

# Let's Talk Bullying



Send her mail.

*"Love Perspective" is an original column appearing every other Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Serenity. Serenity is the mother of 4 boys and both a recovering mainstream parent and statist. She seeks to share what she has learned along her journey to voluntaryism, radical unschooling, and living a counter-culture lifestyle. Archived columns can be found here. LP-only RSS feed available here.*

For most children across the United States, school recently started back up, and with it come the slogans and campaigns to "stomp out bullying," and a dozen different ways to say, "Bullying is NEVER okay!" Sounds good in theory, doesn't it? If we put up posters and repeat slogans and create songs and chants, children will surely learn that hurting other people by hitting or name calling or teasing or ignoring is *not* acceptable behavior in our society. Or will it?

Children will act out what they see those around them doing. Their behaviors in our culture are learned. They learn by watching and then implementing what they've seen. So what are we showing our children? I spent a bit of time in a local middle school a year or so ago, and I will tell you what I saw. I saw a 13 year old girl pushed up against the wall by an irate administrator. I saw that adult stand over that child, wave her finger in the girl's face while lecturing her on how wrong her behavior had been, and when the child attempted to speak in her own defense, I heard the adult woman raise her voice to shut it down by saying, "I am not through speaking!" A week later, as I walked toward the nurse's office, I saw a teacher standing beside a young man between the ages of 11 and 13. The child's shoulders were slumped, his head was hanging down, and the teacher was standing over him as she lectured him. He didn't even try to speak on his own behalf, so downtrodden was that poor boy.

Do you think these are isolated, random cases? My life experience tells me they are not. As a culture (remember, I used to treat children that way, too, since I was treated like that when I was growing up), we are taught that adults are the authority and adults hold the power to which children must comply - *or else*. Adults are *not* to be questioned or challenged. Adults are only to be deferred to and "respected" (meaning children should fear adults - and authority - solely based upon the adult person's age and status as an adult).

So let's examine "bullying". The dictionary defines bullying as, "a blustering, quarrelsome, overbearing person who *habitually badgers and intimidates smaller or weaker people.*" (Emphasis added.) Based on that definition, I'd like you to contemplate where young children could have possibly learned such behavior. Do you think they got it from their friends, saw it on TV, or heard it in their favorite music? Or could it possibly be something they have been witnessing since birth inside their culture? I believe it's the latter. Any given day, you can see bullying happening around you. Don't believe me? Go to the store and watch an angry mother grab her toddler by the arm as she fiercely says, "I told you to stop running!" and then forces the screaming child into the shopping cart to be buckled against her will. Go to the park and see a dad yelling at his children, "I said we are leaving now, so get in the car, or so help me, you will be sorry!" Go to church and watch a parent slap a child on the back of the head while sternly shushing and admonishing them to pay attention. The scenario plays out endlessly, and it always has the same message: I am bigger and stronger than you, and you will comply with my demands or suffer a consequence of my own making.

When this is an everyday occurrence in our society, why do people act so shocked and disgusted when one child says to another, "Do what I want or else?" They learned it from us.

Most people agree to this statement, "Children need discipline." And I agree, too! But discipline does not mean using your will to coerce and force another being against their will, because *that* is bullying! Discipline means to disciple, to lead, to guide by example, to gently instruct, to help.

If you are against bullying and want to see it stop, I recommend you start by carefully examining your own interactions with the children in your life. If you are against children bullying each other, then please help stop it by role modeling that bullying truly is *never* okay. Disciple them and lead by example. If you would be respected, respect them first.