

Ep 5. How do I parent my child in the face of bullying?

[00:00:00] **Kirsten McLeod:** Empathy is, is a skill. So empathy is a skill, but we also born with certain temperaments. So this is the where nature and nurture comes in. Some of us are born more assertive. That's just who we are. It's part of our personality. So sometimes that needs to be really nurtured. I use the word nurtured, cuz it is a beautiful quality, but if it's not nurtured and managed, well, it can get out of hand.

[00:00:28] Um, especially if, if this specific child is going through anything troubling in their lives that assertiveness can be, can be used for an imbalance of power.

[00:00:40] **Vanessa Pickford:** Welcome to the latest episode of this podcast series "The Heath Wrap", powered by Mediclinic Prime - Healthcare experts at your service. I'm your host Vanessa Pickford, a registered nurse and the founder of the Safe-Med Training Centre. Throughout this podcast series, we're looking at various health topics that can affect your children in the baby to teenager age range. Mediclinic Prime, is a health programme created by our team of dedicated experts that unlocks a world of health information for you and your family. Sign up today through the link in the show notes, to gain access to a variety of free resources like newsletters written by specialists, discounts, competitions, an Info-hub to search for health-related information, and more!

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[00:01:47] Like you, I'm a parent. In fact, I'm a mother of four who cares deeply about the health and well-being of my children. In the previous episode, we spoke to Bettie Rall about school readiness and how to prepare a child for school. We explored this topic

in-depth, asking questions like “How do I know if my child is ready?” and “What should I do if they aren’t ready yet?”

[00:02:12] For answers to these and more, go back and have a listen to that episode. In this episode, we are discussing bullying. Bullying is a problem of longstanding and rife amongst children of all ages. Now having never been the target of bullying myself. I very naively embarked on motherhood, not anticipating that this would ever become a problem for my family, much to my horror.

[00:02:37] Therefore, when my second born was in preschool, we got a call about a bullying incident, and we requested to attend a meeting to resolve the matter. Naturally, I immediately started fawning over my son asking if he was alright, and whether he had been hurt. My boy, wasn't terribly forthcoming with the details, which I attributed to his shock and embarrassment at having been [00:03:00] victimised.

[00:03:00] So instead I gave him the pious talk about showing grace and forgiveness to his bully and off we set, me with a reluctant four year old in tow. Well, we were duly met by the teacher for other parents and the child in question who was a little wisp of a thing, which immediately had me assuming that this was obviously a case of emotional bullying, because there was no waif that that wave could have physically gotten the better of my robust son.

[00:03:26] I'm sure by now that you have an inkling about how this story unfolds, but it came as a total surprise to me when my son was named the bully. I was completely blindsided by the torrid details of how my son treated that poor imp of child. Now, over a decade later, I have very bad recall as to how this scenario played itself out.

[00:03:47] But I do remember as if it was yesterday turning to my little boy and explaining, “You did what?” Followed by a hissed threat of just wait until we get home under my breath, which I [00:04:00] immediately regretted because the look that passed between the other adults spoke loud and clear that they thought the apple hadn't fallen far from the tree tree.

[00:04:09] Truth be told, I handled that situation badly. I was unprepared and my responses were far from constructive. Realistically, I'm sure that I'm not alone in my experience and that most of us have either faced bullying ourselves or had a child experience it in some form or other. And in modern times with the proliferation of social media, bullying is also happening online in the form of cyber bullying.

[00:04:33] In fact, according to a 2018 report by IPSOS, 25% of South African parents surveyed said they had a child who had gone through the experience of being cyberbullied. No matter the type of bullying, it is not a subject that parents and caregivers can just ignore and hope for the best. So, we speak to Kirsten McLeod to find out the best strategies to prevent and counteract bullying.

[00:05:00] Kirsten completed her Honours Degree in Psychology at The University of Cape Town in 2013 and has been in private practice for 4 years, working especially with children between the ages of 5 and 12 years old. She is part of the multi-disciplinary team at Foundations for Life - a holistic, multidisciplinary therapy practice situated in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town where they work with families, parents, children and adolescents.

