

Bullying Behavior is not an Onkwehonwe Value
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We all had to deal with bullying, so what's the problem? The definition has broadened in recent years, and is commonly referred to as **Relational Aggression**. In other words, "*using relationships and friendships to hurt others.*" Kids aren't born bullies, research has proven this. It's a learned behavior; adults definitely do this too. So what are we doing about it?

A 2007 survey at Survival school revealed that 94% of students said bullying occurs at the school (39% said every day, 55% said on occasion). For who gets bullied, 10% said girls, 20% said boys, and 66% replied both. 46% said bullying was dealt with, 48% said it was ignored. 52% said they would talk to a friend, 35% to their mother, 15% to their father, 20% to their teacher, and 25% to nobody. What's alarming is half of our kids feel the problem is ignored, and a quarter are silent. According to membership numbers, there's approximately 1100 kids between ages 6-18. Many who may feel worthless, scared, and angry, but are saying nothing. Is your child being bullied?

We have the information, but what have we done with it? Our children answered expecting something, and the more we make light of the problem, the less our children will trust us. Kids understand action. When they trust us with information and we do nothing, we break that trust. When kids act out, we blame them.

We need to accept that **adults play a huge role in bullying behavior**. Adult behavior impacts how kids see the world, and can contribute to the development of aggressive behavior. Examples are name calling, seeing things from your point of view only, not taking responsibility for your role in a situation, making mountains out of molehills, etc. Our children learn these behaviors from us, so we need to pay a little more attention to what we do and say.

Disciplinary measures can have an impact. If we only punish, there's no true understanding of the consequences to the action. Disciplinary policies in our schools often reflect this punishment philosophy. For example, if a student fights, policy says they'll be suspended a minimum of two school days. It doesn't provide an opportunity to sit down with those affected, nor does it say what measures the school will take to ensure the behavior does not repeat.

Example, one student picks on another, they fight, and both are sent to the office. The administrator may talk to the students to figure out what happened, what started it, and other "facts". A suspension or an expulsion is the usual remedy. The problem is punishment makes a person resentful, not reflective, minimizing the chances of learning something, possibly making the bully a victim too. They aren't truly made accountable, never realizing the number of people their behavior affected, directly and indirectly. Punishing doesn't allow opportunity to repair harm, and repeats the cycle of power that breeds a bully mentality. "You made someone suffer, now you will suffer".

Research and evidence proves using **Restorative Approaches** with children is ideal. It involves meeting with everyone affected individually, and asking questions like, “How have you been affected? and, What needs to happen for things to be put right?” This alternative is being used in many schools across North America, and worldwide. It isn’t a “no blame” approach, but a full accountability response, which punishment can never be. We must develop strategies to prevent bullying, and respond quickly and consistently if it happens. We need to remember that punishment can be dangerous and ineffective, and can reinforce the very behaviors we want to stop.

It’s our responsibility to teach children the consequences of their behaviors. Oral tradition tells us the Peacemaker brought peace to Tadodaho by using songs, good words, and discussion to “comb the snakes from his hair”. This shows good dialogue can change the mind and ways of people and bring about Sken: nen. Had the Peacemaker been adversarial and punishing, Tadodaho might not have changed, he probably would have worsened. Hence, the Peacemaker is showing us the way to be as Okwehonwe, and how to deal with conflict.

In the Ahenten Karihwatekwen, we give thanks to the natural world and express how our relationship with the natural world is interdependent. It reminds us we need to care, support, and treat each other with kindness to survive. These traditional ways need to be held on to, otherwise, who are we? It’s our duty to teach our children that violence isn’t the answer, and there are better ways to resolve conflict. **That is the Mohawk way.** When peace was established amongst the Iroquois, all weapons of war were buried. These weapons can include gossip, hatred and violent actions. We have this knowledge through oral tradition, but it’s our responsibility to carry on and live it.

Sken:nen A’onsonton is hosting a visit by Ms. Cindy Wesley, mother of Dawn-Marie Wesley, who at 14 years old was a victim of bullying, and committed suicide. Through her efforts, for the first time in the Canadian Justice system, a bully was charged, and a Restorative Justice circle was used in the process. She’ll be telling her story to the youth of Kahnawake, with a separate session available for community members free of charge. Location and time to be announced, all are welcome to attend.