THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 4 – Episode 10

What To Do If Your Child Is Being Bullied

What to do if your child is being bullied. This episode is to help you as parents to really manage if your child or teen is being bullied. This usually isn't an indication of bullying, like school, but it might not be. So Welcome, welcome everybody. I'm Ashley from The Resilient Kid and for me, I feel like this is a really important and sensitive topic.

So, let's talk about how to help your child or teen if they're being bullied, whether it's school, online, social settings. Today, this is going to be a series of episodes. So today I'm going to talk about school specific because I want to give you very practical information on how to manage that [00:01:00] and really be able to support your child and navigate this because it is really, really difficult.

Okay. So the first thing that I want us to talk about is how to recognize the signs of being bullied. So when we. Think our children might be bullied. It's, it's really interesting because a lot of parents think, oh, but I'd know, but actually, you know, it's not easy for kids to come out and say, you think about if you was at work or you was in a situation and one of your friends or one of your colleagues was bullying you would you come out and tell others?

Like that's a really hard situation, isn't it? You're embarrassed, why can't I stick up for myself, why is this happening to me? So there's lots of those feelings going on for the kids. So let's have a look at how we can really recognise [00:02:00] That there might be some signs there before, you know, if they're, particularly if they're not able to tell you.

So look at changes in behavior. So it might be they become withdrawn, they become anxious talk about worrying about things, they look depressed they might start to isolate themselves. Now, if you've got a teen who spends quite a bit of time in their bedroom, then you might think, well, how would I know the difference?

But actually look, and again, very similar to if they're on the phone, because, you know, they're all on the phones, but have a look, how much time are they spending on the phone? And I cannot say to you enough about if your child is under 16, how important it is that you check their phone. And I say this because I have.

I have that unwritten rule with my kids that we always, you know, it's our phone until they get to an age where they're paying the bill probably won't be to be [00:03:00] fair, but you know, that's kind of the idea around it. And so I regularly check their phone. I think it's really important. And there's two reasons for this.

One to keep my child safe, you know, and two. to make sure that other people are safe, their friends. And we had an incident of, a little while ago, of group chat and somebody was calling somebody else gay and it was, it was horrible, it was horrific and my child was like, I didn't know how to tell you, I'm not sure how to deal with this, you know, but if I, you know, checked that phone, he would have had to deal with that on his own, and also, you know, that other child, in fact, there is, there is two other children, my child and another child that was involved, and actually, I could manage it because I knew about it. But

[00:04:00] My child, you know, has got all those feelings of he wants to stick up for his friend and he did in the chat, but where does he take it from there? Because in this chat, supposedly all his friends. And so I think it's really important that we check our phones to keep our kids safe. You know, many of us didn't grow up with social media.

Many of us didn't grow up with a mobile phone. We know what it's like to have that downtime. They don't, they just don't. So it's important as parents that we take that responsibility and we keep checking in to make sure they're safe. And you know, you will get backlash off this if it's something that you haven't already agreed to.

But it is about keeping them safe and so I can't reiterate that enough. Please do check your phone. So we've looked at changes in behavior like being withdrawn, being anxious, isolating themselves. Look at, look for injuries and this is, this is heartbreaking, but [00:05:00] look to see if they've got any unexplained bruising, if their belongings are damaged, anything like that.

How are they physically? Are they getting stomach ache? Are they getting You know, are they complaining about being sick headaches, things like that. Now we

know, and if you listen to the podcast, you'll, I talk about this a lot, that if our child is worried or anxious, there is you know, they go into that fight and fight and there is like a whole bunch of Super fuel chemicals that are released in our body that when we go into fight and fight, they help us literally do that to run, to, to fight, to stand up for ourselves, things like that.

If those chemicals don't go anywhere, they sit, particularly for kids, they sit in their stomach and there's research to be shown that it causes physical pain. So anxiety that that worry, that starts in our head. Is then turned into [00:06:00] anxiety, which is a physical response. So anxiety is a physical response in our body.

Those chemicals can cause physical pain in, in our children, in our teen's stomachs. So when they say they've got tummy ache, do not pass it off. They will be physically hurting. Of course we can walk them through that, but just so you know that if there is chat around more tummy ache. More stomach ache That's what it is. What about school?

