



We read a lot about bullying these days-and with good reason. It's a contributing factor to acts of violence in schools that involve young people. Bullying also takes the form of social cruelty. Girls who bully tend to use social exclusion and rumor-mongering to harass other girls. Male teens and adults also use this technique to bully. This kind of bullying is just as damaging to a school's learning environment as an act of violence.

Bullying is a nasty business in part because it flourishes right under our noses. Even concerned adults witness bullying but fail to stop it. Why? How do we enable bullying?

William Voors, LCSW, writing in *Paradigm** (Winter 2004), lists three ways adults enable bullying:

1) Minimizing - "Oh, that's not such a big deal. Lighten up." Because it doesn't bother us, we shrug off an insensitive remark or action.

3) Normalizing - "Everybody" does (or says) that." "Kids will be kids." We accept a certain behavior as "normal" based on what we learned from significant adults in our lives.

2) Denying - "That kind of thing doesn't happen here." We can outright ignore something or pretend it didn't happen. But denial goes another step further, too. It can also mean refusing to recognize our own prejudicial beliefs and attitudes. We may not even recognize that we have them until we've made a remark that clearly hurts someone's feelings. How can we stop these behaviors?

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Confront it - Don't shirk. Don't soften it. Say it out loud so that the person who's being insensitive or cruel can hear it and so can the victim and those who witnessed the behavior. Admittedly, it's not easy to do this among peers, and we may fear saying something so strong to another person's child, but it is necessary for all of us to do so if we are to stop this kind of behavior. In a case when we recognize (often with surprise) our own prejudicial behavior or speech, we have to be open to apologizing, examining why we would have said something like that and making a change.

Don't call it "normal" - Don't accept the status quo. Go with what your gut tells you - this remark or behavior caused someone else pain.

Name it - Call an apple an apple. When you encounter bullying behavior, label it: Say, "That kind of behavior is bullying/harassment/cruel/prejudicial."

Be brave - Take a stand for what's right and help your community become the kind of place you want your children to live in.

Paradigm is a publication of the Illinois Institute for Addiction Recovery at Proctor Hospital in Peoria, Ill. (1-800-522-3784).