love and hate. The ramifications of what you say, do, and how you react can help or hurt children as they develop. However, parenting is about consistency and it is what is practiced day in and day out for years that determines whether or not children become strong, confident, self-assured adults. This article is about the way we parent and how our parenting affects our kids.

Parenting Style and Children's Growth

It is generally accepted that there are three parenting styles they are Authoritarian, Authoritative, and Permissive. In my practice I call them dictatorial, active, and permissive.

Dictatorial-this parenting style is basically my way or the highway. Children are not allowed to share their thoughts, ideas or feelings. Parents make all decisions for children from birth until they leave for college. Parents decide they know what is best and by golly that is how it is going to be! No matter what.

Active-this parenting style allows children to have as much freedom and decision-making as is possible for their stage of development. Parents allow children to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Along with allowing children to make decisions parents listen and try to consider and accommodate children's ideas where they make sense.

Permissive-this parenting style has no boundaries, kids pretty much do what they want. Parents here behave as friends or ignore children's misbehavior and think they will eventually learn. This parent provides no boundaries and let's kids learn from trial and error.

I believe that these three parenting styles should be a progression of parenting as children get older. When they are infants, toddlers and young children parents tend to be dictatorial they make most all of the decisions and lay down the rules. Around age three parents should beginning moving into the active parenting style; beginning to let children make small decisions like what to wear and what to eat for lunch. Then around age 16 parents start walking the line between active and permissiveness. Permissive parenting comes to the fore as children head off to college.

There is a problem however and that is that many parents fail to move through these stages of parenting. Most parents feel comfortable in one stage and choose to use this one style all the time. This can cause an imbalance that can lead children into hard times later in life. Two of the three parenting styles can leave children in danger of either becoming a bully or being the target of one. These are the dictatorial and the permissive styles. Surprisingly, these styles can lead to both being a bully or a target. It depends on the personality and temperament of each child as to which they will become.

Reactions of a strong willed child:

<u>Dictatorial</u>	<u>Permissive</u>
Helplessness	Controlling
Frustration	Frustration
Acting Out against boundaries	Push for boundaries
Depression	Fear
Lack of intimate relationships	Lack of intimate Relationships

Reactions of a laid-back child

<u>Dictatorial</u>	<u>Permissive</u>
Fear	Uncertainty
Lack of Self-esteem	Unsure of world around them
Hindered from growth- boundaries	Fear of non-existent boundaries
Depression	Feeling of being unsafe
Lack of intimate relationships	Lack of intimate relationships

Children who live with these uncertainties will often carry these feelings out into the world. Children who are bullies are often also pro-violent. This means they can be prone to say violent and hurtful things or behave in a violent manner. Notice the one thing all these children have in common is a lack of intimate relationships. It is this lack of intimacy that allows children not to develop things like the understanding others have feelings, the sense of doing what is right because it is right, standing up for people who can not stand up for themselves and simple kindness and courtesy. Children who do not learn these things can find it easier to become bullies. They find weaker children and prey on them. Often it is to make them feel or look important. Sometimes it is just to satisfy that urge to get what they want or because they have not learned to care that other people have feelings. When children live in homes where their feelings are ignored or indulged children learn that feelings are not important and what I want is; no matter what I have to do to get it. Other children who become victims have learned that no one cares about how you feel. If you are hurt the world is tough and then you die. If you tell then you are a tattle-tale or you are a wimp who can not handle a little teasing. Or even worse it is your fault because you deserve to be bullied.

I believe that all parents love their children and want what is best for them. However, many adults do not consider how their actions will affect the lives of their children. Parenting style has a lot to do with a child's sense of self, sense of others and how to treat people. One of the biggest issues I see is the use of negative words and pressure to motivate children. The words parents use are the most powerful and crucial in children's lives. Children believe what their parents tell them. When their parents say you can do it. Then give them the tools they need. Children try hard and work to accomplish it , because they believe they can. The opposite is also true. Children remember for life what their parents say about and to them. Dr. James Dobson, one of America's chief parenting experts. In his video series on Essentials of Discipline tells a story. The story is about hearing a negative statement his father made about him when he was around five years old. He remembers it clearly like it was yesterday. The statement was made decades ago and Dr. Dobson remembers those words clearly. Negative words do not motivate they fester. They can also teach children to accept negative words and violence from others.

Bullying is defined as using words, actions, attitudes to intimidate, harass, isolate or violate another person who is weaker or subordinate to you. Today bullying takes place at school, on the school bus, via text message, email and cell phone. Our kids live in a technological age where they are not able to get away from the harassment. When we were children bullying often ended at our front door. Now, however bullying can reach right into our children's bedrooms; children have no place to be safe and free of negative messages. This is why parents have become the great equalizer. Rather, parents have the ability to become the great equalizer

Relational Intimacy and Bullying

Relational Intimacy is the closeness of heart, soul and mind that leads to connection and camaraderie. This kind of relationship can happen between parents and children; however it only happens with deliberate and planned effort on behalf of parents. There are three elements of relational intimacy they are respect, listening, and time. Parents' use these elements in consistent and purposeful manner will gain close knit relationship with their children. Because bullies tend to look for certain characteristics in victims: anxiousness, caution, lonely, with low self-esteem and who will rarely defend themselves parents can use a strong relationship to combat the negative affects of bullying. Relational Intimacy help children defend themselves.

Respect

Self-respect is a by-product of being respected by important adults in our lives and the knowledge of the fact we can do things and be successful. Parents when they use respectful words, actions, and attitudes in raising their children empower them with self-respect. When someone you think of as important treats us with honor and respect we feel better about our place in the world. If it is true of adults and since children are people too it is true of them.

