

10 Ways to Overcome Bullying in your Mind

As a kid, I hated walking down one hallway at school because I feared two mischievous seventh-grade boys. These boys had me so convinced their words were true. When a guidance counsellor attempted to console me – she told me I was “pretty” – I didn’t believe her. I distinctly remember laughing as if she had made a joke.

Even as a young adult professional in the workplace, I battled depression and anxiety. This caused me to be hugely resistant to correction. As I wallowed in numerous insecurities, I came to believe that that no one liked me. I thought that I was nowhere near good enough.

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Ten Rounds with a Powerful Bully

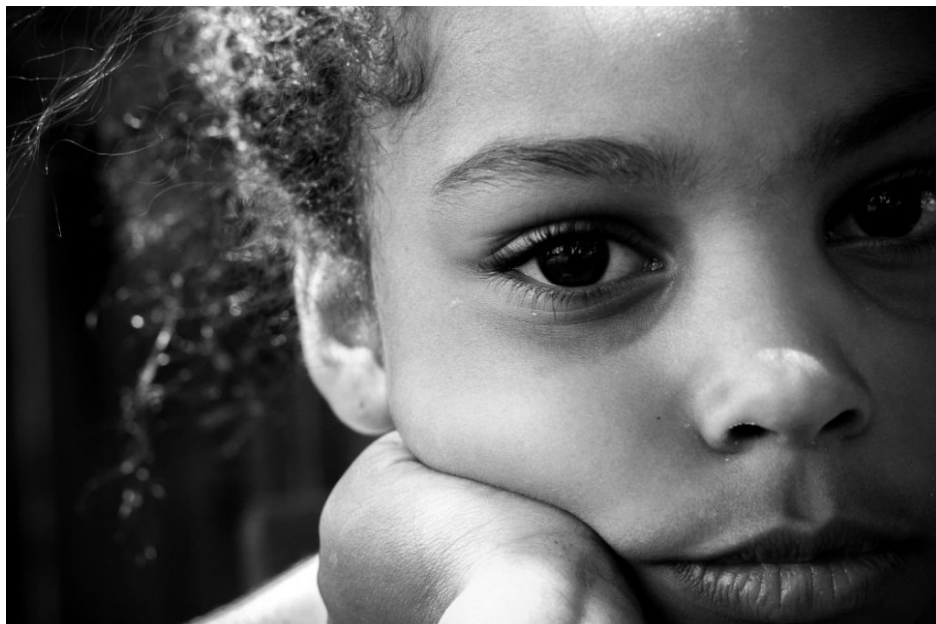
Though, I was no longer a bullying victim, technically, a bully remained in my mind and I constantly found myself going up against her. I went into the ring every time I ran into a “bossy” co-worker, or a friend who poked “harmless” fun at my expense. Or every time I was discriminated against, or crudely dismissed for a job or ignored by a not-so hot crush.

Bullying is not just something that plays out in one scene of our (childhood) and disappears the rest. Research (2013) has shown that being bullied as a child or adolescent leaves you at a higher risk of developing psychological disorders as an adult, such as depression and anxiety. While it may not be possible to completely undo the damage of the past, here are some ways you can counteract against the psychological effects bullying may have on you now as an adult.

Standing Up to Yourself

Confront your Past

The taunts you endured in high school, could be affecting you still. Leanne Prendergast, founder and president of an anti-bullying organization called Love Our Lives, says that one of the biggest ways the trauma from bullying manifests itself later on in life, is through our language.



Frozen in time: Childhood taunts still ringing in your ears? It is time that you rewrite the script.

“There’s a script in our minds that we’ve allowed to rule our thoughts. But the moment we start to rewrite that is when we’ve taken our first step to restore ourselves. Then, we begin the process of letting go of the negativity that we’ve been carrying for so long.”

Don’t Play the Victim

We play the victim every time we blame whatever problems we are dealing with, on someone or something else. No matter what challenges may arise, we’re good at shifting blame away from ourselves, at all cost. While there is no denying the severe impact, you may have experienced as a result of distressing past events, at some point we have to look within to find what part we had to play in our own messes. Though, please don’t use this as an opportunity to fall into the trap of guilt and self-deprecation. You’ve taken a hard beating, so go easy on yourself. Use this time instead to learn from your mistakes and grow into a better version of yourself.

