

Reacting to a Bully

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: My granddaughter is no stranger to mean-spirited girls, but now, as a middle school student, she has received some nasty text messages. Is there an appropriate way to respond or would it be better for my granddaughter to ignore this person?

A: People who say mean things to others or hurt others physically are bullies. What you may not realize is that your granddaughter is not alone. Nearly half of today's students have been bullied by their peers. Although bullying is not new, some of the methods bullies use to hurt others are.

With the onslaught of modern technology, the term "cyberbullying" has been coined. This is when people conduct their dirty work over the internet via email or instant message, or use cell phones to send mean text, as in your granddaughter's case. Bullies also use the internet to spread rumors and lies about other people.

Bullies may have been subjected to mean and unfair treatment themselves, but it is no excuse to treat others in hurtful ways. When a bullying problem is ignored, it only gets worse and causes children to become afraid. Here are some general suggestions to follow if you are being bullied:

- Do not respond to a bully over the internet or through text messages.
- Stick with a group – bullies will often pick on someone who is alone.
- Tell the bully to leave you alone using a strong clear voice.
- Act confidently – remember your body speaks louder than the words you say.
- Tell an adult – a teacher, your parent or guardian.
- Walk away – never hit or push a bully even if the bully is hitting or pushing you. Fighting is against the rules in and out of school.

When you are a witness to someone who is being bullied:

- Let an adult know about the bullying and tell them exactly what happened. It can help to have a friend go with you.
- Help the person being bullied. You can sit next to them at lunch or on the bus. Walk home with the person or invite them to play at your house.
- You can join with another person or more than one person and say to the bully, "Stop that! We don't treat people that way around here." Let them know that their actions are not popular.

Grown-ups and children need to cooperate. Adults are important because they can discipline children who bully and help the ones who have been bullied to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem. Equally important, children who witness bullying need to know they can use their power to change a situation for the better. Martin Luther King once said, "*In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.*"

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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