Are they school refusing? Is their, is their grades getting lower? Are they losing interest? Are they talking about not wanting to go? Things like that. Another one is avoiding social situations. Now that could be Not wanting to go to the local shop on their own. It could be they want to stop going to extracurricular activities.

You know, could be after school clubs, they suddenly want to stop going. So any of these are kind of signs. So it's really [00:07:00] important That we approach with care and concern, you know, don't jump in there going, Ashley said that if you're isolating or you're on your phone or you're complaining to me that you're probably being bullied, don't jump in with that.

Although, you know, happily play the bad guy if you like. So, okay, so how do we approach this conversation when you suspect there could be a chance that your child is being bullied? And the way that we approach that is really crucial. So, the first thing I would say to you is create a safe, open environment where they feel comfortable talking.

Now, this is not sit down and face to face and have this conversation with everyone around. What I mean by safe is really think about when you're going to do it. Make [00:08:00] sure they have been watered and fed. So, after dinner. After snack, letting them just chill, but make sure they've, because if, as we know, if they

haven't eaten for a little while, their fight and flight sensors can trigger really easily.

So it's important that they're stable, that they're grounded before we open this very difficult conversation with them. My suggestion is you take them for a drive or you take them for a walk. And if you can do that, just the two of you, amazing. This is not to say that both parents can't get involved, but to have that initial conversation.

Others, you know, I, I often sometimes have a conversation with my sisters, with my sister and her son, but the initial conversation, just one of you, please, because don't be overwhelming. And actually it's very difficult to listen to two people. So that's kind of the next bit that I'm [00:09:00] going to come on to.

Listen. If you don't listen to anything else I say on this podcast, listen, listen, listen, pin your ears back. Do not interrupt. Let them express what's going on for them without interruption. Let them go kind of from A to Z before you start interrupting, before, before you start asking questions. All right.

At this point, when they're telling you stuff, just reassure them it's not their fault. They're okay. They're not alone. You've got them. You've got their back. Okay. Now, when they have told you what's going on, kind of make a mental note, don't start writing this down, but make a mental note of some of the things that they might be saying, like, you know who it is, when particular times of the day.

Now, once they've told you their story or what's happened, then what I want you to [00:10:00] do is I want you to ask open ended questions. But the first thing you ask about is how they're feeling. How they're feeling. Okay, don't jump in with, you know, what did he do? What she said? Blah, blah, blah. Really, you know, keep it calm all the way through.

I'm sure you'll be seething. You'll be hurting too. When our child is being bullied, everything in us is triggered. And that is usually because as a parent, we feel like we failed. We feel like we failed if our kid is being bullied because we haven't protected them. And so, your fight, flight, freeze, fawn, reaction will kick in.

It is up to you as an adult to keep that in check because you are not here for you right now, you're here for them. So, what I would say to you is, ask open ended questions. [00:11:00] Talk about how they're feeling, then talk about the details of

it. So, when does this happen? How many times has it happened? Really, you know, listen to them.

And that's going to help you with the next step, because the next step is taking action. Of course it is, because we're not going to sit on this, okay? And don't, don't promise at the beginning of the conversation that you're going to keep it to yourself, okay? And the reason I say this to you is because quite often they go, I'll tell you but don't tell anyone, I'll tell you but you can't go to school.

And you go, do you know what? It's my job to keep you safe, okay? And I often ask parents, what do you want for your child? [00:12:00] Because they'll say, oh, you know, it's this, it's that, blah, blah, blah. And I'll go, what do you want? Do you want them to be happy or do you want them to be safe? And when they say happy, my answer is, it's not my job to keep my kids happy.

It's their job to be happy. It's my job to keep them safe. And so this is, comes under that remix. It's us keeping them safe. That's why we can't promise anything. So don't promise at the beginning what you can't keep. Okay, because then there's a mistrust, isn't there? So talk to them about, it's really important that I keep you safe.

And so at the end of our conversation, I might have to do something, but right now I'm only interested in you. I'm interested in how you feel and what's going on for you. So as we move to the taking action, once you've got like a better understanding, then what I want you to do. Document everything. So, record of incidents, dates, [00:13:00] times, locations and the reason that I say that is because, is there a pattern to it?

