

September 15, 2023

Bullied – What Should I Do?

As an ER physician I see people every day who are being bullied. The obvious cases are those of physical abuse – the swollen faces, blackened eyes, broken bones, cigarette burns, etc. The more common but less apparent patients can present with chronic headaches, stomach issues, peptic ulcers, anxiety, depression, or suicide attempts. Given enough time and abuse, bullying can destroy a person's self-respect. How then can a victim overcome it?

There is no single strategy. Each situation is unique, and only you can decide what is best for you. But I will say there is one strategy that is never recommended – tolerating any bullying long term. Let's consider your options.

Avoidance.

Get them out of your life as completely as possible. No, don't kill anyone. Instead, move away, change jobs, change phone numbers, change your name, home school, get a restraining order, or if necessary, go into hiding.

However, there are two problems with the avoidance strategy: it disrupts your life, and it can make you feel defeated – you lost and they won. But some battles aren't worth fighting. The battle itself – even if you win – can be too costly or even dangerous, especially if you're facing a psychopath. The most important thing is to never beat yourself up if you choose avoidance. Any military commander knows that it is smart to avoid a battle if you have little or no chance of winning.

One-on-one fight

Go after the bully. Fight back with a vengeance and double down on every remark, insult, shove, slap, or punch. Teach them a lesson in manners with the old slogan, "Don't Tread on Me," and convince them to find easier prey. It might work – after all, bullies are cowards at their core. But a one-on-one fight is fraught with pitfalls. Beware of falling into a well-designed trap to get you fired or arrested or sued or kicked out of school (Wendall's experience). Even worse, you could physically injure or kill the bully and then be arrested or sued. Or finally, *you* could be injured or killed. Is a bully really worth that cost to you? Maybe not.

Build an army.

I've saved the best for last. This is the "civilized" way to deal with a bully. Civilized society expects us to obey the law, follow rules of conduct, and basically respect the rights and freedoms of our fellow citizens. Bullies violate the rights, freedoms, and self-respect of their victims. The key is to use their words and actions to build a case, and then let society (the authorities) handle them. The authorities may be your boss, the school superintendent, the police, the DA, or ultimately a jury of our peers in court.

“Make your case.” Document everything. Record the bully with your phone. Video them on your phone. Save all calls, texts, messages, tweets (or X’s) etc. Keep a detailed journal on paper or on your phone of specific bullying crimes. Remember the crimes in the chapter, Don’t Peck on Me:

Assault – verbal threats or threatening someone with a weapon.

Battery – physically touching you or striking you or injuring you with a weapon

Extortion – threatening harm unless you give money, property or things, or threatening harm unless you something for them or you stop doing something you want to do.

Harassment – tormenting or terrorizing you

Defamation – writing, posting, publishing (libel), or saying derogatory things (slander) about you as if it were fact and not just their opinion.

Next, recruit your army. Talk to everyone who will listen and ask them for help. Show your documentation to your family, friends, bosses, co-workers, teachers, attorneys, the police, and the media. If necessary, file a restraining order against the bully while demanding justice from the authority figures. Don’t be hesitant in this step. Throw a fit. Demand action. Expose the bully. There is no shame in seeking help. Your only alternative is to take the law into your own hands which is never advisable. Just remember that you may receive apathy from some authority figures. Just as Wendall learned, it’s too inconvenient for them to get involved, or they think the problem (you) will go away on your own.

Shame the bully or bullies. This could be the first step, and it can sometimes be effective at shutting the bully down if shaming is used aggressively from the very beginning with no subsequent let-up. However, shaming often leads to a one-on-one battle as described above. Instead, it’s best to document and recruit first and then have multiple people help you shame the bully simultaneously.

Stand up for others when you witness bullying. It will give you practice documenting and shaming the bully. Many people worry that the bully will then turn their sites on them. It’s possible, but it’s better than experiencing that cowardly feeling in your gut that comes from turning a blind eye to someone else’s abuse. Plus, the people you are defending can become a member of your army.

Be grateful for the bullying jerks. I know, it doesn’t seem to make sense, but it beats being afraid of them. Bullies give you the opportunity to build and exert your self-respect. They are the fire that can turn soft clay into a brick.

Next up: Compulsive Liars – What makes them do it?