[00:05:29] Kirsten. Thank you for being here and welcome.

[00:05:32] **Kirsten McLeod:** Thank you. Thanks so much for inviting me, um, to chat it, um, on this, uh, subject today.

[00:05:40] **Vanessa Pickford:** Brilliant. Well, let's dive in. Can you please start by defining for us what bullying is?

[00:05:47] **Kirsten McLeod:** Yeah. Sure. So, um, I'd say, you know, the main two components of bullying, uh, there are two components and, and that really is firstly, the imbalance [00:06:00] of power.

[00:06:01] For example, like a physical, you know, a child that is, might have more physical strength, they might use that, um, to bully a child that may, they might perceive as not as strong as

them. So the, the imbalance of power is quite an important part of the definition. Another important part is obviously the repetition.

[00:06:24] So bullying is definitely not something that. Uh, an act that is done once off that is, it occurs when someone seeks to cause harm towards someone else, um, repeatedly. So therefore one would say it is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power, and that could be in friendships or relationships and obviously it comes in different forms.

[00:06:48] **Vanessa Pickford:** You've spoken a bit about play and the physicality of play, but are there actually different types of bullying? And are you able to identify those for our audience and possibly give a short explanation?

[00:06:58] **Kirsten McLeod:** For [00:07:00] sure. Um, so there are various types of bullying. Uh, we've already touched on physical bullying. So that is when, when examples might be, you know, kicking or hitting.

[00:07:13] Um, so when you actually use your physical force to, to cause harm to another, another person, um, another form of bullying is, is verbal verbal bullying that looks like threatening another child or another, another person, um, teasing, name calling, manipulation, um, that falls under, um, emotional bullying so it can, can be can sometimes it's it overlaps the forms of bullying, especially when we talk about verbal, emotional, and then we also have social bullying.

[00:07:54] Social bullying is when, when someone deliberately. Um, [00:08:00] leaves someone out, for example, just one example or spreads rumors about another person. Um, and then of course we have cyber bullying, which I believe you already chatted about in other, in other episodes. Um, but that usually happens online on various social media platforms.

[00:08:22] Um, Yeah, and most, and, but, but these forms of bullying, what really happens the long term effects is, is obviously extremely distressful for children or whoever, whoever experiences this. Um, but it can cause severe psychological harm.

[00:08:39] **Vanessa Pickford:** Mm-hmm mm-hmm yes. It sounds like, um, from what you've said, Bullying is rooted in that imbalance of power that you already alluded to.

[00:08:49] But what do you think possibly motivates people and specifically children to engage in bullying behavior?

[00:08:56] **Kirsten McLeod:** Um, so this is, this is what I, [00:09:00] I like to refer when I talk to parents or teachers. Um, because this is the nature of the work that I do. I work with children and parents. I, I often ask them to imagine an iceberg and on top of the iceberg, that's what we can see.

[00:09:15] You know, those are the behaviors that we see and what we really want to do is we want to think about what's going on below that iceberg? What's going on there, that we can't see? That's what we really want to get to. As a therapist, we want to try and figure out and unpack, um, the, the underlying unmet needs.

[00:09:34] Um, of, of what's causing this bullying behavior and, and what we sometimes, what you would find is, a child displays a lot of anger and that, where does that come from? Anger can come from many things, perhaps, um, an unhappy home where mom and dad might be displaying a lot of anger. [00:10:00] This sometimes bullying behavior is.

[00:10:03] Happens at home and parents aren't really aware of, of, of, of what's what the, what behaviour they're modelling to their children. So various forms of types of bullying behaviour could be going on at home and like physical bullying or, you know, shouting at home name-calling, belittling. Those sort of things could be, be happening at home and children.

[00:10:26] Children learn from us, children learn from their, their primary caregivers. So if they've seen this type of behavior at home, they could be, be going out in the world and, and, and doing that and modelling that behavior or, you know, practicing that behavior towards other people. Cause they're. They, when they get angry, they see, this is what mom and dad do when they're angry.