So, for instance, I find that when there is bullying incidents, it's quite often at break or at lunch because there's less adults around there's more kids around, there's more distraction around and so You know, if you can see that pattern, that's a really good when you're going to go forward to ask for some action to be done, that you can give them that.

And also any witnesses. Now these witnesses might be friends. These witnesses might be friends of the bully. But it's really important that there are witnesses. Now, a lot of our secondary schools have CCTV, so they'll often be able to pull up recent stuff. If it is primary kids, then what we're looking at there is who else was

around at the time, because quite often what will happen in Instance like this is the school will ask [00:14:00] those witnesses.

So ask your child or teen who was around at the time. And you know what? That's not up to you because you don't want to involve the others. It's more about holding witness for your child and it's up to the school what they do with that. So document everything. The next thing, the next kind of step is to contact the school, okay, making sure the school are aware of it.

So lots of schools have policies in place to address bullying and other things. So those policies are there to ensure your child's safety. However, a lot of schools only play lip service to this. So what I would suggest is that you download the school bullying policy. It will be on the website. It is supposed to be there on the website.

If it isn't, ask, email into the office and ask for a copy because they will have [00:15:00] it. And it absolutely should be on the website. Check through what the procedure is for in their bullying policy. If it is primary, I suggest you go straight to, unless the policy tells you otherwise, go straight to the class teacher.

If you're not happy with the class teacher, then go to a deputy head. or head of pastoral role or go straight to the head. Do not be afraid to go higher. Absolutely do not be afraid to go higher. If it is a secondary school or a sixth form, often it's not worth going to the farm tutor. And this is the reason.

The farm tutor sees them 20 minutes in the morning. They don't really have a lot of say. They are there to take the register and deliver pastoral role. Lessons you know, things like that. It is just a base. It is not [00:16:00] really the place. If you have a good relationship, or your child has a good relationship, and it would be a key go to person, then yes, absolutely.

But what I would say is the makeup of a secondary school, they don't have a lot of sway. So I would go to the head of year straight away with a bullying issue. Because the chances are the other kid is not going to be in the same class anyway. So I would go straight for the head of year. If you do not get You know, I would email in, say there's been an incident of bullying and I would ask for a meeting immediately.

And I would do that no matter what the school or education place would take your details. If you do not get a, because it's very easy to email in and give all the

details, but actually. They then, you don't get the response that you want face to face. They will absolutely give you a response. Don't be afraid again to go higher.

So go to an assistant head [00:17:00] or a deputy head. And in both cases, if you are not satisfied with what's being done, then go to the Board of Governors. Without a doubt because there will be a every governor meeting has to report instances of racism, homophobic, bullying. So you, you know, there is already a governor that is going to oversee that kind of thing.

And it has to be reported quite often. Schools will try not to report it to the governors and they will say it was a friendship issue. So, just so you know how the hierarchy work. Now that's not them always trying to cover their backs, but in certain cases, it absolutely is. So, make sure that you take those steps.

Ask them what are they going to do about it. Right, and often they won't tell you, I mean, you'll know who the other child is, but they won't tell you often about [00:18:00] how they've handled that consequence or that punishment for that child. But one thing that I always say, and I do this a lot, is around reparation.

Okay, so how are you then going to get these two children to get on , because it’s alright when you're going back, you're going to get bullied, you're going to get isolated, you're going to get detention, there's a letter going home, I'm going to call your parents in, that's all very well and good. However, the bully and your child have probably still got a fair few years together in school.

and it is amazing how many schools do not use a reparation restorative justice kind of model. I've had it with my child where there's been an incident gone on and to be fair, it wasn't really bullying. It was a two-way thing. And I said, okay, so. That's, that's great. I'm absolutely behind you, but can you tell me when you're going to have that [00:19:00] conversation between the two of them?

And the head of year was a little bit aghast and going, oh, well, we don't usually do that. No, I know, but they still got three years to go three years together that you want these two young men to get along. And other instances like this don't happen. So I need to know that you're going to do some repair work in this relationship.

And it is so important to do that. Absolutely. So you can ask for that. Absolutely you can. What else can we do? Encourage the positive relationships in their life. So help them build a supportive network of friends and peers. So if that's in, you

know, primary, then it's really easy, isn't it? Because we can message other mums going, do you want a play date?

