

“Confessions of a (Former) Bully” (Teacher Copy)

by Connie King

I’m a bully.

There, I said it.

Granted, I don’t *look* much like a bully. I’m much closer to scrawny than I am to burley. In fact, I’m actually one of the smaller kids in my sixth-grade class. But as I learned one afternoon at the mall, bullying isn’t always about beating up someone smaller than you. Sometimes all it takes is a few well-placed and spiteful words.

It happened a month ago when I was spending a leisurely Saturday afternoon playing Fashion Police at the mall with my friend, K. (All initials have been changed to protect the innocent.) We were enjoying a delicious cold drink in the food court while keeping up a running commentary on the fashion choices of all who walked past us. Suddenly, who should walk by but M., one of the kids at my school. She was wearing the same big, clunky, worn-out combat boots she wears almost every day at school. I just couldn’t help myself.

“Hey M.,” I called out. “Are you here to have your dad’s boots polished? Cuz the shoe repair shop is the other direction!”

At the time, K. and I found this terribly witty. We laughed and laughed and gave each other exploding fist bumps. Meanwhile, M. had stopped in her tracks, glaring at me with her hands on her hips. When she finally spoke, she said just one word: “Bully!” Then she turned and walked away as K. and I watched, dumbfounded.

“I don’t know what she’s being all snippy about,” I said at last. “I didn’t even mention that hideous sweater she was wearing.”

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, but I couldn’t get the incident with M. out of my head. Could she be right? Was I really a bully? I had never in my life hit anyone or threatened anyone or screamed and yelled at anyone. How could I be a bully?

So I did what I always do when I have an important question that I need answered: I asked the Internet. In a few minutes, I had my answer. Bullying doesn’t have to involve physical harm. You can bully people verbally by calling them names or teasing them. And there’s also social bullying, like gossiping about people or excluding them from activities unfairly.

So M. was right. I was a bully, both verbally and socially. So was my friend, K., and our little game of Fashion Police was nothing more than a bully’s game.

As it turns out, K. and I have a lot of company. Bullying is as much a part of school life as spelling tests and math quizzes. The National Education Association estimates that someone gets bullied every 7 minutes in American schools. In any given week, one-third of students report being bullied, and fear of bullying leads an estimated 160,000 of them to miss school each day. Usually, the victims of bullying are different from their classmates in some way. They may be smaller or weaker. They may be socially awkward or shy. Or they may just wear big, clunky, worn-out combat boots, like M.

Defining the Topic

Presenting the
Thesis (underlined)

Background
Information

Research and
Development

Yet, believe it or not, there are some people and researchers who believe there are benefits to bullying. For example, it has been said that if the person being bullied fights back, it is considered to be a benefit because confidence and belief in one's protective instinct is being strengthened. In other words, the person being bullied goes through adversity and thrives. Furthermore, it has been said that being bullied when younger, like in school, shows bullied students what the "real world" is like and prepares everyone for their future. They learn independence and self-defense. If kids don't stand up for themselves and learn autonomy from a young age when their personality is still being shaped, they will be crushed by the true cruelty of the world.

But the more I researched bullying, the more I realized that anyone who advocates bullying is actually practicing how to be a bully! I learned that bullying is not just "kids having harmless fun." In addition to physical injuries, bullying can lead to intense feelings of helplessness, anger, or worthlessness. Bullying can even affect kids' attendance and academic performance. Kids in elementary school through high school and beyond have hurt themselves, sometimes committing suicide to get away from the bullying. There is no "upside" to bullying. These feelings are not limited to the kids being bullied. The big surprise is that studies have shown that bullying negatively affects everyone involved, including the bully and the witnesses. Bullying hurts and can kill.

But here's the good news: Much of the bullying we see in our schools can be prevented by calling out the bullies, just like M. called me out that day in the mall. Of course, if the bullying is violent or threatens to become violent, you should immediately notify a teacher, parent, or other responsible adult and let him or her handle the situation. Otherwise, here are a few things you can do the next time you witness bullying:

- Say something, and the sooner the better. As you point out bullying behavior, remember to be calm and respectful. You can be a good example of how to deal with conflict without resorting to name-calling or threats. Sometimes just informing bullies that they are acting like bullies is enough. It worked with me.
- Encourage bystanders to stand up to the bully. One study found that although 90 percent of people dislike bullying, only 20 percent of them speak up during an incident. But despite people's fears, peer pressure can be a powerful deterrent to bullying. One study showed that when bystanders speak out, bullying stops within 10 seconds a staggering 57 percent of the time.
- Talk to the kid who is being bullied. Many bullied kids blame themselves for the bullying incident. Assure the victim that the only person responsible for bullying is the person doing the bullying.

Standing up to bullies can be intimidating. But a few calm, well-chosen words from a bystander—or even from the person being bullied—can turn a budding bully into a former bully. I should know. It worked with me.

Opposing View

Debating
Opposing View

Wrap-Up and
Conclusion