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Common Points of View About Bullying

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Our society has many well-known expressions that characterize, describe, and portray bullying; some are accurate and true, while others are outdated and don't reflect the realities of bullying. Here are a few of those often repeated phrases, followed by a response to each statement and insight into the real story.

Bullying is the same as arguing.

People argue about lots of things. Let's say you and a classmate get into an argument about who's the best hip-hop artist. That disagreement isn't bullying. It would be, though, if your classmate told everyone not to hang with you because of what you said and got them trash talking about you. When there's a power imbalance (like being outnumbered) and the intention is to be mean or control someone else, that's bullying.

Bullying only happens in middle school.

Kids can show bullying behaviors even before they leave the sandbox, calling others names, leaving someone out on purpose, or making fun of others. It can start early and continue through elementary as well as middle and high school.

People who bully come in all shapes and sizes.

It's not like the movies, where the person bullying is a big, tough-looking kid who wears all black and grunts a lot. There is no stereotype, it can be the athletic girls and the studious boys. The person bullying can be popular, unpopular, tall, short, rich, poor, or anything else. The only way to recognize someone who bullies is by how they act, not by how they look.

Calling someone "gay" or "retarded" is funny.

Think about it. If you use "gay" to mean something that isn't cool, it's like saying that people who are gay aren't cool. If you call people "retard" when they do something you think is dumb, that's a slam against people with developmental disabilities. Interesting way to look at it, isn't it?

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Those bullying have access to huge audiences.

It's called cyberbullying, and it includes things like sending mean texts, posting gossip or embarrassing pictures, and uploading cruel videos — all just because it seems like fun. Because cyberbullying is out there for the whole world to see, it can be particularly devastating. You know what makes it even worse? Sometimes it's done anonymously, so you don't even know who's trying to hurt you. Nasty stuff!

Words will never hurt you.

Yeah, you have heard this one before. People used to think bullying was just physical. Now we know better. Even though words don't leave bruises or broken bones, words can be like weapons, inflicting great emotional pain — and the scars on a heart can last a long time.

If you see bullying, you can help stop it.

Yeah, you can. Most teens who see bullying want to help put an end to it. How? Speak out, stand together, tell someone. You can always do something to help, either directly or indirectly. And yeah, we get it; it's definitely not easy to do, but no one should have to deal with bullying alone. When we all stand together, no one stands alone.

Bullying makes you tougher.

Tougher? Nope. Fact is, bullying often makes you feel scared, alone, worried, sad, and down on yourself.

Teens who are being bullied may not want to tell anyone, especially an adult.

You know it. Why don't teens want to tell? For starters, they might be embarrassed that they're a target. Lots of teens worry that the person bullying them might try and get even. And telling adults can be a mixed bag. Some might not take the teen seriously. Others might overreact, avoid dealing with it, or not know what to do. But, know this: no one should go through bullying alone.

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Some people deserve to be bullied.

So old school. It was a reason (and not a good one) to justify bad behavior. The way people act or look is never a reason to bully them. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and consideration.

Telling an adult about bullying is ratting someone out.

Tattling means sharing petty secrets or information about someone to get them in trouble. Telling means reporting a harmful or dangerous situation to an adult to help protect someone. If you don't tell, who are you protecting? That's right, you're protecting the one doing the bad behavior and the person who really needs help is all alone. Not telling only protects people who are doing something that they shouldn't be.

Bullying is just a normal part of growing up.

Normal? That's a messed-up definition of "normal." Getting beat up, being left out of social situations, getting made fun of, being laughed at, ridiculed, or gossiped about is normal? It's not.

Bullying can be about wanting to feel in power and control.

Kids who bully love to have control over others, and they use it on purpose to intimidate, hurt, or harass others. Should those who hurt, harm, or humiliate have all the power in a school or power over others? Think about it. Wouldn't it be cool if those who included others, were kind, and helped people had the power? Think about it.

If you ignore bullying, it will go away.

If it were that easy, then those getting bullied could make it stop by just walking away, not engaging. Boom, problem solved. Of course this isn't reality. It can be hard to address the issue, but work on a plan and get a parent or other trusted adult to help. No one deserves to be bullied and you have a right to feel safe at school.

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You should fight back.

They push you, you shove back, they push you harder. Then who gets it trouble? Probably you both do or, worse yet, maybe you are even seen as the problem. Where does it end? Reacting with anger and violence usually makes the situation worse.

Students who are bullied should just learn to deal with it.

Someone who has never been hurt, harm or humiliated must have thought up that response. No one should ever have to go through school knowing that they will be bullied. In fact, it's every students legal right to be safe at school.

The real story about bullying? It is NEVER acceptable. The phrase that everyone needs to repeat (often and loud) is that all students deserve to go to school, be online, and live in a community in which they feel accepted, included, and respected.