Blah, blah, blah. I would genuinely refrain from telling all the mums about the bully. We don't know what's going on with that child. We absolutely don't [00:20:00] know what's going on with that child. So it's really, really important that we don't. Tell everybody because then they kind of get tired with that, don't they?

Now, there could be some at major. And this is there, that child trying to make a connection with yours. Yes, in a very misguided way. So don't be that drama mom. Or Drama dad, don't let them, don't let that be the dominant conversation. Just let it go. You encourage those positive relations, encourage play dates, encourage, you know, do you fancy meeting up with the park with your kids, blah, blah, blah.

I have done it before where I've invited the bully around and we've had those conversations because it's So, I've just had a little knock on the door then, and if you're watching on YouTube, you'll see it, little knock on the door, and my, one of mine just coming in, bless. So yeah, [00:21:00] I've done that before now, to just, let's just get rid of this, and you know, and get it sorted.

If you're in high school, it's not as easy is it, because we're, we're not privy. We're not privy to all of their friendship groups and stuff. But what I would say is invite more friends around, you know, say, do you want to, do you want to invite such and such around for the weekend? Do you want to invite?

I don't mean the bully. I mean, other friends that they have. Do you want to have a sleepover? You know, do you want them to come over for a sleepover? Things like that. You can do, you can do any of that. And that really helps. The other thing that I would say is think about how are they going to manage this.

So really thinking about how they're going to cope, what's their

coping strategies. [00:22:00] So little things like working out if this happens again. How do we manage that? How, what are you gonna do? Who are you gonna go to in school? Who's, who's a safe person? Who's a trusted adult that you trust in school that can help you with this? Is there places to go? So like the library places like that.

Is there, is there places that you can hang out? Help you feel safer just for a little while. And this is not them avoiding this is keep making sure they've got a safe space. Absolutely. Is it is. If particularly it's at lunchtime, can you hang out in a different area? And it is so that they feel safe because what you.

The last thing you want is school refusing. Absolutely. So talk to them about a little strategy of how they're going to manage that. And that doesn't matter how old they are. Okay. So [00:23:00] it's easier, isn't it? If they're in primary, because we can just go and tell the teacher, but actually do they feel comfortable enough telling the teacher to work out a little strategy of what they're going to do.

And then. Let's really think about the toll that this might take on our child's well-being, no matter their age. So how do we help them because they're already going to be feeling, you know, their self-esteem will have taken a kick in. How do we encourage that to grow? How do we help boost that and their confidence and things?

So the first thing I would say to you is get them involved in activities that they are comfortable with. Already enjoy, or that they excel at, or that they'd like to try new. So things for me, like they already do stuff you know, maybe they go to an extracurricular activity afterwards. Is there something else they can do with that?

So it [00:24:00] might be that they have an extra class or they have like you know, I know like in dance, they have, you know, if you do like one type of dancing, they might do lots of others. So they might want to try that. Definitely invite friends' round, do things like try new things, even things that they might do round the house that would just start to build their confidence.

So for instance you might say to them, can you, I really need help with this. So it could be just as simple as tidying out the garage. So they might need, you need help and talk about needing, because that's a really good. For them to hear that an adult needs them but don't just go, can you go and do that?

You know, don't set them up in that way because if they feel very overwhelmed, then they're going to fail it. And we want this to be a positive outcome. So stuff like, I really need help with this. Keep it small, but keep it achievable. So at the end, and that could be anything from helping them tidy their room, them helping you tidy the garage, [00:25:00] things like that.

Helping it. Oh, look at that. Look at, doesn't it look amazing now? Like, haven't we got a lot of space, you know, things like that. Anything like that really helps games. So I really like double, I have eight sets of double, I think. And I have, I have eight sets of double, and actually I had a little client who had just come to the end of their sessions last week.

Bought me a new set, I was like, I was crying, it was just so lovely. The reason I like double and this is really funny because Double can be played at any age, like we play with this with grandparents as well as you know, kids. But there's lots of reasons why we play double. One is because there's that cognitive, getting the brain going, warm up.

