THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 4 – Episode 12

Understanding Why Children Bully

[00:00:00] Understanding why kids bully each other. Hello everyone, welcome to the Resilient Kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello. Today, this topic is quite complex, it's controversial, and it's concerning. So why do kids bully each other? Understanding the reasons behind bullying behaviour can really help us address it more effectively.

Support both those who are victims of bullying behavior and those people who display bullying behavior. Hopefully in healthier ways and, and teaching them how to interact better. So thank you for joining me and feel free to comment, share your thoughts, whether it's here at ashley@theresilientkid.co.uk, DM me whatever you want, please do drop, drop some comments and questions. So, the [00:01:00] nature of bullying, what's it all about? So let's just define what we mean by that. So, bullying involves repeated. Behaviour, usually aggressive, negative behaviour intended to hurt another person. Now that can be physically, emotionally, psychologically.

And do not underestimate, just because someone's not being punched in the face, the physical hurt emotional or psychological abuse can do. It can take various different forms, can't it? We know. Obviously physical violence. There's that verbal taunt. The kind that you see, kind of, for me in high schools, it's the stuff of corridors.

I went to a school the other day, and the corridors were really wide, and honestly it made my heart sink, because the corridors are usually quite narrow, and it's where you know, you have got lots of [00:02:00] children at a quick capacity Several times a day. We're talking kind of seven, eight times a day where there's two lots of rows of kids, hundreds of kids passing each other on a daily basis in very small, tight corridors.

And actually that's where a lot of um, taunts, verbal taunts are given. So having those wider corridors really helps with that. Social exclusion where, you know,

they push somebody out of the group. They ignore them. You know, we would have said sent to Coventry years ago, things like that. And now we've also got obviously social media and cyberbullying.

So they, that has been around for quite some time, but it is horrific. So just kind of so we know what we're talking about when we talk about the nature of bullying. So why do kids bully? Well, there's several reasons really. So some of the more common [00:03:00] ones would be seeking some power, some control. And that might be because they enjoy that feeling of dominance over another, over a perceived weaker person.

It might be because they want to assert authority, especially in a peer group, a social situation where they want to be seen as the leader. Now, of course we know there's plenty of ways you can do that, but sometimes kids don't know a different way. So that can happen quite quickly. Attention seeking.

So, you know my thoughts on this. I talk about, rather than attention seeking, because it has a very negative effect and connotations in our society, I talk about connection seeking. So when we're talking about bullying, it can be ways for kids to get attention. Let's swap that out for connection to peers and adults.

Now doesn't that make us see bullying in a different way? A bully is looking for a way to get a [00:04:00] connection whether it's through a significant adult or their peers. So their behaviour is just a product of a need that they have for connection. Now I'm not saying it's right, of course it's not, we're not condoning bullying, but what we do know is that negative attention is better than no attention at all, of course it is, and actually in the brain it doesn't see any difference.

If that kid is getting a connection from that teacher, that parent, or that peer, that is better than nothing. Doesn't that make you think differently when we talk about wanting to gain connection rather than attention. Sometimes children mimic behaviour they see at home, in the media, or from peers.

If they see aggressive behaviour being modelled out and it being rewarded or unpunished, of course they're [00:05:00] going to replicate it. If they see a behaviour that gets that person what they wanted, of course they're going to replicate it. Of course that is obvious. That's why we call modelling behavior. We talk about modelling behavior as if like, it's going to be a you know, positive thing, but actually when we talk about modelling behavior, that's good or bad.

So it's really important that we realize what the things that we say, the things that we do is being seen. It is on show 24 seven. We can't get away with it. And if they are seeing stuff online, you know, and I have seen a rise in young men who are following Andrew Tate and the message he's giving out. He is showing These big flashy cars, big fancy homes, big holidays.

And he is behaving, his language is around [00:06:00] sexism, things like that. The way he behaves, look what I get. This is who I am. These are my values. This is what I get. Of course, they're going to mimic that because they're not, it's not about his values. It's about that car, that shiny holiday, things like that.

And of course, they're bringing him. They're bringing our young men in and I'm going to talk about that a little bit more in a second. Low self-esteem. So, not surprisingly, or maybe surprisingly for some of you, some people who, despite bullying behaviour, have really, really low self-esteem. They are doing this as like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is to get them to feel better about themselves. And also divert attention, isn't it, from their own insecurities. And I will say this to you, and this is, this is probably the most important piece for me, [00:07:00] particularly with teens. So as teens hit puberty and get older and stuff like that, as they, you know, preteens go into that section, everything in them, in their DNA, pulls away from us as parents, as caregivers, and identifies with their peer group.

Now, we do that because the survival of the species, that is why we have survived. It's an evolutionary thing. And when we identify with that peer group, it makes us feel like we belong. If that group that we're trying to identify. with, either doesn't accept us or is maybe not as appropriate or not as favourable as maybe parents or adults would see, that doesn't matter if we still have that belonging.

So as a, if you imagine a young teen or a teen who is feeling on the [00:08:00] periphery, of things, and that might be because they have anxiety, that might be because they don't feel like they fit in, that might be because they don't have any confidence. If somebody then says, oh, come with us, and they might have something in common.

