

When Eleven Hurts

by Barbara Baranowski

I can still visualize the face of the terrified child and hear the humiliating words directed toward her. A group of girls huddled in a corner of the schoolroom taunted the new student. She felt threatened and alone. This scene replayed daily, and at night she cried herself to sleep. We would consider this bullying as harassment, understanding that this type of threatening behavior is remembered long after the encounter. I know because I was that new student the girls had targeted.

In schools across the country bullying takes place daily. What can teachers, administrators, and parents do to alleviate the stress for both the one feeling threatened and the bully? I used the memory of my own painful experience and concerns as a parent to develop tips that I incorporated over twenty-five years in my own classroom.

First, children should be encouraged to inform the teacher of instances of harassment or bullying. Sometimes that is a fearful thought for a child. If he/she is apprehensive to do so, the parent should inform the teacher. As a teacher, I met with the aggressor, as well as the victim. Both students are affected. Hurting or insecure individuals, in their frustration, sometimes hurt others. By getting intervention as soon as possible, both students can be helped, and the aggression stopped.

Second, parents and teachers should be alert for signs of a student who is the target of aggression. Some of the signs I witnessed from the bullied student are sadness, withdrawal, fear of being around others, and changes in behavior (such as acting out, depression, or a drop in grades). Today, many schools have counselors on staff. The

teacher should share this information with parents and the counselor, allowing time for the counselor to meet with the parties involved. In my childhood situation, the teacher was alerted by my parents, and she took immediate action by talking to the girls. They eventually became my friends when they realized what hurt they were inflicting, and how their behavior was hurting them, as well.

Finally, the teacher and parents can introduce the child to other children who do not bully. This is incredibly valuable. Even though it took awhile for me to overcome the depression and anxiety of this experience, making friends who were kind and sensitive helped me recover.

As parents, friends, and teachers of today's students, it is important that we help them feel secure and safe in their formative years. We are a vital link in their emotional, as well as educational, growth and stability. Our loving concern for their well-being can be exemplified through keeping a watchful eye as they interact with each other. As God keeps a watchful eye over us, we must do the same with our children. There is no better way to show our love and care for them.