

## Bullying still an issue today

by Mark Pavilons

?Courage is fire, and bullying is smoke.?

??Benjamin Disraeli

Half of students aged 13 to 15 years in Canada reported being bullied or fighting at school.

According to a report released by UNICEF, upwards of 150 million students worldwide experience peer violence in and around school.

Fifty per cent of students aged 13 to 15 years in Canada reported being bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months and/or having been involved in a physical fight at least once in the past 12 months. This is a higher rate than more than two-thirds of wealthy countries.

?Too many teenagers across Canada carry a large burden of violence. Bullying and fighting at school affects learning and mental health, and it can affect children long into the future.

?Education is the key to building peaceful societies, and yet, for millions of children around the world, school itself is not safe,? said UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore. ?Every day, students face multiple dangers, including fighting, pressure to join gangs, bullying ? both in person and online, violent discipline, sexual harassment and armed violence. In the short-term this impacts their learning, and in the long-term it can lead to depression, anxiety and even suicide.?

In Canada, 34% of students experience bullying (at least once in the past couple of months) and 25% report bullying peers.

In 2017, there were 396 documented or verified attacks on schools in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 26 on schools in South Sudan, 67 attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic and 20 attacks in Yemen.

Nearly 720 million school-aged children live in countries where corporal punishment at school is not fully prohibited.

While girls and boys are equally at risk of bullying, girls are more likely to become victims of psychological forms of bullying and boys are more at risk of physical violence and threats.

?I am disappointed to have more evidence that violence is a persistent problem that disproportionately affects Canada's children. We need to empower our kids to speak out against bullying and learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully, but it is adults' responsibility to protect children from all forms of violence in our homes, in society and in schools,? Morley added.

Most of us have experienced some form of bullying in our lives.

I?vividly recall one instance in high school where a student constantly bullied me. He was younger and smaller than me, but had a behemoth of a big brother. He felt he could do and say whatever he wanted because his big brother would back him up. I tried to brush off his comments but he was relentless.

At one point I?had enough. I?pinned him up against a locker and not so eloquently told him to cease and desist.

I firmly believed that his sasquatch of a brother would pound me out after hearing what I did. I did receive some evil glances; a few words were exchanged, and we knocked shoulders a few times. But the big brother and I?never did exchange blows.

A minor victory for those standing up to bullies.

In all my years, I don't recall many real fights at all. There were few school yard brawls and other than some pushing and shoving, no blood was spilled. We never carried knives and guns were unheard of.

While raising three children, I did learn about different forms of bullying that exist today. We all know that kids can be cruel, and it seems the bullies have learned a thing or two.

Both of my girls had on-again, off-again friendships with others. A few ill-timed comments would get you shunned in quick fashion, followed by online attacks and nasty texts.

As the UNICEF study pointed out, no kid should go to school afraid for their safety. School is tough enough as it is and we don't need other kids destroying what's supposed to be a great building experience.

In my day, teachers had no trouble grabbing us by the shirt collar or getting involved. Alas, in this era of enlightenment, teachers aren't allowed to touch or admonish students.

No parent wants their child bullied, abused, insulted or hurt. When I heard the stories from my kids, I?wanted to have a discussion with the offenders' parents, but cooler heads prevailed.

The issue of bullying has never been more talked about than it is today. Many school boards have a zero tolerance when it comes to bullying and there are countless campaigns and online support tools. And yet, it continues.

My experience is that young bullies grow up into adult bullies, and awkward situations flow over into the workplace.

I?find it odd that we can't wipe out this one blemish on society.

The awareness programs may be helping, but I think kids need to be reassured there is help and it's not okay to suffer in silence. We need to be there for them, 24/7 and encourage them to let loose and share.

I don't know about you, but I would not want to be a teenager growing up today.

We all need to be on guard and be prepared to meet this menace with courage and gusto.

Wouldn't it be nice to read the headline one day:??Bullying eliminated, humans finally get the message??