So it could be football, it could be music, it could be singing in a choir, doesn't matter what it is. There is that sense of belonging. If that sense of belonging, that is

a DNA need. For our kids, is not met, they will seek it elsewhere, and that might be in a gang, it might be with drugs, alcohol, sex. See where I'm going with this?

It is very easy in that very impressionable period where the brain is on a massive development phase that our children will identify with a group that is not favourable. [00:09:00] So we need to be very careful about that. When we think about peer pressure, we don't often think about the bully in that situation.

So peer pressure is, is when the group is trying to get a kid teen to join in, to be part of it, actually, to be a bully, to fit in with that group. Thinking about what we've just said around the need to belong. Sometimes that can be really amazing to do that. It can be really you get accepted really quickly in that case.

Some kids don't have an understanding of empathy. They don't have an understanding around the impact of their [00:10:00] behavior or their actions on others. And this can be for various reasons. It can be developmental, that they've not, they've not hit that developmental stage or they haven't fulfilled that stage properly.

It can be a lack of social or emotional learning as they grow up. And it was very, it used to be. Lots of people would say, oh, you can teach empathy. You absolutely can. You absolutely can teach empathy. You can model it; you can give opportunities to learn it. So for me, it's around that as well. So lack of empathy, although maybe an excuse in the, you know, at the beginning, there isn't an excuse to not plug all of that.

That gap in empathy because we absolutely can teach it. And then kind of one that, you know, we talk about a lot, which is such as personal problems. So there might be issues at home with the family. There might be academic [00:11:00] struggles. There might be trauma that we don't know about that will lead to a child coming out in that, you know, fight.

Because they've gone through their own trauma and actually, they're really, really struggling. And this is a way of coping. This is a way of coping. Because what does it do? You know, it holds others at arm's length, doesn't it? We don't want you to get too close because you might hurt me again. So, you know, there is that element of we need to take in consideration.

Now I am not saying that that's an excuse, but it. Might well be a reason, and actually we need to look at the whole child, that whole student, not just their behaviour. So, let's have a little look into that. What role has the environment got that, that might play a [00:12:00] significant part in how they behave towards each other?

Well, home environment, we've kind of just talked about, it might be those children who witness domestic violence, it might be very harsh or strict parenting, or they might be neglected. And I think quite often we talk about that from like you know, socio, socioeconomic parents where they might not have enough resources, but actually I have found a lot of bullying behavior will come from affluent neglect, where there's plenty of money.

But no connection, no regular attention, you know, no interest in the kids. So we, we give you everything, but actually how much connection do these kids get? So it is, it goes across the divide. It absolutely does. School environment, school culture has a massive part to play in this. And particularly if it doesn't effectively [00:13:00] address bullying behavior.

So it almost enables bullies. For me, lots of schools have a bullying policy, which they're supposed to have. It should be always listed on the website. But they have a policy that doesn't always include reparation. And I, I am massive into the repair of. Any relationship, it doesn't matter who it is, it doesn't matter if it's a colleague at work, it doesn't matter if it's a sixth form student, university, we've got to repair, right from little too big, we've got to repair that relationship.

Because how can we move forward if you've really just hurt me, or I've just really hurt you, we need adults in that situation to mediate and, and walk them through how they can then. Have a healthy relationship. So it's really, really important. I find schools with poor supervision. Bullying is rife, unclear [00:14:00] policies, so if they're just playing lip service to it and also if you know, hierarchical kind of heads or governors are not included in that.

And that is usually, again, because of a bit of a blame culture, they don't want to have to report bullying incidents, so they'll try and deal with its low level. That's not good enough. We need to take it to the top. We need for all parties to be supported, including parents and carers in this. And then lastly, kind of our social environment as well.

Media, video games, social media can have a massively effect. They really glorify aggressive behavior sometimes. And, you know, it's not, it's not fair. When we. Open our kids up to playing games that are eighteens. I have got some primary kids who I know play, you know, Call of Duty all of those kinds of games that have, you know, [00:15:00] very sexist behavior very aggressive behavior, killing, shooting, that kind of thing.

And. So it's no wonder our kids think it's acceptable. It's okay. It's not okay. And that is why we have those that's why we have those age ratings on there. So please, please heed them. This is the reason. If I turned around and said to you, one of the reasons why we have bullies, why your child could be a bully in school is because they are playing games that are rated older.

Now, when we say we rate games at 18, that is because the brain is not fully developed. It's not fully developed at 18, but hopefully we've had enough life experience to make those calls between real and imaginary, because we know our brain can't do that for us. So, so actually, Experience is giving the feedback to our brain.

So when we give our kids higher ages, [00:16:00] access or opportunities to play those games, right, we think it's just a game. It's not just a game. You are setting up the pathways of their brain. And that is what can lead to this kind of behavior. So how

do we address this kind of behavior? Well, education, we need to teach children about empathy. And as I said, it can be taught. So we need to be putting in lessons in the school, lessons at home. I don't mean sit down and form a lesson, but take opportunities to point out empathy, to ask them, how do you think that person felt?

