

Guidance Guide

Another Perspective on Bullying

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I didn't realize until I became a parent that I would be opening myself up to being under surveillance 24/7. My kids are constantly watching my every move. Their big brown soulful eyes are like hawks watching me while I drive, shop and as I converse with strangers and friends. They are constantly observing every single one of my habits, likes and dislikes etc. etc. Like actors they watch the movie of me and then act out both my conscious and unconscious self. I will often say to close friends and family members, "if you ever want to know how I am feeling or know my habits, watch my kids." This is absolutely fine when I am on my best behavior and in a great mood. However, it becomes uncomfortable when I see myself in the mirror as I witness the way they express my not so fun self or habits that I would not like to admit. Just today I observed my five year old eating her snack standing up. As I reminded her to eat at the table I realized that I have a horrible habit of eating while standing up and on the run. She then summoned me to the table to have a "chat." Hmmm....I wonder where she heard that?

In a fit of anger a few years ago I said to my son, "how dare you!" Our then three-year-old daughter who was a witness to this frustration decided to chant (and haunt me with) this statement every day for six months. As you can guess, the "how dare you statements" were often directed towards me.

An unfortunate memory etched in my mind was the first time I witnessed my son having a temper tantrum as a toddler that mirrored my own temper tantrums to a tee. He could have won an Os-

car. He had me down perfectly! I was both fascinated and mortified. Our children are adopted and so as a mother who studied psychology, anthropology and social work, I became caught up in the nature vs. nurture question. And yet I was also overwhelmed in that moment about the intense responsibility that we carry as parents.

Whether we sign on consciously or unconsciously to become parents, we lose our right to privacy to our children. We can (and must!) have boundaries (essential for the health of all) but in my opinion (and most psychologists) even our unconscious selves are no longer private.

Which brings me to the very popular topic of bullying. Bullying campaigns as well as prevention and intervention programs are thankfully gaining momentum. It is a real issue that carries legitimate concerns. It is a huge problem with dire consequences. For years I counseled college students who were experiencing Post Traumatic Stress as a result of bullying.

However in my experience and observations so far, the campaigns/programs are heavily (if not entirely) targeted towards the children/teens who are either victims, perpetrators or witnesses of bullying. I often hear parents (and teachers) say, how could that child/teen do such a thing? What is happening in our culture? Why have kids become so mean? It reminds me of the many families who unconsciously choose the family scapegoat/black sheep to blame so they in turn will not have to

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look in the mirror and take personal responsibility for their own defects.

In my opinion many of these campaigns are well intended but are not the focusing on another significant source.....the parents, the adults and our culture as a whole. These young people are our mirrors, acting out what they witness.

Unfortunately, adults in our culture are rather talented in the blame game and the art of avoidance. We have never been more addicted as a culture. Pain meds, shopping, exercising, working, internet, drugs, alcohol, etc. etc. The list is endless. What I find disturbing is that many of those suffering from these addictions are the ones who are attempting to teach our children to avoid such things. These are the people who see their family docs to prescribe them drugs for depression and anxiety and yet never bother to make their way in to counseling or seek help. I would say the majority of people in our culture avoid personal growth. Rebuttals to seeing a therapist, pastor, life coach or other professionals might be, "that's for weak people, that's new age, my therapy is beer and football, drinking wine or getting my nails done." "I don't have time." "I don't see the point."

What I would love parents to say in response to bullying is, "how might my behavior be contributing to this systemic issue?" "What am I modeling at home?" "What are my children observing?" "What am I avoiding in my life?" "How do I deal with conflict?" "How do I cope with stress?" "When I am confronted with conflict, do I move in to victim or victor mentality?" What are you doing to take personal responsibility for your "not so fun" stuff?

As long as we avoid looking in the mirror, we are doing a disservice to our children. It can be scary and very overwhelming. We are all perfectly imperfect. And yet our children can be a huge motivator. A call to action to look bravely in the mirror. By consistently attending to our own self-growth, we have an opportunity to raise children who approach this world with a level of healing that can bring peace to themselves, their friends, their classmates, their schools.....the world.

Erie Day School Motto

May I live each day being mindful of the goodness that surrounds me.

May I always stretch my mind and heart so that I live my life in wisdom and love.

May I be a loyal friend to others and willingly help those in need, and may I always honor and respect the earth of which I am a part.



Erie Day School

Learning today, leading tomorrow.

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If you have any questions, comments or additions to the *Guidance Guide*, or know someone that should be included on the email distribution list, please contact Allison Parr-Plasha at 814-452-4273 or via email at aplasha@eriedayschool.com

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