[00:10:45] So they could try that behavior out on, on the playground, um, in their relationships or friendships. It also could also be a reason why children could, could bully could be because there's this imbalance within [00:11:00] themselves and their home or somewhere in their, in their life could be out of control and sometimes bullying helps them feel more in control.

[00:11:09] So it's this regaining of power by acting out aggressively.

[00:11:14] **Vanessa Pickford:** Let's delve a little deeper into the parenting aspect of bullying. So other than the overtly poor behavior displayed by parents, are there possibly certain parenting styles that inadvertently foster bullying behavior in children, despite our best intentions as parents.

[00:11:33] **Kirsten McLeod:** For sure. Yes. Um, so the, the authoritarian parenting style would be the parenting style that would, would model bullying behavior. So what does that style, what does that look like? That is the type of parenting that is extremely strict. Um, the, the [00:12:00] children don't have a voice. So parents, parents, uh, don't encourage a space or a home environment where children have feelings and their feelings are valid.

[00:12:15] So that is authoritarian parenting style is parents are, are very strict. They don't explain the rules, they don't explain their values. Children just need to listen to their parents and don't ask questions. Um, so it's really an imbalance of power there. Um, and the repetition of, of, um, enforcing, um, extreme rules and regulations over, over, over the children.

[00:12:48] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yeah. So possibly what he's suggesting is there should be some introspection about our parenting styles, but, you know, once the bullying behavior has been identified, how best should [00:13:00] parents or caregivers handle this type of conversation and corrective intervention with the child in a healthy and positive way?

[00:13:08] **Kirsten McLeod:** So, you know, it's important that you know what we need to always think about why I'm going back to the reason why, and children often get labeled this bullied or be-

ing a bully or being labeled a victim. But again, it's not something that they choose. It's not something it's not something they want to be.

[00:13:29] And that's what I always explain to, to parents or teachers is. Um, they can get, we can treat them a certain way based on their behavior, but we need to think about what is making them behave like this. And we need to create a safe space for, for these children to be able to look at themselves and think about and unpack what's going on inside of them.

[00:13:51] Because a lot of, a lot of. A lot of them can be shamed and for being behaving in these inappropriate ways. [00:14:00] And sometimes you, what it looks like is this child is naughty or this child is I can't stand this child cuz this child keeps on picking on my child or this child just is rude. But. We need to provide help.

[00:14:14] We need to create a safe space for these children to be able to externalize the, uh, these angry and very sad feelings actually that they're having in order in order that they can process and unpack them in a safe space, whether that be at home. If parents are able to, to have open communication with their children to provide a listening ear.

[00:14:37] And this, that to create that warm space for them to feel like this is not me. It's not a confrontation. It's a space for me to listen to what you have to say, what is going on for you? What are, what, what, what, what are your feelings? So step into your, that, that bully. Now I'm using that label, which I hate, but step into that. [00:15:00]

[00:15:00] child's emotional world to see what's really going on here. And how can I help my child process this in a way that is appropriate? Because these feeling angry and sad is our important feelings. They're not bad feelings. What we do with those feelings is important and that's what we need to teach our children.

[00:15:22] We need to help them find ways to process these feelings, but in a safe space. And that sometimes that might be a be at home. Sometimes it could be, um, check-ins at home, um, to,

to see and, and, and show that you show your child, that you care about what's going on for them. And that you, you are open to hearing their side, or, you know, sometimes children aren't good at verbalizing their feelings.

[00:15:50] And they might not want to share. They might not feel ready to chat to mom and dad about that. And that's where I feel, um, referring your child to a, [00:16:00] a psychologist or play therapist where those, those professionals have the, have certain skills to be able to invite children, to tell them their stories.

[00:16:09] **Vanessa Pickford:** That's very insightful. And so essentially managing the bullying behavior when it is first identified, seems to be the key to successfully overcoming that bullying behavior, but are they possibly helpful tools or skills that the parent can teach children in order to afford them the language, that emotional language, to be able to discuss the, the bullying and also to prevent them from doing so again, in future?

