THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 4 – Episode 11

My Child/Teen Is the Bully. What To Do!

[00:00:00] What to do if your child is the bully. Hello and welcome to the Resilient Kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello. Today we're going to discuss a topic that's quite difficult for most parents to face. What to do if you discover that it's your child that's bullying others. It's a situation that none of us want to find ourselves in, isn't it, but it's crucial that we address it and give support to you and to that child and do it with care and responsibility because that's what we want our kid to do, isn't it?

So I'm going to share some practical advice on how we handle it. And how to support your child or teen with their behavior. So first of all, we need to recognize the problem, don't we? So that might be complaints from schools or other parents about your child's [00:01:00] behavior. There might be, you know, and that's a, like, that might be the first time you hear and actually.

I'm gonna, I'm gonna come on to how to respond to it. But as far as we know, and you know, of course we know our children's flaws, but for the most part, we think they're empathetic, we think they're kind. You know, we certainly want to think that. And what I would say to you is, do not see their behaviour as them.

Their behaviour and them as people are very separate. Behaviour is very indicative for me that there is a need that is not being met. So they might be bullying somebody else because they want connection with that person. They're not sure how to go around it. There's a host of different reasons to why that might be.

What I would say to you is, see them as your child. [00:02:00] Separate to their behavior. They are not bad, inappropriate, unacceptable. Their behavior is unacceptable. Not them. We really need to see the difference between the two of those because when we talk about them being bad, that's their self-esteem we're kicking.

Not their behavior. So it's really important that the language that we use, we make sure that we keep them two separates. I hope that helps. And I would say that for everything, not just in this particular topic area. Okay, so what if though you've not had a complaint? And so you don't know outright, we'll have a look for increasing aggressive behaviour, whether that's at home, you know, and we talk about kind of, you know, kicking the cat, I'm [00:03:00] not saying particularly kicking the cat, please don't, but, you know, that whole, like, their demeanour is changing a little bit, they're being more aggressive towards siblings.

Or pets. Or it might be that they're not being aggressive, but they're being more dominating in their actions. So it might be that you're playing a game and they want to dominate, they might have friends around, they want to be first. That, you know, that kind of behavior that you, might be unusual for your child.

Now, often we talk about lack of empathy towards others feelings. I think sometimes as parents, we're, we're kind of guilty of, or they don't realize, you know, so to give you an example Mother's Day is really important to me. And a few years ago. We did it was Mother's Day. [00:04:00] I'd arranged for us to go to the huts at St Anne's Beach.

It was beautiful. It was really nice. Now I don't have my mum anymore. She died a good few year ago now. So I always want to make a thing, and it's not necessarily that it's all about my mum. But it's really important that those people in my life who are mothers or mother figures that. I recognize them and equally that I, you know, celebrate my kids and having my kids and being a mom, you know, because not everybody gets that privilege.

And what happened was I'd arranged this day because I thought it'd be really cool and the kids were moaning and the hubby wasn't, you know, the hubby was trying to get stuff organized to, to get to the beach and stuff, but it just everyone was moaning and I just went, I'm just going to stop you all right now.

Just going to stop you all. This is Mother's Day. This is really important day. And I explained how I felt. And after that, the difference was huge. [00:05:00] And that wasn't for me to lay the guilt on. That was for me to give them an understanding of how I felt. And then therefore, then the empathy comes. Okay, then they're tripping over themselves to help, which, you know, great.

Of course we don't want that all the time, but I think, I think sometimes as parents, our kids go along their little lives and we go, oh, well, they've not noticed this. Oh, blah, blah, blah, blah. And actually what we can't sit and complain that there is no empathy if we are not explaining That empathy, if we are not highlighting to them times when they need to be feeling something, you know, it's a little bit like.

You know, in the eighties, when we had lots of videos of African children, you know, who were struggling with water and stuff, if you weren't careful, [00:06:00] like that got to a point where it was just another advert and you would turn around and turn over and that's awful, isn't it? So we need to highlight. Some of these.

So the reason I'm bringing that kind of up now in this is it's not that they would necessarily have a lack of empathy because they, they might be really empathetic. It doesn't stop them being a bully at times or having that bullying behavior. But I think sometimes we also Let it slide. And so it's important that we highlight to the kids about how people feel.

