

Help kids avoid bullying this new school year

“Bullying in our school?

No way. There may be some teasing and taunting since kids will be kids, but nothing as serious as someone considering taking their life.” This is understandably how many parents and educators think. Think again.

I presented to two groups this summer. No group had more than 25 students, from middle to high school. As I began my PowerPoint with the first group, one girl near me looked totally devoid of joy. Pain just covered her face, totally crestfallen and hopeless. During the break, I asked her if my topic was familiar to her. Her response was, “Oh, yes!” Another, who I had



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talked to prior to the presentation, indicated she certainly was the target of bullying. During my presentation, I asked for volunteers to share their experiences. No one volunteered. Many kids

don't like to share because it would appear as though there is something wrong with them. Or if it is reported resulting in an investigation, the taunting will become worse. Also, you can't blame them. No one wants to dredge up ugly experiences and relive them.

The second group was more vocal. Two boys related that each had helped a friend who mentioned suicide due to bullying. Was this a feeling of despair at the moment, or a serious

cry for help? We'll never know. However, we do know that the boys took it seriously, as well they should. Thank goodness they had compassion and didn't care if they were labeled a wimp, the same as the victim, which does happen. A girl in the group indicated she had been considering “doing that” due to a female acquaintance that just wouldn't leave her alone with “put down” remarks. She decided otherwise, due to having family, friends and two pets that would miss her terribly. What a tragedy that children even have these thoughts.

Folks, these are not schools from the inner city of Chicago, Detroit or New York; these kids are from your and my neighborhood. Though it's difficult for even me to fathom there is a serious problem, all I have to do is talk to students. They tell it like it is. You may wonder how this

can happen without the knowledge of school officials and teachers. Most bullying takes place under the radar. Teachers may know something is going on, but it isn't always easy to pick out specifics. And if they ask, generally students won't tell. It's that “code of silence” in which you don't rat on peers.

Soon children will return to school. The excited anticipation they had waiting for summer vacation to come is now being replaced with boredom and the anxious arrival of a new school year. For some, it's returning to their old school with all the familiarity and joy of the past. For others, great changes will take place as they enter a new school. Most will be happy. Some will dread the return, knowing they will once again be subjected to the same cruel ridicule with which they have so often become familiar. A

few may enter a new school or school year having great expectations only to realize that things have changed drastically for the worse and they no longer have a place with friends to enjoy and learn.

Parents, talk to your children about what's going on in their lives at school. Ask about how they are being treated or if they see someone being mistreated. Talk about what can be done to help. There are useful websites, which you can find links to from my own, at www.coolcarl.com. You never know, you just may avoid a major tragedy just waiting to happen.

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