

LIFE TALK NEWS 21

BULLYING: A THREAT TO WELL-BEING

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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

BULLIES AND THEIR VICTIMS

Bullying has reached alarming levels. From feedback, some 60%-70% of teens become victims of bullying by the age of 18. Cyberbullying in particular has rocketed during the past year, and is responsible for many cases of depression, reluctance to go to school and attempted suicide. (Cyberbullying also affects young adults, at college or work.)

So what can we all do about what's happening? We can address the symptoms, place guards in school playgrounds, implement software to watch for nastiness in cyberspace – or we can be proactive and address the causes.

Life Talk's primary focus is on getting children and teens to think about their choices, actions, consequences, values - and the outcomes they're striving for. We've included an excerpt from Izabella Gates' teen *Life Talk* books (from the chapter 'Could you be a bully?') to kick-start some essential conversations.

Let's get all our teens to read this – and let's stimulate some urgently-needed focus and action.

COULD YOU EVER BE A BULLY? READ ON AND THEN DECIDE...

"My teacher says I'm a bully and that's so unfair! All I did was text a loser about the fact that everyone hates her and now I'm being called a bully..."

Have you ever done anything that could be classified as 'bullying'? Is there anyone you know who might feel that you bullied them? Bullying takes many forms and includes verbal attacks, excessive teasing, spreading of rumours, physical violence or humiliating behaviour of many kinds. Nowadays cyberbullying is one of the most common forms and this includes malicious texting or posting nasty comments or videos on social media sites. Bullying happens so often, to so many kids, and yet most of the time the "aggressor", if confronted, is adamant that he/she never bullies anyone.

What does a bully do?

Izabella suggests: "Before you declare yourself to be a non-bully, see if you do any of the above, and ask yourself:

1. Do you get a kick out of making people uncomfortable, putting them down, intimidating or hurting them?
2. Do you ever send nasty text messages or spread rumours about someone else, either verbally or by posting mean comments about them online?
3. Does bringing someone else down make you feel better about yourself?
4. Do you see someone else's happiness or good fortune as a threat to your own happiness?
5. Do you find it fun to show off by victimising someone who appears defenceless?
6. Does your character change when you are online or part of a group? Do you suddenly become unkind or cruel to someone you would normally be nice to?

"If **any** of your answers are "yes" then the chances are good that you are a bully. If so, this is not a good place to be. When our actions have a negative effect on someone else, that's when warning bells should clang for us. What gives us the right to make someone else's life unpleasant? Just because we have some kind of issue, does that mean we're justified in bringing pain and misery to someone else? And if we do, do we really believe that it'll make our problems go away and that we'll feel good about ourselves? If you recognise bully-type behaviour in yourself, you have two options: carry on as before, or change your behaviour."

If you choose to remain a bully

"If you see no reason to change your behaviour, certain things will probably happen, including:

- You'll continue with behaviour which will constantly make someone miserable, afraid of you, and want to avoid you whenever possible.
- Some people might look up to you, but they'll no doubt be problem-ridden themselves. Do you really want to be idolised by a bunch of losers?
- Your "victims" will one day grow up, and you never know where you'll encounter them again. I know of someone who ended up jobless, and his only chance of employment was with a company run by one of his ex-victims. Needless to say he didn't get the job and eventually ended up living on the streets.
- By remaining a bully you won't be dealing with the issues troubling you. By not addressing your behaviour, your problems and situations may well repeat themselves throughout your life – and you'll probably always be victimising someone somewhere.
- You'll never really like yourself. You might pretend to like your behaviour, and you'll hide behind numerous excuses for being the way you are, but if you're completely honest with yourself, deep down you won't be truly happy.

If you don't confront and resolve the reasons for your bullying behaviour, they could well end up sabotaging you and your life for the rest of your days. Why risk that?"

If you choose to change

"Deciding to change your behaviour takes guts. You've developed a "comfort zone" and now you'll be entering new territory. The best way of tackling such a change is to first identify why you felt it was necessary to be a bully in the first place. Reasons for bullying can be very complex, and can include all sorts of childhood, school, parental or even abuse issues. Something might have happened to you which made you feel that adopting your chosen behaviour would somehow protect you or make you feel worthwhile. Or maybe you've had it too easy and you belong to the "spoilt brat bully" category?

"Whatever the reasons, truly understanding and resolving them will probably mean asking for some kind of professional help. Whether it's from a counsellor, teacher, parent or doctor, asking for help will give you the guidance you'll need to succeed in your quest. The path to change may well be a tough one. You'll have to face the realities of your negative behaviour, you'll be dealing with the reasons for it, you'll be exposed to the damage you did to your victims, and you'll be finding a new way of being. So, you'll need guts. But the freedom of being kind to others and true to yourself will be totally worth it!"

(Extract from 'Are you ever a bully?' in *Life Talk for a Daughter* and *Life Talk for a Son*)

Other related chapters worth reading include:

Life Talk for Parents: -Bullying; -Peer pressure; -Communication; -Self-esteem..
Life Talk for a Daughter and *Life Talk for a Son*: -When you're being bullied; -When your mates pressure you; -When things are tough at school; -When you don't get what you want; -Your happiness, is it up to you?; (and 70 other helpful topics)
The Tug-of-Life: The Tug-of-Teens section, as well as a number of other chapters.

DON'T MISS OUR VIDEOS ON WWW.LIFETALK.CO.ZA !

The top left video on our home page is a '**must see**' about the issues our youth are facing – and it shows what you can do to help!

We've also released video clips that address specific challenges being faced by teens, young adults and parents. We upload a new video every few weeks, so check regularly to see the latest tips.

OUR WEBSITE HAS SECTIONS FOR PARENTS, TEENS & EDUCATORS: HAVE A LOOK!

NEWSLETTERS 1 – 20 COVER: Alcohol and the teen brain; huffing; clubs; Facebook guide for parents; drugs; cell phones; pocket money; hubbly bubbly; chewing tobacco; clubs & fake IDs; communication; self-esteem & boundaries; depression; Grade 8 hiccups; mixcidity; self-mutilation; eating disorders; discipline; bullying; abuse; ADHD; EMO; subject choices; MXit; divorce; ice-spiking with 'eye drops', head injuries; cults; chat-rooms; child-trafficking; cyberbullying, choking games; exam stress; tips for hosting parties; and many others. (Downloaded off www.lifetalk.co.za)

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HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM JOINING?

- You'll become more proactive in preparing your children for the challenges of adolescence (and adulthood);
- You'll receive current information and advice;
- You'll unleash your power (replacing worry and helplessness with action/results);
- You'll become part of building a society where values, positive attitudes and successful choices are part of our youth's future.

SPECIAL ON LIFE TALK BOOKS!

Buy 3 books: get the 4th one free!

Life Talk for a Daughter, *Life Talk for a Son* and *Life Talk for Parents* include 15 new chapters covering many of the latest issues being faced by teens and young adults. (So even if you have the original version it's worth getting a new copy!)

The Tug-of-Life is "a life-changer of note" and no family should be without one! A unique approach to tackling life's challenges, this entertaining book identifies the choices and challenges we all face (children and adults alike). It helps you to take control of (and enrich) your life so that you can achieve the outcomes you desire.

THE BOOKS ARE A GREAT GIFT FOR YOUR CHILDREN, FRIENDS & FAMILY!

Price on our website is R160 each, now get the set of 4 for R480 (save R160)

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