



Suffering in Silence

After watching *Bullyproof* on RTE 1 the other night, myself and a friend of mine discussed how devastating and damaging the effects of bullying are on our youth. We talked about how the problem appears to be getting worse and how it seems to have become the 'norm' in society, for people to treat each other in a nasty and vicious manner. Put-downs, personal attacks, rumours, nasty comments and the like are finding their way into our daily interactions and online lives.

More worrying however, is the fact that many young people are suffering in silence and feeling very alone in their pain and distress. Many young people do not tell anybody what is happening to them for fear the situation might get worse, others tell somebody what is going on but feel nothing is done to help them. In my experience many young people don't tell anybody because of the shame they feel. When a young person is bullied, they can experience a huge sense of confusion about the bullying. They wonder why this is happening to them, why somebody is calling them names or treating them badly. They often wonder what it is they might have done to cause this and that there must be something wrong with them that this is happening. So they don't tell anybody. Instead they often try to push their feelings deep down inside them in the hope that they will go away. Unfortunately those feelings don't just disappear, the sadness, hurt, fear, hopelessness, powerlessness, shame and humiliation travel with the young person on their journey into adulthood.

Most people are aware that bullying exists and yet it often goes unchallenged. Bullying is about power and it thrives on silence; the silence of the victims and the silence of the bystanders. It's important therefore that we fight bullying together, that we break the silence. As adults we can be vigilant; look out for signs of anxiety and distress, out of character behaviour such as becoming more aggressive, withdrawn or attention-seeking. Young people will often refuse to say anything is wrong, however it is important to keep the lines of communication open and have daily check-in's with them to see how their day is going. If you continue to have concerns about your child and they are not opening up, it can be helpful to have a person who they feel close to, maybe an older sibling or other family member talk to them. Finally when young people talk, it is important to really listen to what they say, to support them and come up with solutions together.

Clare Crowley Collier, Therapist, Educator & Facilitator for Teenagers and Parents