

The MIND Reader

Who Are You and What Have You Done With My Child?

By: Lindsay Simoneo

There are busy seasons in any job. Accountants have their tax season until April 15th. Retailers have their busy Holiday season at the end of the year. Mental Health is no different with the busy season for a Child and Adolescent counselor being the month of October.

Why such a spike? Simple. Kids have returned to school. What doesn't seem like such a life-changing event to mere adults, returning to school can serve as a major transition for many children. A transition can be defined as the process of or period of changing from one state or condition to the other. A transition can be as small as changing activities or rooms or as significant as moving or changing who the child is living with.

Transitions are hard on our kiddos, as they are still in the mist of cognitive and emotional development. With this state of development comes a lack of coping skills, and with a lack of coping skills comes an increase in negative behaviors, outbursts and trouble at school. More troubles at school equals more children and adolescents who find themselves at Mind Spa looking for help.

Here is a list of events that could increase the chances of your child having a difficult transition into the start of the school year:

- ◆ New Sleep Schedule
- ◆ New School
- ◆ Returning to primary home, after spending the summer with the other parent
- ◆ Kindergarten**
- ◆ Returning to a School Schedule and participating in a sport at the same time

Even though all these situations increase change and stress for your child, there are things that a parent can do to facilitate a smoother transition.

1. **If the sleep routine is going to change once school is back in session, enforce a new sleep routine at least 3 nights before.** Ideally, enforcing the new sleep routine a week before the first day would be best, but realistically may be hard to implement with it being the "last week of freedom." Encouraging your child to have at least 3 nights of their new sleep routine before the start of school will promote less physical change and stress on their body when the school year starts. (Continued on pg. 3)

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Tips For Back to School Shopping!

1. Make a list and get your child involved!
2. Separate the wants from needs.
3. Take inventory of last year's supplies and try to reuse.
4. Buy the basics in bulk
5. Figure out when quality supplies beats discounted/off brand supplies.

Children often have very mixed feelings about returning to school- everything from excitement about meeting their new teachers and seeing their friends to worrying about going to a new school, fitting in, or being bullied. Recent statistics published by the US Department of Education indicate that while the rates of bullying have dropped since 2005, as of 2013, “the reported prevalence of bullying among students ages 12 to 18” is still around “22 percent,” which is still more than one out of five students that are bullied on a daily basis (1). Bullying is a serious problem, and with the prevalence of electronics, it can happen anywhere, and at any time. So, it is important for parents to be aware of the risk factors, the warning signs, and the methods of correction. Now, this does not mean that only children with these particular problems will be bullied, just that these are common risk factors to be aware of and to watch for.

The **risk factors for being bullied** as reported by the US Department of Health and Human Services include:

- Have a disability.
- Are perceived as different from their peers, such as being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing.
- Are new to a school.
- Are unable to afford what kids consider “cool.”
- Are perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves.
- Are depressed, anxious, or have low self-esteem,
- Are less popular than others and having few friends.
- Are not getting along well with others, and are seen as annoying or provoking, or antagonizing others for attention (2).

I also believe it is important for parents to recognize **signs if their child is the bully**. Common signs, again from the US Department of Health and Human Services, include:

- Some are well-connected to their peers, have social power, are overly concerned about their popularity, and like to dominate or be in charge of others.
- Others are more isolated from their peers and may be depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers, or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others.
- They are aggressive or easily frustrated.
- They have less parental involvement or are having issues at home.
- They think badly of others.
- They have difficulty following rules.
- They view violence in a positive way.
- They have friends who bully others (2).

Next, the following are **warning signs that a child is being bullied**:

- Unexplainable injuries.
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry.
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches.
- Feeling sick or faking illness.
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating.
- Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares.
- Declining grades.
- Loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school.
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations.
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem, and self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide (2). (Continued on page 6)

Who Are You and What Have You Done With My Child? (Continued)

2. **If the teacher is using a behavior program or chart in the classroom, use it at home.** Many primary grades use some kind of behavior program or chart in their classrooms and are willing to share that knowledge with interested parents. By implementing the same behavior chart at home, you provide consistency for your child. When the rules and expectations are the same at home as they are in school, it is far easier to adapt.
3. **Begin to enforce a school-like routine at home as much as you can two weeks before the school year.** Make sure all your big summer trips are done before this time. If kiddos are away for the summer, bring them home. Any summer sports should be wrapped up by this time. This alerts the child into recognizing that summer is ending. The next two weeks can be focused on being home, eating at schedule times, completing tasks at scheduled times, chores in the evening and bed. With the kids having this transition time to get used to their house and the summer winding down, it will make transitioning into classroom structure so much easier.

Even by implementing all of these activities, a child could still have difficulty adjusting back into school, with calls to home still being made. Rest assured that if problems arise, it is normal for your child to react to the stress of starting school. The increased agitation and outbursts are normal. The tearfulness is normal. As you help your kiddo transition, provide empathy for them when it gets too rough. This is fundamentally one of the best things you can do for them.

