

Kind Words, Modeling And Bullying Behavior

by Kathy Cotner

We talk a lot at school about using kind words with our friends and treating each other with respect. We strive to lead by example and encourage parents to do the same. We all hope that our manner, tone, and choice of words will help model appropriate behavior in our children and create a peaceful environment for all children. Peaceful environments are learning, creating, and inspiring places where innovation and collaboration are fostered. The power between the children is equal and balanced. An unbalance of power between children leads to bullying. In researching ways to curb bullying in schools specifically in younger populations, a number of common practices among both parents and professionals have come into question. Four of the most interesting are: sharing, gossiping, over-scheduling and spectating.

Sharing is a learned skill that takes time, maturity and encouragement to develop fully. Children who are forced to share, especially at a young age, experience a feeling of powerlessness. This causes children to search for other ways to regain their power. Instead we can encourage, model, offer alternatives, and offer assistance.

Gossiping within earshot of children is modeling teasing, plain and simple. It's indirect bullying, better done away from children or, when we can muster the courage, not at all. If you have ever seen a child walking around with a pretend cell phone screeching, "Wow! No! Really? I can't believe they would do that!" with eyes wide, and hands waving, you know what I mean.

Over-scheduling children in order to provide them the best advantages so they don't miss out, fails to recognize that the most important thing that young children need is free time. If your child has a passion, by all means allow them time to explore it. But kids need unstructured free play time, creative time, and quiet time not enforced by a parent. Over-scheduling leads to stressed kids. Stressed kids leads to anxiety, anger, and aggression which paves the way for bullying.

Spectating, which is passively watching others be bullied, seems harmless, but is the most powerful facilitator of bullying at any age. The more spectating is excused, the more powerful the bullying becomes. We become desensitized to bullying just like other more physical forms of violence. Every time we watch someone or something happen that we could help prevent with a word or an action, we become peers to bullying.

Not sabotaging our efforts to raise kind and caring kids begins with us. We need to curb our use of negative talk and choose positive alternatives and choices. We need to let kids be kids and not projects needing shaping or vessels to fill. We need to constantly show that we care in our words and our actions. Our children are learning how to react to life through our actions. Let's strive to make what we do count.