[00:16:38] **Kirsten McLeod:** For sure. I mean, as I mentioned earlier, that children learn from us. So how we managing our, our stuff, whether that be our anger or sadness, they, they, how we do that, they, they tend to learn from that. So, um, skills would be, like I mentioned earlier, [00:17:00] having actually making. With it once a day, if possible, that would be great.

[00:17:07] Or, you know, two, three times a week where you, where your child knows that this is the time for me to check in and talk about whatever's going on for me, because that also helps your child talk through situations. Um, and it can help them understand and unpack why this is going on and why this behavior is happening and then what steps can.

[00:17:29] So when you're having that conversation, you open up a, you can, you can actually create a space for you for your, for your, for your child and for yourself to think about what am I needing? What am I, what can, what am I, what are you needing from me? Um, so you open up a conversation to, to talk about these unmet needs possible unmet needs, which then will obviously, if you, when you talk about these things, hopefully the behavior be-

comes less and less because you've actually trying to get to the root [00:18:00] of what's of what's causing this.

[00:18:03] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right. And. So, what I'm hearing is that we should be not only encouraging self-reflection in our children, but also modelling it as parents, but to get with self-reflection can empathy be taught or is it just something that we innately born with or without?

[00:18:24] **Kirsten McLeod:** So that is, that's a good question. Um, empathy is, is a skill.

[00:18:30] So empathy is a skill, but we also born with certain temperaments. So this is the where nature and nurture comes in. Some of us are born more assertive. Some of it. That's just who we are. It's part of our personality. So sometimes that needs to be really nurtured. Use the word nurtured, cuz it is a beautiful quality, but if it's not nurtured and managed while it can get out of hand, um, especially if, if the specific child is going through it, [00:19:00] anything troubling in their lives that assertiveness can be, can be used.

[00:19:05] For an imbalance of power. Um, so there, and so that's the one part of what I'm trying of, of my, of what I'm saying here. And the second part is some children are more, are born with more of it, more of a sensitive side to them and sensitive. I don't say that in a bad way. Again, sensitive isn't a weak quality.

[00:19:28] Some of us are more intuitive. Some of us are more aware of others' feelings. So it is definitely something that equality we can be. Um, More prone to being, having, but empathy is modelled at home as well. So, um, I always say, I say to parents, if you want to, if you want your child to be a kind friend, then you need to show your children how, what kindness looks like.

[00:19:59] You need to be [00:20:00] kind to your, to each other, to your family members at home. So fostering a kind. And compassionate home environment is extremely important and compassion is, is, is very important. Um, value. It's also your values that you have at home. So I often say sometimes children don't like the

word 'rules' so we can bring in, in, you know, our values at home, you know, what are our values and, and making our values clear at home and what it, so there's, our values could be having being compassionate, but then we need to also explain what does that look like?

[00:20:40] So children need to, if you say compassion is fine, that's value, but what does that then look like? So when you do make a. Making mistakes. We all, it's part of human nature. We make mistakes. How are you compassionate towards yourself when you make a mistake? [00:21:00]

[00:21:00] **Vanessa Pickford:** Our focus has been largely on the child and behavior modification, but let's take a moment to consider the parent or the caregiver.

[00:21:08] And how they may be affected by the child being identified as a bully. I mean, speaking from personal experience, I went through a season of introspection as a parent when I was told that my child was bullying another kid in his class and it was a dark time for me as a parent, because I thought I was raising a good citizen. [00:21:24] Now I'm sure that I'm not the only one out there who's had this experience. So as a psychologist, what would you say to parents like me?

[00:21:33] **Kirsten McLeod:** Have compassion on yourself. um, because it's not, it's no one, like no one likes to hear something, you know, when their child is, is because you take it personally, of course you do.

[00:21:49] If you, if, if, if you, if you, whether it be, you know, your child is, is engaging in bullying behavior or whether your child is, um, [00:22:00] Cheated on a test or whatever it may be. It's, it's, it's a, it's it is, it feels like it's a reflection on you. So it's can be very hard on parents and it's, it's important to normalize your feelings too.

[00:22:15] And, and, and, you know, if you, if that's something that, uh, you are struggling with as a parent with your self doubt perhaps sometimes, you know, we all say there's no, there's no there's many books on how to be a parent, but when your child is here,

it's, it's a completely different story. So, you know, if I it's just so I, I encourage parents.

