

It's Time for Bullying to Go

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Don't we wish that old saying could hold true today? Isn't it sad that today bullying and mistreatment of youth by youth is growing, and has become a major problem for many young people? Names do hurt, and kids are reacting to the name calling and mistreatment. Nationally, we see that bullying has led to suicides and the beating of children by other children. Cyber-bullying has created an epidemic of children feeling marginalized and helpless from the onslaught of criticism by others.

It is very sad, but we now know that eighty percent of the bullying that occurs these days is not visible. Bullying takes place behind the scenes in text messages, through various chatrooms, and over Facebook. Bullying happens, and kids don't even have an opportunity to protect themselves. There is little protection when the actual perpetrators are hiding behind computers or cell phones. The results are children who are feeling lost and alone, feeling they have no place to turn, and this can lead to significant anger or depression.

However, this isn't just an issue for kids. Our own occasional negative or critical comments about our boss or the next door neighbor may be modeling inappropriate behavior towards others. I remember listening to my dad rail against the next door neighbor and their dog. When we were kids, however, the issue was handled with a phone call. Today there is no phone call. Today, we may see the dog hung by its ears in a picture on Facebook, along with a picture of the neighbor's house spray-painted with profane words. These internet bullies feel justified in their actions because they are angry,

and if they are able to get others involved in the anger, they feel more warranted in their attack.

However, we are very pleased that in El Dorado County, the Center for Violence Free Relationships is working with our schools to help create a different atmosphere. The most logical action when bullied is to go after the bully. But combating violence with violence isn't the most effective way to deal with the issue. Providing students with tools to cope with conflict and pressure is a more effective way of handling the bullies. Building positive strengths in children goes a long way towards eliminating the influence of bullies. Creating healthy environments for children, where they know they are safe and valued, is critical if we want to keep the bully mentality from taking hold. If we can create a culture where it is not "cool" to be the bully, and kids themselves begin to "counsel" and change the attitude, we have helped achieve a much more positive outcome. With all of us working together, bullying does not have to be an issue in El Dorado County.