



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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Take A Stand - No More Bullying

I've been doing a lot of training lately on Bullying in the Workplace. Many people think bullying is something that only occurs in school to kids. But, bullying activities are not limited to childhood. Many people still deal with bullies as adults - with family members, socially, and in the workplace. I usually have several open cases dealing with this very issue.

First, you need to understand some things about bullies:

Bullies are emotionally underdeveloped.

They do not know how to connect easily with others, and they lack in social skills. People who bully in public have a warped belief that the onlookers will like them and look up to them as they bully their victim. People who bully in private have power and control issues and bullying makes them feel "better than" their victim. These people were not taught effective anger management or conflict resolution skills as children. Their bullying behavior probably started in childhood and has continued on throughout their life.

Bullies have low self-esteem

They generally don't like themselves very much - their true selves, that is. They have the "bully" mask on so they can pretend they are cool and don't care that no one connects with them on anything other than a surface level. Good thing they are underdeveloped, or that might really bother them.

Bullies like being "big."

People who feel the need to overtake the person they are dealing with are doing what I call "getting bigger." Examples:

- Standing up when everyone else is sitting down
- Getting into that

person's personal space

- Raising your voice when the other person is still talking at a normal level
- Clinching your fists, breathing heavy, or gritting your teeth
- Slamming the door, hitting the wall, pounding the desk
- Of course, out and out violence

It's all about scare tactics to get that person to back down - instead of actually dealing effectively with the issue at hand.

Bullies choose their victims well.

Bullies tend to choose people they believe they can bully. People they think won't stand up for themselves. People they believe they can intimidate - either physically or with something to lord over them (like needing your job).

Stay in the Comfort Zone.

Avoid hot topics that lead to opinions - religion, politics, etc. Even though those topics might be more fun to you, and you enjoy seeing people squirm a little, you will quickly become known as a person lacking social skills. Save those discussions for close friends, not new acquaintances.

So, what do we do about these troublemakers? As the title of the article suggests, you must take a stand. Gone are the days when the best recommendation for dealing with a bully is "Ignore him; he'll go find someone else to bully." We know that ignoring bullies only gives them permission to escalate their bullying activities.

Here are my suggestions:

Address the bully directly

Face to face is best. Look that person in the eye and say, "I don't like it when

you _____ (yell at me, try to intimidate me, etc.). If you don't stop, I will _____ (tell the teacher, report you to management, file charges, etc.)." If you can't bring yourself to do this in person, consider sending a certified letter (which you will keep a copy of). Remember, the bully is counting on you being like all their other victims - silent.

Don't back down

Once you've decided to take action, you must go through with it. Other victims may have threatened your bully and backed down. You have to break that pattern. If you must continue to see this person, then you must continue to not allow them to get away with bullying behavior. Ever.

Examine yourself.

There's a reason you were selected by the bully. I'm not saying it's your fault and that you've brought this on yourself, but I am saying you need to figure out what it is about you that the bully felt he/she could treat you this way. How's your self-confidence? Do you look people in the eye as they enter a room and when you speak to them? Do you stand up straight and move with purpose? Do you speak up when you have an opinion or in social situations? Are you willing to address uncomfortable or wrong things immediately, or do you tend to "take it?" Therapy or personal coaching can be very helpful in determining these things.

I can remember being bullied in Jr. High. The girl was pushing me and threatening to beat me up. A very tall friend of mine stepped in on my behalf. The bully backed down. I learned right then that bullies can be controlled - if you're willing to take a stand. No one has had to stand up for me since. I stand up for myself.