[00:22:39] I, I also see a lot of parents, not just children, but I encourage parents. If they needing to feel more empowered as a parent, you know, to ask for help as well. I think asking for help is one of the most powerful things to do. So it's, it's all, if you're saying children can go to, to, to see, to [00:23:00] see a therapist and, and work on themselves, but parents also need to do the same thing.

[00:23:04] Sometimes, sometimes we need some help and it just, whether that means, you know, one or two sessions to, to reflect on how I can be more, um, More place, put more boundaries in place or, um, be more consistent. Those are the sort of things that you could do as a parent to, to help yourself feel more empowered.

[00:23:30] **Vanessa Pickford:** Thank you. Thank you for that advice. Now, other than within the home environment, are there possibly aspects of south African society and its environment that play a role in fostering bullying behavior?

[00:23:44] **Kirsten McLeod:** I mean, I think that is, that is, uh, that's a topic in itself for, uh but yes. Um, there's many, I'd say there reasons like status culture, um, [00:24:00] poverty, violence, um, those are the, definitely the sort of things that in, in society that will, that could add to add to bullying behavior.

[00:24:12] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right. I mean, essentially some of those things you've mentioned again, is referring back to imbalance and imbalance of power. Isn't it? Mm-hmm . Now is there can bullying ever be serious enough to then be classified as a criminal act?

[00:24:28] **Kirsten McLeod:** Well, if we think of what bullying is. When you really violate a victim's dignity and right to equality.

[00:24:37] So, um, there are there's, there are definitely laws, um, that are, are in place in South Africa to protect children, um,

against violence and whatever the form of bullying might be that is happening. So the laws and [00:25:00] what, what the, what the laws, the law does seem to focus on is, um, restorative and rehabilitation.

[00:25:07] So providing, providing, um, programs or, um, so to help the, the, the bully, the label, again, the child who is bullying, um, work through the deeper issues.

[00:25:25] **Vanessa Pickford:** Mm that's so interesting. And you know, we, as a parent of quite a wide range of ages in my house, we are very aware of the influence of social media. So what about cyber bullying?

[00:25:37] We hear a lot about that nowadays. Is this more serious than regular face to face bullying? Are there possibly other criminal implications in cyber bullying that aren't there in regular bullying? Mm.

[00:25:52] **Kirsten McLeod:** So. It's hard to say, which is more dangerous. I mean, if you think of cyber bullying, it is it's, it's [00:26:00] a lot of, a lot of what's going on.

[00:26:02] There is on it. It can be a bit because it's, it's, it's something that we are navigating, cuz technology is, is a lot more, um, At our hands at the moment, especially for children. And it's a big part of our lives. Isn't it. So, um, it's a big responsibility here for parents to take on and be aware of what is out there.

[00:26:25] So we need to educate ourselves as parents as to what apps, what platforms are out there that could be causing what you are encouraging or could be the, uh, foundation or platform for my chart to be, um, engaging or targeted or engaging in bullying or whether it be, or being a victim of bullying.

[00:26:50] **Vanessa Pickford:** Now let's change, focus slightly. [00:26:52] And look at this problem from the perspective of the bullying victim. Firstly, are there [00:27:00] warning signs that parents and caregivers can look out for that might indicate that a child is being bullied?

[00:27:08] **Kirsten McLeod:** Yes for sure. And I'm, I'm happy that we, we are also focusing on the, the, the victim. So the child who is being bullied and some of the warning signs that we could be looking out for is change in behavior.

[00:27:23] And what does that look like? It could be, um, it could be withdrawing, so your child might not be. Motivated to, to get up and go to school. Child might lose a lot of interest in things that they may have loved. Like it might be sport or passion. Your child might not be sleeping well. Um, they might be eating habits.

[00:27:52] May change, uh, might not be. Um, eating as well as they used to [00:28:00] complaining of psychosomatic symptoms. So that is tummy headache, not, and a lot of not complain, a lot of complaining if it's happening at school, of course not wanting to go to school.

