

# Mental Floss

Volume 2

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## DEALING WITH CONFLICT

By Dr. Gary Calhoun

CONFLICT IS A NATURAL OCCURRENCE WHEN PEOPLE ATTEMPT TO LIVE OR WORK TOGETHER. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY OF US ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH CONFLICT AND TAKE THE PATH OF AVOIDANCE. ONE SURE WAY TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE IS TO AVOID CONFLICT. JUST LIKE THE DUST BUNNIES UNDER THE BED, THE MORE WE AVOID THEM THE BIGGER THEY BECOME.

WE ARE GOING TO LEARN SOME EASY WAYS TO OVERCOME THE FEAR OF CONFLICT AND INSTEAD OF AVOIDING, EMBRACE CONFLICT. FIRST LET'S GO OVER SOME OF THE BASICS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH CONFLICT.

COOLING OFF AND ALLOWING YOURSELF TIME TO REFOCUS IS ALWAYS A GOOD START. IN ORDER TO RESOLVE A CONFLICT WE MUST BE THINKING CLEARLY AND HAVE OUR EMOTIONS IN CHECK. THIS IS A REASON WHY THE TRIED AND TRUE METHOD OF COUNTING TO 10 BEFORE SAYING ANYTHING OUT OF ANGER IS SO EFFECTIVE.

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## School is back in Session and So Are School Yard Bullies

What are parents and children to do with school bullies?

By Dr. Susan Calhoun

A 1998 STUDY BY THE NATIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY CENTER REPORTED 525,000 ACTS OF BULLYING EACH MONTH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN OUR COUNTRY. ALMOST 200,000 STUDENTS MISS SCHOOL EACH DAY IN THE U.S. IN AN ATTEMPT TO AVOID BULLIES.

WITH SCHOOL BACK IN SESSION STUDENTS AND PARENTS ALIKE WILL HAVE THE UNPLEASANT TASK OF DEALING WITH SCHOOL BULLIES. ONE OF THE GREATEST MYTHS REGARDING BULLIES IS THAT THEY ARE A HARMLESS PART OF GROWING UP. THE FACT IS THAT HIGH SCHOOL BULLIES TYPICALLY BECOME CRIMINALS. AT LEAST 60% WILL HAVE CRIMINAL RECORDS BY THE AGE OF 24 AND 40% WILL HAVE AT LEAST 3 CONVICTIONS.

BULLYING CAN OCCUR AT ANY AGE, BUT TYPICALLY ESCALATES AS CHILDREN REACH MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE. SO, WHO ARE THESE BULLIES? MANY BULLIES WILL HAVE LOW SELF-ESTEEM, BUT THIS IS CERTAINLY NOT TRUE OF ALL BULLIES. MANY BULLIES THAT TORMENT OTHER CHILDREN ARE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE THEMSELVES. IN MANY CASES THE BULLY AT SCHOOL IS A VICTIM AT HOME. BULLIES CAN BE EITHER BOYS OR GIRLS AND COME FROM FAMILIES REPRESENTING ALL ECONOMIC GROUPS.

IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS THE VICTIM OF A BULLY WHAT KIND OF ADVICE CAN YOU OFFER? HERE ARE SOME OF THE RECOMMENDED RESPONSES A CHILD CAN MAKE WHEN BULLIED...

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## DEALING WITH CONFLICT, CONT'D.

ONCE YOU HAVE A CLEAR HEAD AND YOUR EMOTIONS IN CHECK IT IS TIME TO DEFINE THE PROBLEM. USUALLY MORE THAN ONE PERSON IS INVOLVED SO YOU HAVE TO REACH AN AGREEMENT ON THE DISAGREEMENT. IF MORE THAN ONE PERSON IS INVOLVED YOU CAN BE GUARANTEED THERE WILL BE MORE THAN ONE VIEW OF THE PROBLEM.

NOW IS THE TIME TO NEGOTIATE. WITH MOST CONFLICTS THERE ARE 3 SIDES TO CONSIDER, YOUR VIEW, THEIR VIEW, AND THE MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN THE TWO.

WHEN NEGOTIATING CONFLICT REMEMBER TO KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE ISSUES AND NOT ON PERSONALITEIS. IT IS BEST TO GO HARD ON THE PROBLEM AND EASY ON THE PERSON.