*A perfect example of how a child copes in the mist of transition can be found in the movie [Inside Out](#), which I wrote an article on it this past month's newsletter. If you have not seen the movie and are not reading our monthly newsletter, you should stop everything you are doing and fix both of those things right now.

**Kindergarten can be more of a major transition than it can be for 1st or 2nd graders. This is due to it being their first exposure to the educational system, new adults, and exposure to children much older than themselves. It is not uncommon for new kindergarteners to experience an increase in outbursts, tearfulness, aggression, anxiety, clinginess, and/or refusal to sleep in their bed. This increase in behavioral issues should fade after 6-8 weeks into the school year. If after this time your kindergartener is still experiencing an increase in these behaviors, we encourage you to call our office for an appointment.

Stand Strong: You Can Overcome Bullying

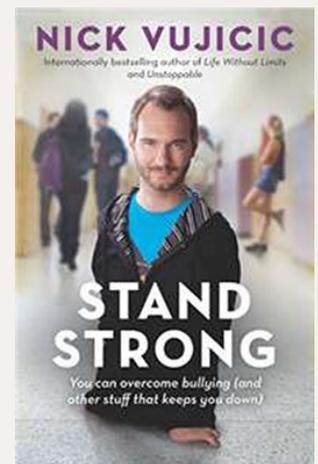
Book Review By: Patricia Elliott

An effort to help put an end to the global bullying epidemic is found in Nick Vujicic's book *Stand Strong: You Can Overcome Bullying*. Nick is an international and New York Times best-selling author, motivational speaker, evangelist, and leader of the nonprofit organization Life Without Limbs. He has been a bully's target and knows first-hand what it feels like to be picked on and pushed around. Born without arms, legs, and no defense, Nick has experienced bullying of all kinds and has written strategies for developing a "bully defense system." By building your strength from the inside out, Nick teaches how to turn being bullied into opportunities, establish strong values that no bully can tear down, develop a spiritual foundation to stay strong, monitor your emotions and control your response to them and create a safety zone within yourself. When a bully picks on you, it really isn't about you or any flaws you may have; it's really about the bully's own issues. Figuring out who you are so no bully can tell you differently is the key to becoming a bully's nightmare!

After an attempt to drown himself in the bathtub at age ten, Nick decided suicide was not an option. Why give anyone that power to take your joy and your will to live from you? Nick's message is if a man with no arms or legs can overcome challenges like bullying, any-

one can. His advice is to build your strengths from the inside out. When a bully picks on your weaknesses, it won't matter. Believing and knowing you were created in a unique fashion with talents, brainpower, and other gifts that make you special and beautiful will empower you to feel stronger than you ever have felt before. If you believe in your own value, no bully can take that away from you. Having an attitude of self-acceptance and self-love is a first step in building your antibully 1.0 operating system.

Dealing with bullies requires using patience with perspective. Some bullies are just angry and cruel people. But, Nick believes showing kindness is always worth a try and actually a good way to live in general. By building a bully defense system (including defining yourself), taking responsibility for your own happiness, and having a plan for your life guided by unshakable values will help you handle bullies of all kinds.



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The New Bullying

By: Robin Gorsuch

Seeing your child being bullied is one of the hardest things a parent or caregiver can experience. When the bullying takes place on an electronic device (cell phone, computer, tablet) it can leave a parent feelings especially helpless and unsure about what do to next. Bullying that takes place through electronic media is called “cyberbullying.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines it as “electronic aggression.” Between 10 and 35 percent of children and teens report being the victim of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can take many forms, with the most common being mean or insulting comments, rumors, embarrassing photos or videos, or fake profiles sent by e-mail, text messages, or posed on social media sites.

Several things are unique to cyberbullying that make it especially distressing. First, messages and images can be posted anonymously so the victim is often not sure who the bully is. Second, the victim never knows who has seen the messages and/or photos. Third, the victim has no way to know when the next cyberbullying episode will take place. Fourth, the victim is at risk of being cyberbullied at any time, day or night, even when they are alone. Finally, cyberbullying messages and/or photos may follow the victim for years because it is very difficult to get them out of cyberspace once they are posted.

The effects of cyberbullying are similar to in-person bullying. Young people who are cyberbullied are more likely to use alcohol and drugs, have health problems, skip school (or be reluctant to attend school), and have lower self-esteem. Also, children and teens who are the victim of in-person bullying are more likely to be experiencing cyberbullying as well. The CDC has come up with the following tips for parents on how to protect children and teens from the risks of technology, including cyberbullying.

1. Talk to your child. Most parents regularly ask their child/teen where they are going, who they will be with, and what they will be doing when they go out with friends. Parent should ask their child these same questions when they are on electronic devices. Keep in mind that your child may not want to tell you about problems they are having on electronic devices if they are afraid you will take away their devices. For this reason, it is important to work with your child to come up with solutions that will address the problem without punishing your child. Teach them to be smart about their use of technology. Find out what they already

know and what they think about the potential dangers. Try to understand without judging. Let them know what your specific concerns are and why you have those concerns.

