

## **Empowering Kids to Deal with Bullies & Low Self-Esteem**

by

*Kathy Noll*

**Did you know that 23% of 9th graders have carried a weapon to school recently? According to the US Justice Department, one out of three kids will be offered or sold drugs at school and one out of four kids is bullied either mentally or physically every day. Do we really know what happens to our kids when they leave the safety of our homes to go to school?**

**Unfortunately, bullying and child violence have become quite common themes in every school across the country, and outside the US as well.**

**Dr. Jay Carter and myself have written a book, and run a web site, that helps parents, teachers, and kids learn the skills they need to deal with bullies and low self-esteem. On this journey, we've encountered many sad stories that are all too real.**

**One that really stands out in my mind, and heart, is a letter from a woman in IL. She thanks me for writing my book and she she wishes she would've had it for her son, Ricky, 5 years earlier.**

**Ricky was tormented every day at school by his "bullies." He was an asthmatic, and his classmates would continually take his inhaler medication from him to spray on themselves, in the air - essentially wasting it. This went on until one cold day in December, 1994, that has left his mother devastated. Ricky was found dead at school. He died of an asthma attack. His inhaler, found empty.**

**This is only one of many depressing stories. We've all had bad experiences to some degree that seem to be too close to home. But what can we do?**

**One of the things that Dr. Carter and I did to bring awareness was in collaboration with NBC10 News out of Philadelphia. At a local middle school, we hid 5 cameras in a classroom of 8th graders. Only one child, Jonathan, was in on our "sting" operation. He played the role of a bully while wearing a wire microphone. We then hid in a nearby classroom and monitored his classmates reactions as he harassed them. He harassed them with the arrogance that only a bully knows. We had him making fun of people, pushing and shoving, and giving off a real "I'm the only all important one" attitude!**

**The reactions varied as you can imagine. They were about as different as every child's personality. Some moved out of his way, timid and frightened, while others stood up for themselves screaming, "Get some manners!" One girl smacked him in the forehead! But we were also touched by the concern of many. We listened as they**

**approached the teacher and expressed concern for Jonathan's behavior. They felt he must really be hurting inside to be taking out so much frustration on them.**

**Bullies really do have low self-esteem. If there is something about themselves they don't like, they feel that by putting you down, and teasing you, they are distracting from their own problems. Bullies are also angry. Most likely they were also bullied at some point. We call this the "Bully Cycle." Also in question would be the negative influence of peers, caretakers who may have abused or enabled them, and exposure to violence in the media.**

**What can the victim do about his/her bully? Try confronting them and telling them how they are making you feel. "What did I do to you?" In many situations ignoring has the best results. If the bully no longer gets a reaction out of you, he/she will usually move on. It is no longer any fun. But what about the bully who is very abusive or violent? Make sure the school knows what is going on, and if they are unwilling to get involved, you need to contact the bully's parents. This type of bully should be avoided at all costs. Traveling to school in a group, and staying away from empty buildings are other wise options.**

**I'm sure you'll all agree that both the victims and bullies need help and support. Teach them that their actions have consequences. Instill in them the Rules for Fighting Fair: Identify the problem. Focus on the problem. Attack the problem, not the person. Listen with an open mind. Treat a person's feelings with respect. And finally - Take responsibility for your actions.**

**Let's all do our part to help prevent the children of our future from becoming "statistics."**

*Those of you who saw the segment we filmed for NBC News and sent your support - THANK YOU.*

*If you'd like to learn more about bully and self-esteem issues, please visit our web site at: <http://hometown.aol.com/kthynoll> E-mail: [kthynoll@aol.com](mailto:kthynoll@aol.com)*

*Or send comments, suggestions, book orders (\$16.90 each includes S/H) to: Kathy Noll, 3300 Chestnut St., Reading, PA 19605 USA*