The second area of self-respect is knowing that you are good at something and becoming proud of yourself. This begins at age 2 when children begin to say things like I can do it myself. Parent who help children to consistently find and do things they are good at empower them to feel proud. Please, only compliment children when they do a good job. Do not patronize children and try to make them think they are good at everything. Children know the difference. However, parents should encourage children to try hard at everything whether they are good at it or not. It is the only way to find out what you are truly gifted at doing.

Children can be prevented from bullying others by learning to treat others with respect as well. Someone who recognizes that there are others who are less fortunate that need our help and support know that bullying is wrong and will be less likely to participate in such activities. One tool is for parents to volunteer at the Special Olympics, soup kitchens, hospitals and talk to children about why it is important to help and support others. This also builds in self-respect helping others helps you feel good.

Building respectful relationships with children helps parents to not only prevent bullying behaviors; it fosters trust and safety for children. It is this trust and respect which builds relational intimacy and forms connection and camaraderie..

Listening

While teaching parenting classes I often hear parents complain about their children not sharing their lives and what is going on. My question often is "When do you provide time to listen and not inquire?" Children are a lot like men, when it comes to communication style. They are not likely to sit down with you and have a heart to heart. Provide some kind of activity that requires no media and you will find all kinds of things to discuss. Children really care about what their parents think of them. Therefore, they are not willing to see disappointment or whatever their parents may think. So, providing an acceptant, respectful, non-judgmental atmosphere will give children a safe environment to share thoughts, feelings and actions.

One of the challenges I give to parents is listen without commenting or giving advice. Just listen and hear what your child is saying. Not just saying with words, but with body language, facial expression, and attitude. Then address what is being said with compassion and respect. One thing you want to avoid is hearing and judging when you are in this discussion. One can always go back and correct misbehavior this time is about connecting. There is an art to listening it takes several steps. They are 1) listen carefully, pay attention to the feelings being expressed and not just the words; 2) don not criticize or give advice just hear what is being said 3)before you respond repeat back what you heard ask questions for clarification and then 4)take a moment to think before you respond. Take a drink or restroom break if you need it. Here is an example.

Jim's 10 year old son Eric has come to him with a problem. Eric tells Jim that Robby the next door neighbor {who is 12 and is both bigger and stronger than Eric} took his ice cream cone and change from a five dollar bill at the ice cream truck. Jim listened to Eric and heard his son's frustration, anger and feelings of helplessness. He repeated back what he heard and asked Eric how he wanted to handle the situation.

Eric told Jim that he wanted to confront Robby but he wanted Jim to be nearby while he did so. Jim told Eric he thought that was a good idea and to let him know when he was ready to confront Robby. Jim did not mention however that Eric took money from his piggy bank without permission which was a rule at their house. Nor did he mention that Eric was getting ice cream when he was being restricted from sweets because he took cookies at Grandma's house without permission.

Jim stood in the yard two hours later while Eric confronted Robby and asked for his five dollars back. Robby's Dad overheard the conversation and made Robby give Eric ten dollars for pain and suffering. He also discussed bullying with Robby and Eric. Jim went back into the house with Eric and told him how proud he was of how he handled the Situation. Jim also added a week of no sweets and took Eric's ten dollars and piggy bank for a month for breaking the rule.

This example is the best way to handle the situation. However, many parents would have told Eric that is what he got for getting ice cream; when he should not have been doing so in the first place. However, this response would not have dealt with Robby. In addition, it would have told Eric that he deserved to be bullied because he broke a rule. One last thing it would have told Eric that Jim was not a safe place to go when trouble was around. That he could not count on his Dad valuing him as a person and being there in a crisis.

Time

The one thing that we never get back is time. Once a minute is gone you will never get it back again. So, many parents have said to me. If I had just taken the time to hear what he was saying or attended that baseball game. The truth is what you spend your time doing is what you value. If you spend more time watching a game than playing one with your children what are you telling them. Relational intimacy can not be built without spending lots of time together. Building relationships is all about spending time to learn about each other and to keep the communication going.

I was talking to a friend recently we were discussing relational intimacy and she was saying how hard it is not to let life get in the way of keeping that kind of relationship going with her husband. How much more difficult than with children? Life is about choices. How you spend time is chief among them. Time

spent with children is the number one issue in America today. Parents who are working 3 jobs to keep a roof over head and food on the table spend little time with their children. Parents who are working 70 hours a week to keep kids in private school and to pay for tee time on Saturday are just as busy and the kids are not getting their parents time. Kids learn they are valued when parents spend endless time with them just hanging out and being a part of their everyday world. Again, value of self is determined by being valued by others for children. This gives kids the esteem t hey need to stand up for themselves and for others if necessary.

Parents who work hard to develop relational intimacy with their kids will automatically give them the tolls they need to combat bullying. Value of self is the number one weapon kids have against bullies. Help your kids fight by giving them the respect, listening ear and time of a parent who loves them and is on their side throughout their entire lives.

One last thing to think about and that is monitoring of electronic devices that your kids use. I hear so many parents discuss privacy for their children and respecting them. I think this is important but I also think that safety is important. Letting your children know up front when they are given electronic devices that you will be monitoring them and that they will be responsible for what is found on these devices gives children a heads up and respects them at the same time. Parents should be consistent in monitoring electronic devices at least bi-monthly. We are talking about protecting your children from predators children and adults. Developing relational Intimacy will allow your children to tell you about predatory happenings, but in case they are too frightened by the predator you still need to monitor. You can give your kids tools to come against bullying. The greatest tool you can give them is you!