Recognize the Triggers

Maybe you find yourself getting worked up when someone challenges your authority. Or, perhaps you begin to feel insecure around narcissistic personalities. Their persistent need for control may remind you of those bullies from your past. Whatever the situation, try honing in on it. You can’t resolve a problem if you don’t know it’s there.

Seek Support

Research released from The Center for The Developing Child at Harvard University, reveals that supportive, solid relationships with adults and caregivers from early on can actually reverse some of the damaging effects of toxic stress. Though, you are no longer a child, the benefits that come from having a strong support system still apply. Shelly Wiggins, a licensed professional counselor with Driftwood Counseling, says that recognizing the value that comes from a therapeutic relationship process, is highly

important. Whether this be a “mentor, coach, or therapist,” there’s something incredibly rewarding about having “someone that can walk alongside you through a process; it doesn’t have to take years.” So, as you seek to access healing in your life, be open to having someone support you in this new pursuit.

Take your Time

When you’re dealing with deep-rooted issues, you will need to set a grace period for yourself as this will no doubt take a lot out of you. “Sometimes people have this story of bullying that’s so far back in their memory that they may not want to talk about it or they think its so insignificant that it doesn’t matter,” says Wiggins. “It takes some time to work with a person to unravel the story.”

Believe you Can Overcome

Despite the fact that studies show that being bullied can lead to significant mental health problems such as depression later in life, there is still hope. A study published in JAMA Psychiatry found that the detrimental effects of bullying decreased over time, which the authors say indicates the potential for resilience in children exposed to bullying. This is good news, because it shows people can do better, no matter what they might have experienced in the past. It starts by letting go of the pain from previous years and then choosing to cherish a resilient spirit. No matter what you’ve had to endure, believe that restoration is possible.

Speak Up About What Happened



Confront the bullies now: Speak, write and keep a journal about the abuses you suffered. You may empower someone else.

Ignoring traumatic events does not support us in our journey to recovery. After you have acknowledged what has happened to you, the next step is to free yourself from the fear that is paralyzing you and speak up about it. Depending on where you are in your passage to healing, this could look like sharing in a private manner, with a trusted friend or family member. Or, it

could mean choosing to become a public advocate at the appointed time, in order to help others come to terms with their own hurtful experiences.

Take Up Journaling

A study in 2002 found it to be a useful practice for those undergoing trauma or stress, which may be why so many therapists recommend it for their clients.

Wiggins explains this point further. "Just the process of writing out your story can be therapeutic in of itself," she says. "The purpose of doing this is to get the story out of you that might be stuck inside. It also helps to validate your own feelings and dispose of the negative emotions that might be hanging on, so that it doesn't inhibit your daily functioning and current relationships."

As an additional measure to encourage the release of painful thoughts and emotions that may be blocking you from accessing true healing, Wiggins recommends writing a letter to the person who bullied you in one of your private sessions. Though, she does not encourage seeking the person out with the intent of sending the letter, neither should it be posted on a public platform.

Head Outdoors

A breath of fresh air can do wonders. Remember that the next time you find yourself in a toxic situation or lagging under the weight of heavy emotions. Some possible ways you can use your time outdoors well, can be a brisk walk, a cardio workout session, or a cool, refreshing swim. If you're looking for an even quieter option, you might even choose to settle down under the shade of a nice tree with a book. "I have found significant value in taking people out to be in nature," says Wiggins. "It gives [them] a place to be able to express [their] emotions in a complete safe environment which is different from traditional talk therapy."

Forgive

As the popular saying goes, "Not forgiving someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." When you choose not to forgive, you unconsciously feed into a never-ending cycle of bitterness and resentment, which does more harm than good.

Yet, according to the John Hopkins School of Medicine, the biblical principle of forgiveness has substantial health benefits too. Not only does it lower the risk of heart attack, improve cholesterol levels, and reduce pain and blood pressure, it can also decrease levels of depression, anxiety and stress.

"Nine times out of ten when people walk into my office, I am going to have to deal with one of two things, one of which has to do with forgiveness," Wiggins says. "We can all benefit from learning what true forgiveness is." If you're seeking to recover from inner wounds previously inflicted by the bullies of your past, then maybe it's time you tried forgiving them. Believe me, you'll be better for it.