[00:28:14] **Vanessa Pickford:** So Kirsten, then. If we start to see changes in our child's behavior and we get the, the inkling that they are, in fact being bullied.

[00:28:24] Could you perhaps give us some tips that we, as parents can provide for our child to help them neutralize a situation in which they're being bullied? Um,

[00:28:33] **Kirsten McLeod:** we need to step into our child's emotional world. Uh, this is the second time I'm saying that, but this is from the, from the child who is being bullied.

[00:28:41] We need to sit them down or have, create that safe space to chat to them about, um, how they're feeling. Cause it, if we. We really think about how they're feeling it's it could be extremely scary for them to, to, to go to [00:29:00] back, go to school or see, or be in an environment that this, this bully is in. So, and it really affects the child's self esteem.

[00:29:09] So, what we would want to do is help your child find their voice, which it's not an easy thing, cuz that's also a skill. Um, especially when, when you feel like there's this imbalance of pow-

er going on. So there's a lot of practice that you could do at home, um, around, um, standing up for yourself.

[00:29:32] Preparation is always key for anything. So coming up with a few. Sentences, um, in future to stand up for yourself, um, simple, direct and clear and boom. And not entering into a conflict or confrontation with, with this child who is bullying. Uh, that's definitely what we don't want. [00:30:00] We want to diffuse it. So whether that is cause we wanna give help with this, the child who's been bullied.

[00:30:07] We want them to feel like good about themselves. Like they've done something for themselves. So I always encourage this practicing of a firm clear sentence statement that you could say back.

[00:30:21] **Vanessa Pickford:** Excellent. So a direct, clear firm statement and then not having the child enter into conflict and try and neutralize it by walking away.

[00:30:35] Sounds excellent. Now, as parents, we encourage our children to stand up for the downtrodden, but bullying is complex and we don't want our child to become the target when they are possibly trying to help a classmate. So what should they do if they see that a friend is being bullied, would them then, [00:30:54] making this direct care firm statement on their friend's behalf, be the best course of [00:31:00] action.

[00:31:01] **Kirsten McLeod:** Um, I think it is standing up for each other is always a good, a good idea. Um, so that would be one option. Um, another option would be of course, speaking to an adult and, and. And exploring that option. So standing up for one's friend is a good quality to have in a friend, but, um, I'd also depends on the situation.

[00:31:28] Talk to talk to, to talk to an adult as well and see what they can do to help you.

[00:31:34] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right. Brilliant. Now, As a parent. And I imagine that I speak for most parents that at some stage or other,

a child of theirs is going to not necessarily be the bully themselves, but they may have a friend group who are doing the bullying and your child is too afraid to stand up to them or distance themselves from that group.

[00:31:58] What should we do as parents? Should we [00:32:00] intervene on our child's behalf? Or should we simply give our child the skills to make the right decision and walk away?

[00:32:08] **Kirsten McLeod:** It's a tough one because our children want to belong. So it's, it's, it can be quite difficult to navigate this situation. It depends on the age of a child.

[00:32:19] Um, If you, if we are talking about, you know, tweens, you, it's, it's difficult to navigate because there it's, there's a sense of belonging that is so strong in them that they want to be part of. And mom and dad might not be as important at this stage as, as, as friends. So I think a lot of guidance there and keeping a close eye of what's going on and what they, you know, they just, now we're talking about, you know, online stuff, if there's WhatsApp groups or what are they part of, what are they doing?

[00:32:55] And then also keep by keeping an eye on what groups they are in. [00:33:00] Online as well as, um, amongst their friends is just noticing changes in them. If you're noticing any behavior changes, then it's time to intervene. You know, maybe it could be changes in behavior at home where they're just not cooperating that much anymore.

[00:33:19] Um, they're using different language. They are behaving ways that are just not like them. That's when I'd say it's definitely time to intervene and have a look at what, what are you getting from this friendship? Why are you in this friendship? Yes, let's talk about that..

[00:33:38] **Vanessa Pickford:** Oh, that's that's excellent. That's excellent.