It distracts them from any worries. It reduces stress. So research shows us that playing games can, you know, be a fun way to reduce stress [00:26:00] and anxiety. It's a really good way of them having to pay attention. So distracts them from what's going on. It's a really good, like for me, sociable game and it boosts, you know, the mood, it really boosts those happy hormones, that dopamine, things like that.

But it can be done from. Any skill level. And I always allow them to win the first one. I don't after that. And to be fair, some kids are really struggle to win after that, but the first one, I always let them win to just build that confidence. And then after that, and if, if you're a parent of one of my students listening to this, do not tell them.

Do not tell them I let them win because sometimes I don't, they just win. But it's a really lovely game and it is just a simple matching game. And there's lots of variations of how you can play, but it's a beautiful, easy game. It's not like Monopoly that can take hours. It's not a [00:27:00] game. It's not a level of skill, it's matching.

And you'd be surprised at how the older ones really love it because it's a very simple, very easy, but actually it levels the playing field for everybody, no matter their age. So things like that will really help boost the confidence as well. Or other games that you might have Jigsaw, Jigsaw is brilliant.

End of the table, end of the dining table, if you've got one, or a certain place that you can set out one and everybody, you know, and as they pass, you'll find they start to get interested in. We've started to do more and more harder ones now

where you don't see the picture, you see what a certain person is looking at and you've kind of got to guess it, that's harder.

Don't start with one of them, but things like that, that are going to really boost their confidence because they're going to need this in other areas of their life and keep the lines of [00:28:00] communication open. I said at the beginning, you know, if you're going to have a chat with them, go for a walk, go in the car, so you're side by side, you're not face on, take the dog for a walk, have a little chat, keep checking in regularly, you know, how they're feeling, what's going on for them, how was it today, you know, end of the bed, my youngest, it's usually after school.

My oldest, it's usually as I'm going to bed, you know, and that's, that's great, isn't it? That you can have that, you know, so it doesn't matter if they're getting in bed, however they are, however old they are, sit at the end of the bed, or if you're going to bed, if they're older teens, sit at the end of the bed and have that conversation.

Just how are you doing today? How's it all going? You know, things like that. Just keep checking in with them and do that anyway. Okay. Also, what I would say to you is consider professional support if it's severely affected the [00:29:00] mental health of your child, your teen. Then Seek a therapist. Seek a therapist for you all because this is really hard what you're going through and you go through it as a family.

And yes, as much as we need to be there for them, it's really hard for us to accept that, you know, it's Why is our child being bullied? What can we do about it? And actually, we do feel very helpless. So really, you know, if you, if you're struggling, absolutely you know, go for some professional help.

Obviously, you guys know where I am, but if you're If this isn't an online thing, I would always recommend going to the BACP website. They have a page called the Find the Therapist. That's the British Counselling and Psychotherapy Association. That's my professional body and they have a page on there.

It's just BACP. com. They have Find a therapist page and you can put filters in for young people . And [00:30:00] your local area, things like that. And they will come up with. And do not be afraid of ringing them up and having a chat with them. I often do that for friends. I'll ring up another therapist that I don't know in a different area.

And I'll say, this is the person. This is what it is. What's your experience on this? What would you do? What's your course of action? You know, absolutely. And I would encourage anybody to do that with me, but I actively encourage everybody to have that because it's about that relationship is so important.

If they don't get you, they don't get the experience. It's not the right therapist. That's all. Move on to the next, go on the next one on the list. So absolutely do that for you guys. Recognizing the signs. Approaching that conversation with care and really listening in, then taking action and supporting your child's mental health by, you know, giving them that support outside of school, outside of the setting.

It can [00:31:00] really make a massive difference and it can really help repair the damage that the bully's done. You know, to the point that they're not growing up going, feeling that victim, we need to. Give them some control back in this and, and I'm hoping that these steps will really help you do that as somebody who has a young person in your life, no matter the relationship, you know, you obviously deeply care about.

So that was all about what to do if your child is being bullied. I, in the next episode, I'm going to do. One around what happens if your child is the bully. Controversial, I know, but really important. I think we need to address it because we don't talk about it enough and actually, we need, as parents, we need support and that child needs support.

So, click into the next episode to hear about that, if that's [00:32:00] the support that you need. I've been Ashley Costello. Thank you for listening at The Resilient Kid. Take care, everyone. Speak to you soon.