You know, if you've been to a funeral, if you've been to, if a friend's going through a hard time without going into details, oh, you know, tell them how you felt because what you're doing is modelling that for them. So when we talk about a lack of empathy, it's not that those, Children are teens have no [00:07:00] empathy.

Sometimes we overlook it and we overlook the opportunity to teach it, but also don't think because they are empathetic. That they can't display that kind of behavior to what was once friends. Also look out for if they're blaming others for their problems or refusing to take responsibility for their actions.

That's a big one for me. And not just in this topic, it's really important that kids take responsibility for their actions, whatever that is. And that isn't, I'm really kind of against blaming. So for instance, and I've probably talked about this before because it's, I'm quite passionate about this, but if say, say there's a mess and we have a little studio in our house and the kids quite often use it for their friends coming round.

You know, the youngest will take his mates in, playing the PlayStation in there, because I won't like having the bedroom. The, the oldest she'll [00:08:00] have all her mates around and they'll be watching movies and things like that. Has a little kitchen in it. It's really lovely. And the kids can use that. Of course they can.

But equally, my mother-in-law comes to stay. And sometimes I work in there. So it's really important that they clean up after themselves. Now I don't go in and go, you know, who's done this, da, da, da, da. I'll say the studio needs tidying, who's, who's helping. Now, whoever's used it last is usually the first in the queue, but I'm not going to go.

You did this. Why isn't this done? Because I don't want them growing up in a blame culture, because if we have that blame stuff, then what happens is they start to lie, they'll blame other people. And actually what we want is for them to take responsibility. And usually when I say. And these needs tidying up, who's going to help?

The first words out of their mouth is, sorry that was me, that was on me, I'll get it started. So, can you [00:09:00] see how just a subtle difference in the language really helps? So, think about recognising, how do we recognise that our kid might be bullying other people? So, if it isn't a complaint from somebody else, there could be an increase, or an unusual.

Display of dominant aggressive behavior, potentially lack of empathy towards others, but watch out for that because reasons explained. And are they not taking responsibility for stuff? Are they blaming others for their issues or problems? So how do we approach this? So, when you first learn about your child teen's behaviour, it's natural to feel upset and defensive, of course it is.

Because, as parents, anything like this, we feel we've failed. Oh my [00:10:00] god, the shame of, the shame of not learning. of somebody coming to you and saying your kids bullying mine or your kids been bullying somebody at school that is heavy isn't it but what I'm here to say to you is it's just behavior it is something that can be addressed it's not a failure of yours unless you're bullying your child it's not on you it is just a behavior that more often than not happens To almost every kid and it might not be serious enough to be seen in school or in sixth form, things like that, but it could be that they're picking on somebody else.

They're picking on the dog. It doesn't matter. All children go through this at some point to varying levels. So it's not a failure as us. If we don't do anything about it or we go on the defensive or we say [00:11:00] it can't possibly be true, it must be that other kid. That's a failure. That's a failure because we are not taking responsibility.

We are not asking our child to take responsibility. There is no shame in this happening. Absolutely none. It is about how we deal with this. So, take a deep breath. Yeah, because this is hard. It is really hard. So, gather all the information that you can and really listen. Listen to what you're being told. So whether this is a teacher giving you a call from school, whether it's pastoral team, if it's, if it's a high school or sixth form, or if it's a parent, the first thing you need to do is listen.

Make a note of all the information, what it was, when it was who did it involve, [00:12:00] you know, things like that. And then what I want you to do. Is sit, well, I was going to say sit down, don't sit down with your child, right? Because it's quite confrontational, isn't it? Having that face to face, go for a walk, go for a drive, make sure they're in a good place first, make sure they've eaten, make sure they're hydrated, make sure it's not last thing at night when they're really tired, or first thing in the morning, you know, after dinner, walk the dog, go for a drive, any excuse, right?

And I am not beyond. Doing this, getting them in the car. Now, anybody who knows me, I don't like McDonald's, but I am not beyond going in the car, going through the drive thru, getting a milkshake, and driving round and having a chat. You are not rewarding them for behaviour, you are getting them in a space that they will open up.

Now, if I did that, my kids would know there's something going on. But, [00:13:00] give them an opportunity. To have an open and honest conversation, express your concerns and ask them to talk about their side. Don't interrupt, listen, just try and understand their perspective without being defensive, without trying to jump in against them, without trying to jump in to defend them.