[00:33:41] Kirsten bullying seems to evolve as children get older, um, from the, those tussles on the playground to becoming really

quite sinister, uh, with cyber bullying and perhaps more provoked bullying when the, when the kids reach their teen years. So looking at that from a [00:34:00] perspective of what if the bully is an adult who possibly holds a position of authority over the child, it feels even more sinister. [00:34:07] So what should parents do if it is the teacher who is the bully?

[00:34:12] **Kirsten McLeod:** Well, if it's the teacher, um, that's the bully, then, then that's something you would, you would definitely. Go to and talk to the head of the school to go to, you know, management or, um, cuz that's something that's really, you need to think about what is in your circle of control.

[00:34:32] What can I do here? And what's out of my circle of control and that applies to many things. So, um, When it comes to external sources like the school, you need to think if this is the sports coach or the teacher that is bullying my child, what's in my control to do something about this and unpack that, that.

[00:34:54] And what does that look like? So it's the top of my head that, that looks like growing and [00:35:00] having a discussion with the deputy principal or the principal and reporting this behavior.

[00:35:07] **Vanessa Pickford:** Are you suggesting then that whenever there is an adult involved in the bullying, the parent shouldn't delay in intervening on behalf of the child?

[00:35:19] **Kirsten McLeod:** Yes. So we need to first, we also need to make sure that it is bullying. So we need to go back to our definition and as to what this looks like. Cause we as parents, we can also get quite emotional and our emotions. Emotions can make us do impulsive things. So, and I've seen that happen a few times where the, where something happens at school and parents are quick to go into the school and create a whole scene about what's happened, but we need to also, we need to get both stories.

[00:35:52] So, you know, it's important to, to chat to. To the, the, the, the teacher or the, [00:36:00] whoever, it may be about what you've noticed. And what's come to your tension that, um, these

are the, this is what I'm, this is what I'm hearing from my child. These are the signs that I'm noticing. Can you tell me what's going on to clarify what is, you know, for sure.

[00:36:17] You know, what actually is going on and take it from. Yeah,

[00:36:23] **Vanessa Pickford:** that's very good advice. I know as a parent that I invariably take my child's side and believe that they are the victim, and sometimes I've been proved very wrong. So having with the, possibly the, the, the awareness, the self-awareness that we as parents are trying to strive for in this day and age, um, In developing emotional vocabularies and, you know, fostering a, an environment that is conducive to a good communication with our children.

[00:36:54] How together with that? How should we try and foster [00:37:00] a relationship where the child feels safe enough to confide in us? And what happens if it is not the parent that the child chooses to confide in when they're being bullied?

[00:37:13] **Kirsten McLeod:** Well, I always, I, when I do workshops with, with kids at schools, um, I often ask who has a safe person that they can talk.

[00:37:21] And sometimes that safe person isn't isn't their parents. Sometimes the safe per person is their play teacher or another friend's parents, as long as, as long as there's one person that you can talk to, that's a safe person that will hear you. Um, that's important. Um, and then, you know, it's important to normalize feelings at.

[00:37:45] I think there's there's this, this idea or this condition in rather that. Being scared or being nervous or being angry or sad is, is not you, you might be weak if [00:38:00] you have those feelings or you bad, if you have those feelings, that those, those feelings are valid. And those feelings are just as important as happy and excited.

[00:38:08] So making space and normalizing these feelings at home by sharing your own personal experiences. With your children and, and earning your feeling and say, giving, giving examples. When you give of yourself, it's more, your children will be, will open up more something I do in my work as well. When, when we expect our children to tell us things, how was your day what's going on?

[00:38:35] But you know, well, what did they know about us? You know, are we sharing? Are we giving of them ourselves? Are we them? Our struggle? Because when children see that we are struggling, they'll think, okay. It's okay for me to struggle. Cause struggling is normal. Feeling UN feeling scared is normal. Um, making a mistake is normal and not being as tough and successful and [00:39:00] studious child all the time.

[00:39:01] That's, that's not normal. You know, we don't, we can't be like that all the time. So if we are struggling and we need some help asking for help is normal to show your children that, that. Normal.

