

**Guest Column by Chief Dennis R. Naylor**  
**Bullying is a Concern to All**

As a new school year commences, the routine for most children and teens remains quite similar to when I attended school several decades ago. This includes back-to-school shopping, anticipation of new classes and teachers, and the excitement of getting re-acquainted with friends. Unfortunately for many, another part of the routine includes the fear of being the target of bullies. What's most unfortunate is that although we as a civilized society have made tremendous strides in sciences and technologies, we have yet to find a way to end this highly destructive problem and until we do, we must not rest.

When I used to teach the DARE program throughout the Otsego County schools, I incorporated an instructional segment to specifically address bullying because I noticed that it was occurring in each and every school. Students in my classes would ask (through anonymous notes in the DARE question box) about how they could deal with a bullying situation. The bullying ran the gamut between physical abuse to being teased for skin color, religion, ethnicity, the type of clothes one wore, how one looked, etc. The common theme was that the criticisms were for things that were beyond one's control.

Nowadays, bullying is even worse. It not only takes in all of the above, but adds the cyber component. Kids now suffer from nasty commentary or inappropriate pictures via social media. No longer does the bullying end when the school day does, but it continues 24/7 through posts, emails, and texts. The saying "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me" is a fallacy. Far too often we learn of a young person who commits suicide to escape the torment of bullies. We owe it to our society to not ignore this issue and we must do more to prevent further tragedies.

Some basic solutions start at home. If you're reading this and you have children or teenagers, please talk to them about the strength of their words so that they understand the true power that they have when they tease others. Let them know that it's OK to be different and to accept diversity in others. People will differ from one another in ideas, but everyone should still be treated with respect. Likewise, let your kids know that they can come to you if they are being bullied so you can help them work through it. Some children may not open up about being bullied because of fear or shame, so if you're a parent or school official, be aware of the signs: Is a child or teenager becoming withdrawn? Are their grades suffering? Do they get sick more often? Do they create ways to avoid school? Do they come home with injuries? Have you noticed an increase in aggressive behavior? Any change can be indicative of a problem and should never be ignored.

Advise your kids that there is a difference between tattling and "telling." It is not tattling or snitching if your child informs an adult when they see somebody being hurt or teased. Informing an adult of such activity is a way of standing up for a victim and is brave and honorable. Sometimes kids are bullied because they are shy. If your child is popular and confident, teach him or her to befriend new or shy students so that they can help that person develop confidence. Everyone needs help getting started out, and sometimes

friendship or a kind word can make a huge difference. Lastly, make sure your kids know that if they're fortunate enough to have nice clothes or a nice house that it is not OK to make fun of someone who is less fortunate. Teach your kids that money is not what defines a person and to never use that a reason to tease others.

When we look at the multitude and magnitude of tragic events that have occurred around our world, one must wonder if the perpetrators were once bullied and made to feel hurt or alone. Did anger and resentment build up which later evolved into acts of evil? One never really knows how badly someone may be scarred as a result of being bullied. If anyone reading this would like more information on this topic, or would like to discuss any specific situations please contact us at the Oneonta Police Department so we can help. In the meantime, we hope for a safe, productive, and bully-free school year for everyone.

***"It is the mission of the Oneonta Police Department to provide professional services with integrity and dedication, to preserve life, to enforce the law, and to work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Oneonta."***