Just listen and let them know that's what you're here for. Don't give them Too much information, just say, I've had Mrs. Whatever on the phone, or I've had a parent on the phone, can you tell me about it? What's happened? And then, once you've kind of got the details, and ask open ended questions if you need more information.

Now, quite often, they might only give you half the story. And give them some more information to let them know, you know, more so that they [00:14:00] can, you know, but give them several opportunities to tell you the whole story, to tell you the truth of their story. And it is their truth, isn't it? It's not our truth.

You're asking them for theirs, their side of the story, and then what I would say is. Discuss, once you have got what you think are the full details, discuss the impact of their actions, their behaviour on others, on whoever it is that's involved. Help them understand how it affects that other person, both emotionally and physically.

And then talk about the importance of that respect for others, those boundaries, that empathy, those kindness. And then what I would say to you is. Have a very honest conversation around [00:15:00] expectations now about their behaviour. So tell them what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in your family. Now you would think that you might not have to do this, but this is a really good opportunity to revisit the values of your family.

And if you haven't done a values kind of lesson at home, I strongly suggest, even if you're just listening to this out of interest, that you do it. I, you know, we will often have, usually around the dinner table and we will just have a conversation about, it could be around politics, could be around religion, things like that.

And I say, what do you think we think as a family? What do you think our values are as a family? So it could be something like kindness. It could be something like we don't lie. Like we don't we're not homophobic. We never use. Words are slurs, you [00:16:00] know, certain words are slurs. We are not racist as a family.

We are an ally. So it's, so it might be, you know, one thing that the kids think that, okay, you know, we're not racist and we won't tolerate that. As a family, and this is the values that we all sign up to, and this is where you find out as your kids get older and they have their own opinions, if they're still signed up to the same and have those debates to why you know, politics have come up of late.

In our family because of the election and stuff because of the some of the policies that come up. So we're kind of talking and it's quite interesting to find out that my younger said he would sign up for a year in military to do military service. And we are like, wow, we weren't expecting that. So, you know, it's, it's really important that you keep that dialogue going, but it's important that you have those conversations around values and actually to what level you'll take [00:17:00] those.

So for us, it's really important. We have. We have a huge amount of gay members of our family. So it's really important that we're allies. So and that, that, because that is the circles that we move in and it's important that, you know, our kids know how we. Our allies on that. And it's interesting that I'm saying that because this is

June, it's Pride Month, and I see a lot of companies, you know, everyone from Coca Cola to McDonald's, whoever, to completely.

You know, washing around LBTQ plus communities and actually here at the resilient kid, we support, we support those communities constantly. And I think it's really important. And just so you know, so anything that you buy during the month [00:18:00] of June, whether that's a service, a therapy service, whether that's one of our books, one of our courses, there is a percentage going to a youth charity group that will help young people who are struggling in those communities.

So that's just an aside. But that is just a Value that has come from my family, you know, that was passed out. My parents were really input, you know, we were really taught how to be allies. You know, it's things like that, that you need to be having these discussions ahead of time, not when the crap hits the fan, like now, when you find out that your child or teen is bullying somebody else, have those very open and honest conversations around the dinner table, in the car, on a walk, ahead of time.

So back to topic. To really establish what's acceptable, what isn't, make sure you're reiterating that now. [00:19:00] And also why, you know, the reasons behind why is it? Well, apart from, you know, its kind, it's fair. It could be something like that, that, you know, for us, that's part of our family. It's really, really important.

And also think about the consequences that are going to come with this behavior. So and keep them consistent. This could be, you know, loss of privilege, additional chores. It could be that they have to make it up to that, to that child in some way, you know, that you, that they have to, if they're younger, I would say, if it's appropriate, invite them round for a play date.

They're the one making the snacks for them. They're the one, you know getting games out, things like that. They take the lead, all that kind of stuff. If they're older, it could be, okay, how are you going to, how are you going to make this up? How are you going to make this up? And involve the child in the consequences and [00:20:00] in the preparation of this.

Ask them first. I find that whenever this the deal with consequences come up in my house. If I ask my children first, they're much harder than I am on this, but it is about, it's a level of, there is a consequence to this behavior, but also taking

responsibility for this behavior. So the last bit is kind of or the last couple of things that I wanted to talk to you was around reinforcing positive behavior patterns.

So encourages, encourage activities that promote empathy and cooperation. So that could be volunteering in your local community. And you'd be surprised at how many people will take. Young people, so because a lot of companies won't take under 16s, volunteer charities will. So that could be a litter pick in your local village, that can be volunteering for a local event, that could be [00:21:00] helping out at a charity.