How do you think my friend felt when this happened to them? We need to be talking about respect. We need to be talking about boundaries and the impact of actions on others. So when siblings are fighting or cousins are fighting or falling out or things like that, there's your opportunity. That's how we learn our boundaries and [00:17:00] our respect for others.

So really help them learn the social and emotional aspects of an opportunity or an incident or a situation that's happened. Positive reinforcement, encourage and reward positive behavior. Recognize and praise acts of kindness and cooperation. But more than that, create opportunities where your kids can

display and have experience of that. So for instance um, we quite often, well, my kids volunteer like, and it's, it's almost like a non-negotiable. My kids volunteer and it's almost non-negotiable, so it might be various different things. We have like a volunteer awards evening here called Community Rewards. Um, they volunteer their time, one of them volunteers their time to check people in and show guests to the tables and things like that.

We do, when we do the TEDx stuff [00:18:00] here in Northwich, they both volunteer, so one will do the same, and the other will do the same. Show guests at the table, greet people, give out programs, things like that. The other one runs around with mics, runs around the theatre with mics from speakers to organizers, things like that.

And it's really important. And I'll, and I'll tell you why, because they get to listen. They have the opportunity to listen to different. People stories. They get to meet different people. They get to talk to different people. So it's not a case for me. It's not a case of just them just sitting and doing their job, handing out the programs and that's it.

We actively introduce them to the speakers. We actively introduce them to guests. And to VIPs and things like that, so that they have the opportunity to build those communications, listen to other people's stories and, and be grateful for what they've got. And also listen to those experiences that other people have had.

So that we understand, you know, so that they understand how lucky they are. And we're [00:19:00] giving them the opportunity to build that empathy muscle because it is an empathy muscle. So yeah, really think about, like, how we do that. Open communication. So really give them, apart from just talking about it, foster, excuse me, foster an environment where they feel safe to talk about how they feel.

You know, and that's from both sides. So please just listen and listen without judgment and give them the support. So what, what I often give advice to my parents who come to see me is there's three things that you can do. First of all. You say to your kids, do you want me to just listen? And that is listening without interruption, that is listening without asking questions.

You can at the end, but just listen to them, right? The second one is, do you want me to help you problem solve this? [00:20:00] So it could be that your child has come to you and say, you know, I know I've done something. I know I've been

mean to this person or whatever. So ask them, you know, do you want me to just listen?

Do you want me to help you problem solve? Or do you want me to take charge of this? Do you want me to action this? And they're the three things that I recommend parents say to their kids. And you can talk about before a situation. And then when a situation arise, go, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to listen?

Do you want me to help you problem solve and make sure you're helping them? Not you're coming up with it. These solutions, or do you want me to take control of this? Now, if they are being bullied, there is an aspect where you have to, of course, you, if there's a, it's a safeguarding issue, you have to take control.

And again, if they are displaying the bullying behavior. Then again, you're going to have to take action and they're not going to want to, you know, they're going to feel ashamed. They're going to feel embarrassed at this, how they've behaved. However, you're going to [00:21:00] support them through this and you're going to model for them how they get, how they do this, how they make repair.

Role modelling is massive and it really When we walk them through it, you know, when we show them how it's done, then they can handle this for the future. This is what I call like a future proofing skill. Handling conflicts calmly. I know loads of people as adults who run away from conflicts. They will not have that open and honest conversation and actually we need them to.

So we need to them to do it calmly and respectfully and how better than to help them in a situation like this is to model that for them. And. If it is that your child is being bullied or that they are displaying bullying behaviour towards peers or friends, then it's important that we address it. Don't ignore it. Don't say, oh well school [00:22:00] haven't said anything so let's just, just change your behaviour. It's not about that. It's about future proofing them.

It's about giving that person the help and support they need no matter which side of the fence they're on. Okay. It's really important that we Involve others and we help support them and we advocate for our kids, whether they are being bullied or whether they are the bully. So just kind of understanding some of why this happens and getting those people around to support all the children involved.

You know, helps foster empathy, helps that repair, hopefully addresses some of the underlying issues, because if your child is being bullied, and that person who is doing the bullying is struggling at home, you can't do anything about that, but school might be able to. And also, really, looking at where your child [00:23:00] sits on their empathy, no matter their level, you know, do they, are they empathetic?

When you talk about people who are disadvantaged, people who are struggling, what's their response? You know, and if, if it's not positive, have them open and honest conversations. Always say, make sure they're watered and fed, so they're in a good space, go for a walk, get in a car, go for a drive, have those open and honest conversations, so that you are all on the same page about this.

It takes, according to research, it takes one significant adult to really have a massive impact and turn a kid's life around. So please, and I've said this I think on every of, every podcast of, of this series on bullying. Please, please

be that [00:24:00] person. Stand up and be that person. And if you're not sure what to do. Reach out, whether it's to me, whether it's to peers, reach out and get some support, get some help, get some education, so that you can be that significant person for any of those kids involved in a bullying incident. Thanks for listening.

Take care. Until next time. Bye for now.