FORGIVENESS SKILLS ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL IF YOU ARE TO MOVE PAST CONFLICTS. IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SAID THAT FORGIVENESS LOOKS FORWARD AND VENGEANCE LOOKS BACKWARD!

### **Rules for Fair Fighting**

FIRST BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR GOAL. IS YOUR GOAL TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT OR COME OUT ON TOP?

AVOID LETTING RESENTMENTS BUILD BY ADDRESSING CONFLICTS WHEN THEY SURFACE.

COMPROMISE IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL CONFLICT RESOLUTION. YOU HAVE TO BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF AND KNOW IF YOU ARE TRULY SUPPORTING AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE OF JUST BEING STUBBORN.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND EFFECTIVELY.

BE SURE WHAT EACH OTHER IS SAYING/HEARING IS BEING HEARD/SAID. THE EASIEST WAY TO DO THIS IS TO REPEAT BACK TO THE OTHER PERSON WHAT YOU HEARD THEM SAY.

DISCUSS ONLY ONE POINT AT A TIME.

DO NOT PERSONALIZE THE FIGHT.

KEEP ON THE TOPIC YOU WANT TO FIGHT ABOUT.

TRY TO KEEP A SENSE OF HUMOR WHEN POSSIBLE.

NEVER MINIMIZE THE OTHER PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW.

DO NOT HESITATE TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHEN YOU ARE WRONG.

REMEMBER OUR RULE ABOUT FORGIVENESS.

### **Communication Tips For Conflict Resolution...**

- MAKE "I WANT" STATEMENTS. THIS HELPS YOU TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR DESIRES AND AVOIDS SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS.
  - MAKE "I FEEL" STATEMENTS. THIS HELPS YOU TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN FEELINGS.
  - MAKE "I LIKE/DON'T LIKE" STATEMETNS TO TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.
  - ASK FOR FEEDBACK AND GIVE FEEDBACK.
  - DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK FOR MORE INFORMATION.
  - DO NOT AGREE JUST TO END THE CONVERSATION.
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**“Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not easy.” - Aristotle**

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### **AM I STUBBORN OR PERSISTENT?**

OFTEN TIMES PEOPLE WILL EXPRESS PRIDE IN THEIR ABILITY TO BE STUBBORN. DURING THESE TIMES I OFTEN USE THE FOLLOWING EXPLANATION TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN A STUBBORN PERSON AND A PERSISTENT PERSON.

TWO PEOPLE COME UPON A BRICK WALL. ONE OF THEM IS STUBBORN AND THE OTHER ONE IS PERSISTENT.

THE STUBBORN PERSON BANGS THEIR HEAD AGAINST THE WALL UNTIL IT CRUMBLES.

THE PERSISTENT PERSON EXAMINES THE WALL AND DISCOVERS AN OPENING DOWN THE WAY. THEY MAKE THEIR WAY TO THE OPENING AND GO THROUGH THE BRICK WALL.

NOW BOTH PEOPLE ARE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL, BUT WHICH ONE WOULD YOU RATHER BE?

## **SERVICES PROVIDED BY DRs. GARY AND SUSAN CALHOUN:**

### **OFFICE SESSIONS:**

Office sessions are available by appointment only.

Individual, Couples, Adults, & Adolescents

Team Training for Organizations – Conflict Resolution & Communication Training

### **TELEPHONE SESSIONS:**

We offer phone sessions for a select group of clients.

Telephone sessions are scheduled just like a regular office session. Busy moms, as well as professionals find telephone sessions fit their busy lifestyles.

### **NEED A SPEAKER:**

Drs. Gary and Susan are available as speakers on a number of popular topics.

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### **IN THE NEWS...**

DR. GARY WILL BE THE GUEST SPEAKER AT THE SEPTEMBER MEETING OF THE INDEPENDENT REALTORS ASSOCIATION OF PINELLAS COUNTY. HE WILL BE SPEAKING ON HOW TO AVOID BEING THE VICTIM OF AN ASSAULT.

DRS. GARY AND SUSAN CALHOUN WERE INVITED SPEAKERS AT THE JULY 2004 FLORIDA BANDSTER BASH FOR LAP BAND WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY PATIENTS.

DR. GARY PRESENTED A SEMINAR ON ASSAULT PREVENTION & SELF DEFENSE FOR WOMEN AT BODY CONCEPTS IN LARGO.