I know around here we have Reengage, which is an older charity where they do, you know, like an afternoon tea for older people and older generation you know, volunteering at something like that. They don't need to do anything, but it's really helping them encourage, you know, encouraging them, sorry, to help out in their community and being grateful for what they've got.

Team sports, that's a really good one. Our group projects is a really good one, like the list picking, things like that. And actually, you know, yes, you're going to get an element of, I don't want to do that, I'm anxious about it. This is the behavior you've done. This behavior, we need to make that up.

There is a consequence to that behavior. And actually I want to see how you are going to do that. Also when they do. Massive praise, massive praise for that. You know, the effort that they're putting in, the energy that it takes positive social [00:22:00] interactions, you know, even if it's just helping out, you know, old person pack the bags, things like that.

Real, give them real praise because quite often there's a connection missing and actually When, when somebody has bullying behavior, it is usually because that need is they want that connection. So make sure we give them the connection in a positive way. So that's, you know, that's really important. And then kind of lastly, if, if it is that you're struggling, or if it is they're struggling to see responsibility, to see what's happening, then yes, of course, get, get some help, get professional help.

You can go to your pastoral at schools, no matter their age. Often a lot of schools have got counsellors in situ, which is free. So absolutely do that. Obviously, as I've said before, BACP, find a, find a [00:23:00] therapist. Page is really good in your local area. But also as well, don't be afraid that. You know, you can always do family therapy as well, which is a really, I think a lot of people, it is changing.

I am noticing a pattern in chair, you know, a changing pattern at the moment where before family therapy or therapy would be seen to when something hits the fan, you know, when the crap hits the fan, but actually, it isn't like that now. There is more and more families reaching out when communication isn't right, when the dynamics are not right, when people and siblings are not getting along.

And actually bringing in a therapist is really, really good. I had A family last year and they were just fabulous. They were a blended family and they were just struggling. They were really struggling. There was a dynamic that was really struggling in particular. A blended family is particularly hard, aren't they?

Because we think, oh, we, because we're in [00:24:00] love, the kids have got to be in love with us and, and with each other. And that's not the case. That's not the case. And the kids don't have a choice in this. So actually what we did was sat down with the kids. And I sat down a couple of times with one and the parents separately, and then all the kids and mum and dad together.

And just, I kind of gave them that element of, let's hear what everybody's got to say, and how do we move forward with this? And actually, it's like a breath of fresh air when a family does that. And yeah, they were struggling, but actually to be open and honest and invite somebody in as a stranger and you're raw, you're going to put everything out there.

What a brave thing to do, but it really paid off for them. It really paid off for them. And actually it didn't take very many sessions at all, but yeah, I really When I think about my time with that family, it was really [00:25:00] precious and I feel very privileged and honoured that they invited me in. So what I'm saying is don't wait for that.

If you, if you feel like the dynamics are not quite right, or there's something, you just need a little bit of help in how to communicate between you all. you are then absolutely get a therapist in, get somebody into help before it gets worse because, you know, you would do that with anything else, wouldn't you? If there was something broke, you needed it fixing, you can't do it.

Go to somebody else, get a professional to help you. Yeah, really, I think if you're, if you're struggling particularly if they're struggling to take responsibility, go to school, ask for help with pastoral or counsellor, or go, you know, seek a professional. But the fact that you address your child's behaviour, you know, I

know it is challenging, it's emotionally draining, but it is a crucial step to help them grow, help them.

To grow [00:26:00] into a compassionate and responsible individual because you're going to recognize the problem you're going to. Set that model of open communication, clear expectations and boundaries, and then you're also going to reinforce positive behavior. So, honestly, you will just really help them, not just now, and how they navigate school, but actually you're going to future proof them, aren't you?

Because They're going to have better and healthier relationships as they move forward. If we ignore this, if we just punish them, nothing's going to change. It's going to come up again. So I hope that was useful. Thank you for joining me today, listening in. If you've got any questions or you need any further advice, please leave a comment, drop me a message.

Ashley@theresilientkid.co.uk is the best method to get me. Every child just needs one significant person in their life [00:27:00] and that can really turn their life around. You could be that significant person, whether you're a parent, whether you're a carer, whether you're an educator. So thank you for being in their corner.

Take care. Bye for now.