

“These are the best years of your life!”

Have you ever heard a grown-up make that statement? Did you think, “Well, if these are the *best* years, what do I have to look *forward* to!?”

Trust me, I know how you feel. I know that your school days can be anything but fun and carefree and enjoyable. I know they can be filled with discomfort, embarrassment and fear. Because, sometimes, kids can be mean. Kids can be cruel. They can be intolerant, and can say and do things that hurt your feelings and make you sad. Make you doubt that you are worthy of love. Make you lack self-confidence and self-esteem.

Bullying is a problem that affects many school-age children, most especially those in middle and junior high school. Bullying has always been around. It’s nothing new. But if you are the child that is being picked on and made fun of, if you are the youngster who is being called names, or getting tripped or shoved on the playground, it doesn’t matter to you if others have dealt with this problem since time began. All that matters to *you* is how you feel. Today, this moment, right now! Scared, confused and angry. Worthless, even.

I know what it’s like to be a kid. I remember what it felt like to be made fun of. I’m also a parent, and I’ve cried inside as I’ve watched the growing pains of my own children as they learned to navigate the daunting world of adolescence.

It is important that you not feel alone. If you are being harassed, it is vital that you tell someone. Your parents, your teacher, the principal, bus driver or guidance counselor. If you tell an adult, and you aren’t satisfied that they’ve listened and responded to your worries and fears, then tell another one. There are people—grown-ups—who *really do care*, and who want to help resolve the issue.

Of course, anyone who’s ever been a kid (*and that is every one of us!*) realizes that there are sometimes consequences for tattling, or snitching, or whatever the current term is. And many children do not report bullying out of fear for those consequences. They worry that they will make their situation *worse* if they speak up.

And yet, it is important that you not feel alone. It is essential that you feel like you have a friend and an ally—someone who is on *your* side. Someone who really, truly cares about *you*, no matter what you look like, or sound like, or act like! A *true* friend!

As unbelievable as it might seem, most children are kind. Most children don’t wish to spend their time looking for other kids to pick on. Many of those that stand in the periphery and do nothing when you are being bullied are scared, *themselves*. They are terrified that if they step in and try to put a stop to the bullying, they will become the victim, instead of you. So, as alone as you might feel, remember—you are not! Far from it!

Bullying is not going to disappear overnight. In fact, if we are to be realistic, bullying may very well be around forever. But there are many, many adults who are working hard to come up with solutions to help prevent this blight on childhood. There are also lots of kids *just like you* who are trying to do something positive to change the situation, too. And remember... it is the *bully* who has the *real* problem. Not you. It is the bully who feels insecure, the bully who needs to have the admiration and respect of his peers so badly that he willing to reduce himself to the role of tyrant in order to try and gain that respect . Chances are, the bully is dealing with some very serious issues in his own life. If you can manage to feel a little sympathy for the fellow who is making your life miserable, I guarantee you, you are going to grow up to be *one mighty fine adult!*

So, tell a grown up. Hold your head up high, even if you feel low and miserable. Don't sink to the level of the bully. Think about all the good, wonderful things there are to like about yourself- because there are *lots* of great traits that you have. Be kind to others, be helpful and always be ready to listen. Be a friend, *a true friend*, and you will find at least one other who is willing to be in your corner. One who will love you for who you are, no matter what anyone else says. And remember to smile. There is a lot of power in laughter. It's good for your body and it's good for your soul. And it really messes with the mind of a bully, too!

Remember, you don't have to be in this alone. You *shouldn't* be in this alone. There is an awesome, tremendous power in friendship. Be a friend, and you will find a friend. Then the two of you can spread that good feeling around until there are more and more people smiling, and being nice, and *not* being mean.

And maybe, just maybe, you can make it *cooler* to be kind and tolerant, than it is to be a bully!

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