[00:39:13] **Vanessa Pickford:** So it feels like ultimately the education and empowering of the child to either prevent them from becoming a bully or alternatively becoming the victim of a bully needs to be something that is ongoing within parenthood.

[00:39:30] So at what age should we start empowering and educating our children? And how frequently should we be doing.

[00:39:38] **Kirsten McLeod:** I mean, I think it's, it's we that's, that's a big question again. but just to put it just for, to, you know, just your life really begins when the moment you're conceived. So whatever mom goes through while when pregnant with you, if mom goes through any traumatic experience that really does have an effect on [00:40:00] you one day, when you.

[00:40:01] When you eventually born. Um, so that has a, but, um, you know, since from, from very, from, as a, from a baby, the language is so important. The language we use is so important. Um, and again, showing children, what, what a respectful and kind re-

relationship looks like is important. And they see that between your interactions with your family members and.

[00:40:32] Taking ownership of your feelings by saying, and it's, you know, I'm talking about language again. I feel like this, when this happens, that's that's you not blaming someone, that's you taking ownership of, of your feelings instead of you make me feel like this, you did this and you made me feel like that.

[00:40:51] There's a big difference. It's it's rather than saying you say, I, I feel angry [00:41:00] when this happens, when you behave like that, so that you must come later, start with yourself.

[00:41:06] **Vanessa Pickford:** Brilliant. Brilliant. We'll also add that as a link to the resources in the show notes. Now bullying feels a bit like an inevitability of childhood, but are there possible long term psychological and physical impacts of bullying?

[00:41:21] **Kirsten McLeod:** Yes. If it's, if it's repetitive, if it's repeated, if it's ongoing, it, it, it can change the, the. The wiring in your brain of how you see yourself, so, and how you, what you believe and how you, how you view yourself and what your worth is. So if you're subjected to, to behavior and you put down teased, you, you, you don't believe in yourself, you, you can feel you'll have low self esteem, um, and that can really impact your.

[00:41:56] Who you are, um, as an adult and how you [00:42:00] interact with the world and how, um, and your relationships and the type of relationships that you form. And that could, that's a whole nother thing as well. Cause then you could be a victim within your relationship, cuz that's who you've been your whole life. You don't know anything better.

[00:42:16] You don't know anything else.

[00:42:19] **Vanessa Pickford:** Gosh. I mean, that's, I don't think that's the way most of us parents have been raised. Is it so are there possibly any resources that we can tap into that will assist us with this?

[00:42:29] **Kirsten McLeod:** I mean, they, the internet is actually also a wonderful place. cause there's a lot, there's a lot of, of free, um, resources and parenting.

[00:42:42] Um, Podcasts. Like what, what, like what we doing now. Um, so the child Mind Institute is a great website, um, cuz that real-ly, it, it gives a lot of information about the different stages of child [00:43:00] development. Um, and there is another woman psy-
chologist that I've just started listening to and she's got great pod-casts and she, she helps.

[00:43:12] She, she, she looks at the child as a whole child and not from one perspective. And I'm going to give you her name now, and she's written various books as well. Her name is Mona Dela-hooke. She is. She is so really she's a child psychologist and she looks beyond, beyond the behavior brain, body parenting. So she's really great.

[00:43:38] Um, and she also gives real laugh examples, which al-ways helps.

[00:43:44] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yes, indeed. And. Just lastly to add that, you know, because the health Wrap series is all about equipping you as parents and caregivers. We have a PDF down-load to help parents and caregivers know how to talk to their chil-dren about bullying. It's called "10 conversation starters to use with your children when talking about bullying." You can find a link to this resource in the show notes of this episode.

[00:44:07] Thanks, Kirsten. We really appreciate your valuable ad-vice on this topic. You gave us an in-depth look at the types and causes of bullying. We asked difficult questions like how to help your child if they are the bully. We also looked at how to recognise when your child is being bullied and how to help them respond to bullying. And lastly, we spoke about healing from bullying trauma, and how parents can educate children about bullying. It's my hope that this chat will equip parents and caregivers to know how to handle various bullying situations in the future.

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