SCHOOL YARD BULLIES, CONT'D.

- TELL A TEACHER, RESOURCE OFFICER, OR SCHOOL COUNSELOR.
- TELL THE BULLY THAT YOU DO NOT LIKE WHAT HE OR SHE IS DOING. IN SOME CASES A BULLY DOES NOT REALIZE THAT HE/SHE IS BEING A BULLY.
- DON'T CRY – BULLIES ARE MOST LIKELY TO PICK ON A CHILD THEY THINK IS AFRAID.
- TRY NOT TO BE ALONE WHEN AROUND A BULLY, INSTEAD HANG OUT WITH FRIENDS.
- IGNORE, WALK AWAY AND GET HELP FROM AN ADULT IN AUTHORITY. BULLIES RELY ON THEIR VICTIMS NOT REPORTING THEM TO AUTHORITIES.

### **AS A PARENT WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE VICTIM OF A BULLY?**

- REPORT THE PROBLEM TO YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, AND RESOURCE OFFICER.
- PARENTS SHOULD AVOID DIRECTLY CONFRONTING THE BULLY. THIS STRATEGY GENERALLY BACKFIRES AND MAKES THE SITUATION WORSE FOR YOUR CHILD.
- PARENTS DO NOT GENERALLY HAVE MUCH SUCCESS DEALING DIRECTLY WITH THE BULLY'S PARENTS. KEEP IN MIND THAT THESE PARENTS ARE USUALLY NOT VERY INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILD'S LIFE, ARE USED TO DEALING WITH CONFLICT THROUGH AGGRESSION, AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND TO SOMEONE OF AUTHORITY AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL.
- ROLE PLAY WITH YOUR CHILD PRETENDING TO BE THE BULLY SO YOUR CHILD CAN PRACTICE WHAT TO SAY AND DO IN THE SITUATION.
- REVIEW THE RECOMMENDED RESPONSES FROM PAGE 1 OF THIS NEWSLETTER WITH YOUR CHILD.

IN SUMMARY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THE SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM OF BULLYING IN OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM. KEEP IN MIND THAT NO SCHOOL IS FREE OF BULLIES AND THAT BULLIES REPRESENT EVERY SOCIAL-ECONOMIC GROUP IN OUR SOCIETY. WITH THE RECENT VIOLENCE OCCURRING IN OUR SCHOOLS CHILDREN ARE MORE FRIGHTENED THAN EVER AND MAY NO LONGER VIEW SCHOOL AS A SAFE HAVEN.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

### **SIGNS YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED**

- YOUR CHILD MAY BE ON THE VERGE OF TEARS OR START TO CRY WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR DAY.
- HE/SHE STARTS TO ACT NERVOUS AND JUMPY WHEN YOU DROP THEM OFF AT SCHOOL.
- YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER SEEMS TO BE LOSING THINGS EVERYDAY AT SCHOOL – A NEW JACKET, BOOK BAG, VIDEO GAME, LUNCH MONEY, ETC.
- YOUR CHILD STARTS TO COME HOME WITH FRESH BRUISES, SCRAPES, AND DIRTY OR DISHEVELED CLOTHS.
- YOUR CHILD SUDDENLY WANTS TO CHANGE SCHOOLS FOR NO APPARENT REASON.
- YOUR CHILD STARTS TO BECOME VERY ANXIOUS AT BEDTIME OR WHEN YOU DISCUSS SCHOOL STARTING BACK AT THE END OF A WEEKEND OR SCHOOL VACATION DAY.

### **WHAT CAN THE PARENTS OF BULLIES DO?**

- ARRANGE A CONFERENCE WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST OR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS AND OFFER YOUR SUPPORT.
- TELL YOUR CHILD IN VERY CLEAR TERMS THAT AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IS UNACCEPTABLE AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.
- EXAMINE YOUR METHODS OF DISCIPLINE AT HOME.
- ROLE PLAY WITH YOUR CHILD MORE ACCEPTABLE WAYS TO DEAL WITH PEERS THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE AGGRESSIVE/BULLYING BEHAVIOR.
- MORE CLOSELY MONITOR YOUR CHILD'S MOVIE, TELEVISION, AND VIDEO GAME WATCHING FOR OVERLY AGGRESSIVE AND VIOLENT CONTENT.
- WORK TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM, AND SOCIAL SKILLS.