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IS IT BULLYING?

NOT EVERY MEAN THING KIDS DO IS BULLYING.

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IS IT BULLYING?

Bullying tends to be used as an umbrella term to describe things that are not always bullying. Many people don't realize that not every unkind thing someone does constitutes bullying. This is especially relevant with younger children because they are still learning how to get along with others and how to react to adversity.

When people lump all hurtful behavior into being bullying, the message of what bullying is becomes blurred and the word loses its true meaning. This can result in people either not taking it seriously or to simply stop paying attention to it altogether. This is yet another reason why it is so important for adults within a community to understand what bullying is - and is not.

In order for something to be considered bullying it must contain the following three elements:

AGGRESSION OR INTENT TO CAUSE HARM

IMBALANCE OF POWER (REAL OR PERCEIVED)

REPETITION OF HURTFUL BEHAVIOR/ACTIONS

This is discussed in more detail in my online course, 'The Anti-Bullying Brigade', but the information on the following page will provide you with specific examples to give you a better idea of common situations that are often mistakenly labeled as bullying, or are ignored because of a lack of understanding of what to recognize.

CONFLICT

Learning to handle conflict is a natural part of growing up as long as kids learn how to solve their problems respectfully and peacefully.



A fight or disagreement between two close friends - even when the kids make unkind and hurtful remarks to each other is not bullying. These things are often one-time events.



Repeatedly using conflict or aggression to get what you want or need at the expense of another person is bullying.

EXCLUSION

While kids should always treat others with respect, we cannot expect them to be close friends with every child they know.



Not being invited to every birthday party or event (playdates etc.) is not bullying. Remind kids that sometimes they must also choose not to include everyone.



Ostracizing behavior that excludes others with the intent to cause harm or posting photos or bragging about how much fun they had in front of the person who was excluded.

TEASING

At some point, nearly all kids are teased by a sibling, friend, parent/guardian, teacher etc. We don't want kids to become overly sensitive to the point where they don't understand the difference or take everything said or done to them personally.



Good-natured teasing in a playful, friendly or mutual way where no one has feelings get hurt (as long as both kids find it funny and understand that it is innocent play).



When teasing becomes cruel, unkind and repetitive with a conscious choice to hurt or embarrass another person. Generally speaking, bullying crosses the line between joking around and being intentionally hurtful.

EXPRESSING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS/FEELINGS

Children (especially young children) are usually open and honest with thoughts and feelings without considering (or understanding) the consequences. It is important that kids learn how to communicate their feelings without offending or hurting someone's feelings. Providing the tools to express their feelings also empowers them be more assertive if/when someone is being unkind.



Unkind remarks uttered innocently (especially with younger children) such as “Why are you so fat?” or “You have really bad breath”. Young children don't yet have a “filter”.



Saying things to or about someone with the intent to hurt their feelings, embarrass them or reduce their credibility such as “You are a fat cow” or “You smell and you're ugly”.

PLAYING GAMES/MAKING RULES/FOLLOWING RULES

Teaching kids how to develop healthy friendships can help them become more assertive and can nurture future leadership skills. Enabling them to work out differences and sharing/splitting responsibilities/taking turns can help empower them to speak up when needed and to stand up for themselves and others.



Wanting to play a game a certain way, but willing to take turns without being controlling. Including and encouraging others and being a fair loser and winner, understanding that you cannot win all the time.



Consistently threatening others with physical harm if things don't go their way to exhibit power and control. Insisting that everyone follow their rules all the time, or insisting on who can/can not play etc.



A WORD OF CAUTION



It's important to note that there are times when adults inadvertently exhibit behavior that can be perceived by kids as hurtful because they are taken literally. While the adult likely does not realize that their words or actions are hurtful, there are kids do not yet understand the nuances of some of the things that we say. Others are too young to differentiate a tease/joke and something that is meant to be hurtful. There may also be kids who are being bullied unbeknownst to supervising adults which can further damage their self-esteem. There are times when things can be used as "ammunition" against a child who is being bullied. Here are a few common examples of things adults can say/do that can be unintentionally harmful:

- *Embarassing someone by making fun of their clothes, hair, abilities etc.*
- *Use of humor or sarcasm that is beyond the ability for the child to understand that it was meant in jest*
- *Playing favorites*
- *Intentionally excluding someone*

We certainly don't want to raise a community of overly-sensitive children, nor do we want to raise a community of people with no thought for the way others feel. By no means am I implying that we need to walk on eggshells for fear of upsetting someone. Creating an environment that is welcoming, inclusive and safe for everyone requires that consistent messages are sent out that clearly reflect that the way we treat each other is important, we are friendly and positive, and everyone will be treated with respect.

Our strength lies in our collective understanding and action.

I have created several eBooks, reference guides, presentations and online courses because it is vital for adults in any community to take an active role in bullying prevention. I have also created a program for community-wide bullying prevention.

As adults, we have an obligation and responsibility to be better equipped to act as role-models. I wholeheartedly believe that it is this differentiation that will have the biggest impact in fueling the change we speak of and will help to empower and inspire kids to do the same. My eBook 'Are You Leading By Example?' gives some great advice on how to take a more active role in bullying prevention.

Change must start somewhere, and before we talk about making change, we can all start with ourselves.

I will be traveling throughout the country speaking at schools and organizations. If you are interested in having me speak at your school or organization or have any questions, feel free to reach out to me.

For more information, send an email to sandy@sandylundy.com.