2. Develop rules. Work together as a family to come up with family rules about what is okay when it comes to using electronic media. Just like you have a plan in case there is a fire, have a plan for what your child/teen should do if they or a friend become the target of cyberbullying. Work to come up with rules that enable your child to get the most benefit from technology while decreasing risks.

3. Explore the internet. Many children enjoy being the “expert” and welcome an opportunity to spend time with their parent or caregiver sharing what they know. Approach this activity from a standpoint of curiosity rather than evaluation. Your child will be more open to sharing things if you are able to set aside any negative responses you may have. Try to focus on your feelings of concern about how your child’s use of technology may negatively impact him or her now or in the future.

4. Connect with your child’s school. The most effective way to combat all forms of bullying is to change community attitudes towards bullying. One way to do this is to work with your child’s school to learn how you can help bring about these changes.

What should you do if you find out your child is the victim of cyberbullying? The Stop Bullying Now website recommends the following:

- Don’t respond to and don’t forward cyberbullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails, and text messages. Use this evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- Block the person who is cyberbullying. Visit social media safety centers to learn how to block users and change settings to control who can contact you.
- Report cyberbullying to online service providers. Cyberbullying often violates the Terms of Service established by social media sites and internet service providers. Review their Terms and Conditions or Rights and Responsibilities sections. (Continued on page 6)

Back to School and Bullying (continued)

Also, **warning signs that your child may be a bully** include:

- They often get into physical or verbal fights.
- They have friends who bully others.
- They are increasingly aggressive.
- They get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently.
- They have unexplained extra money or new belongings.
- They blame others for their problems.
- They don't accept responsibility for their actions.
- They are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity (2).

What to do if you find out your child is being bullied. According to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, parents should:

- Never tell your child to ignore the bullying.
- Don't blame your child for the bullying.
- Don't assume your child did something to provoke the bullying.
- Allow your child to talk about his or her bullying experiences.
- Write down what is shared.
- Empathize with your child.
- Tell him or her that bullying is wrong, that it is not his or her fault, and that you are glad he or she had the courage to tell you about it.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don't criticize him or her.
- It is often very difficult for children to know how best to respond.
- Do not encourage physical retaliation.
- Check your emotions. A parent's protective instincts stir strong emotions. (Continued on page 7)

The New Bullying (Continued)

- Report cyberbullying to law enforcement if it involves any of the following activities because they are against the law. Some states consider other forms of cyberbullying to be criminal activity. Consult your [state's laws](#) and local law enforcement for additional information.
 - Child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos
 - Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
 - Stalking and hate crimes
- Report cyberbullying to schools. Cyberbullying can create a disruptive environment at school and is often related to in-person bullying. Some state laws cover off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment. The school can use the information to help them develop plans to prevent and respond to all types of bullying.

For additional information about Wyoming Anti-Bullying Laws and Policies, visit the Stop Bullying Now website and click on the Policies and Laws tab at the top of the page.

The information in this article is based on information from the following websites. Please visit any of these sites to obtain additional information and resources on the topic of bullying and cyberbullying.

<http://www.stopbullying.gov>

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/ea-tipsheet.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/index.html>

<http://cyberbullying.us/>

Back to School and Bullying (Continued)

- Although it is difficult, step back and consider the next steps carefully.
- Contact a teacher, school counselor, or principal at your school immediately and share your concerns about the bullying that your child has experienced.
- Work closely with school personnel to help solve the problem.
- Encourage your child to develop interests and hobbies that will help build resiliency in difficult situations like bullying.
- Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students in his or her class, or help your child meet new friends outside of school.
- Teach your child safety strategies, such as how to seek help from an adult.
- Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment.
- If you or your child need additional help, seek help from a school counselor and/or mental health professional. (3).

Finally, **what to do if your child is the bully**. There is no easy solution, but according to the Pacer Center, parents should:

- Talk with your child.
- Explore reasons for the behavior.
- Confirm that your child's behavior is bullying and not the result of a disability.
- Develop an action plan and teach them empathy, respect, and compassion.
- Make your expectations clear and let your child know that bullying is not okay under any circumstances and that you will not tolerate it.
- Provide clear and consistent consequences for bullying.
- Teach them by example, and role play with them to help your child practice different ways of handling bullying situations.
- Provide positive feedback when your child handles conflict well, shows compassion for others, or finds a positive way to deal with feelings, provide praise and recognition.
- Be realistic; it takes time to change behavior and recognize that there may be setbacks.
- Talk with school personnel; reach out to those who work with your child at school and share information about your concerns.
- Finally, seek help from your community; your child's doctor, faith-based professionals, coaches, or a psychologist can help you and your child learn how to understand and deal with bullying behavior (4).

In summary, while school should be a safe place of learning for your child, it can often be a source of stress and loathing, where your child wakes up every day dreading what form of ridicule or even torture they will endure that day. Please do not wait for the situation to escalate. Be involved and know what is going on in your child's life. That way, when the warning signs appear, you can stop the situation from becoming worse and impacting your child's, or another child's life, maybe irreparably.



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