

There's a lot of information out there dedicated to protecting our kids from bullying and enforcing policies to ensure it doesn't happen, but the real key to stopping this problem is understanding it. Bullies are definitely people like the rest of us, so what's so different about them that their social skills are so drastically different?

It's easy to just lump these kids into the "bad eggs" category, but the reality goes years back, all the way into a child's upbringing and their years in preschool. Here we'll explore some of the basic parallels that psychologists have drawn between bullying behaviors and the kids that exhibit them.

It Starts Early

More and more research is showing that bullying behaviors are developed between toddler and preschool years, and further engrained into a child's communication style as they continue to progress through elementary school with the behavior unchecked.

Kids are a product of their upbringing, and many parents unknowing expose them to interactions that shape the way their children will communicate with others one day. It's been shown that there's a link between disciplinary parenting styles that use threats and spanking to control behavior and the children that in turn use the same methods to get their peers to cooperate with them.

As a child enters the typical turmoil that are the toddler years, emotional volatility is the bane of a parent's existence. However, it's crucial to teach our children how to manage these feelings, encouraging them to talk. It's likely to be slow going at first, but eventually they'll come to practice these methods without even thinking about it.

From there, developmental psychologists that unsupervised free play is crucial in furthering these communication skills, and allowing children to solve disputes on their own, without parental intervention. This not only shows kids how to interact and coexist with one another, but pushes other children to assert and stand up for themselves.

They lack personal awareness

Interestingly enough, it appears that most bullies are completely unaware of how they are perceived. Often they find ways to justify their behavior, and have no concept of how their peers actually see them. For the most part, they consider themselves well-liked, though this is usually just a result of fear-based manipulation, and people being too afraid to speak up.

They have low self esteem

Bullies are made, not born, and as I said before, this behavior is typically fostered at a very young age. A difficult upbringing can result in low self esteem, which coupled with aggressive behavior can create a child who not only lacks communication skills, but feels the need to defend themselves constantly.

It's due to this that so many bullies are able to make peace with what they do – they see threats and insults everywhere they look, and in their eyes, everyone else is asking for it. They lash out as a defense mechanism, and then often seek out 'weaker' victims to bolster their own sense of superiority.

They need to feel in charge of someone

This lack of self esteem can also foster a need to be in control of something. If they've had a tumultuous upbringing with a lot of big changes that were completely out of their control, they might lash out and assert their dominance over others as a means of coping.

Major changes and volatile circumstances can make a child feel vulnerable, and if the ability to be aggressive is there, they turn to others to victimize in an effort to protect themselves. By having a say in someone else's day, it helps them cope with not having a say in their own.

Rewriting Bullying Behavior

The trouble is, bullying behavior is something that is developed over years and years of difficult circumstances, threatening parenting styles, and a lack of healthy social interactions – it could take years to correct, and indeed, there may be no rehabilitating a bully.

Once these patterns of behavior in play, it's difficult to reach the sensitive, vulnerable child underneath.. However, one key point that's worth mentioning is the power of suggestion. In many instances, people tend to become what society perceives them as.

If society perceives you as a bully, you're more likely to become more like that person, and dig in your heels even further. While it's important to show our kids that this behavior is completely unacceptable, it's also important to offer them the opportunity for a clean slate, and the chance to redeem themselves.

If an aggressive child is shown that he can be treated with respect without having to push for it, he may be more inclined to alter his behavior. If he can learn to depend on and trust others without having to threaten for results, he may consider that it's not actually necessary to manipulate others.

It all starts with setting the right example for our kids, and giving them the space they need to exercise crucial social skills. If we can show kids that have taken to bullying as a means of coping that there's no need to act big and tough to get their way, we may be able to show them the world in a different light, and one that they can actively be a part of, instead of being a shadow in it.