**I survived bullying, but too many others don’t**

OPINION Feb 05, 2020 by Andrew Knowles (Hamilton Spectator)

It was a normal school morning; I woke dreading going to school. I would delay as much as I could. Fake a sickness or pretend to sleep in. I was scared to tell anyone, even my parents, of what I would face when I arrived.

I was verbally abused and physically assaulted by my peers at school. Threats, social exclusion and lies spread about me. The bullying started in Grade 3 and continued until the end of high school. Nine years of my life I will never get back.

For others, their entire lives are taken. As recent as the tragedy of 14-year-old Devan who was stabbed to death in October of 2019. And Chris Howell, 17, "feared for his life" and committed suicide in 2011. Taylor Ridout, a close friend of Chris and former student at Sir Winston Churchill, recalled Chris being verbally harassed and physically attacked.

"He always came to me and expressed how he felt, and I was always there for him as best as I could be. The one time he didn't come to me was the one time he would have needed me most, and that will haunt me forever. To this day I feel so sad, and such guilt that I couldn't have saved him."

"In schools we don't get educated much on what bullying is, why it happens, or what to do about it," says Taylor, now 25. A target herself of bullying, Taylor pursued a career in child and youth work to help bullied children and prevent other tragedies.

The Canadian Red Cross presented a study showing victims of bullying have high absenteeism, low grades, and overall apathy for school.

Seventy-one per cent of teachers stated in the report they usually intervene when bullying occurs; but only 25 per cent of students say that teachers actually did.

An important question is: Why is the school system failing our children? Not knowing where to turn. The fear of retaliation, or simply not trusting that a teacher would take it seriously are possible answers.

My worst years were at Viscount Montgomery Middle School. Of course, I stood out like a light in the dark, with my extremely pale skin and bright blond hair. I always refer it to the "wild west" of my childhood. Here is where I was physically assaulted and threatened on a regular basis. One day I was choked from behind by a peer three times my size in front of my entire class as they laughed at me and the teacher watched and did nothing. The bullies I experienced were socially sophisticated in manipulation and hiding their actions.

I always remember a day when a letter was left in my locker by a student asking if I was OK and telling me I mattered. It was comforting to hear that and I cried when I read it.

A study presented by Brown University indicated that bullies were more likely to have a range of mental disorders including being higher risk of developing personality disorders as adults.

The study states that " … it is ... important for parents, clinicians and teachers to identify the root of the children's anger, and to help the children channel their aggression in a better way."

Why these issues are rising is complicated but how children are being raised and taught to manage their thoughts and emotions as they develop is key. As a child and youth worker, the use of Dialectical behaviour therapy is required when working with at risk youth to ensure their development.

Even if bullies are created through various factors outside the school system, as mentors of our children, educators should be responsible for including the development of emotional and social skills as part of the school curriculum from kindergarten to Grade 12.

I was thankful for the friends who stood by my side and two teachers who gave me guidance when I was targeted. Both teachers served at Sir Winston Churchill.

I am now 32, and I am doing the best I ever have. But only after a decade of recovery have I been able to achieve this. Some never had that chance. As a community and a society, we need to come together to address the psychological, emotional and social issues that our children are involved with if we are to ensure them an inspiring and hopeful future.