



Lesson 2, Counselor Resource

Greetings!

Hopefully, you've been enjoying the lessons that your teacher has been doing in your classes. I have no doubt that you all know only too well a little bit about Cyberbullying. I'm guessing that every one of you has seen something mean posted on a MySpace site or maybe even received an unpleasant text message yourself. There's a lot of cool vocabulary in this lesson as well as some interesting videos and articles from the newspaper about real situations. That's the thing –more and more this subject is getting in the news now and schools, kids and parents are having to address bullying and all its ramifications. Basically schools are getting the message that we need to make bullying stop. Now!

I have to tell you that one word really just hit me hard when I studied this lesson and that word was "**justification.**" Your teacher told you that bullies tend to "justify" their actions and behaviors in respect to bullying and/or meanness. I want you to stop and think about what that looks like:

- When one justifies their behaviors they give themselves **permission** to act a certain way.
- When one justifies their actions they **stop questioning** their behavior.
- When one justifies their behaviors they **stop examining** their actions by thinking about ethics.
- They just accept that what they are doing is okay and **give up their responsibility.**

Think about this little scenario. You're on the bus and one boy is routinely picked on and the target of racial slurs that disrespect his culture and heritage. You don't really know the boy well – though you've had classes with him. Maybe he's even been a lab partner at one time. He's not really your friend though – in fact you've always thought that he was a little strange yourself; after all he doesn't have a lot of friends and he seemed kind of annoying when you had to work with him. So....you're sitting there listening to some kids really give him a hard time. You don't join in - well not exactly – but you don't say anything either. When your friend kind of laughs and goes along – you smile – after all – you don't want to stand out and have them notice you. He finally gets off the bus and to be honest you are kind of relieved because you have to admit it was uncomfortable. But – you didn't say anything.

So – how did you justify your behavior for doing nothing?

- You may have justified it by keeping the focus on him and away from you.
- You tried to justify it by judging him as "strange" or "annoying".
- You tried to justify it by saying that you aren't really friends with him so you shouldn't have to care.
- In truth you justified it by simply refusing to really think about what it was like for him.

As this week goes on I'm going to ask you to do something that is really quite the opposite of "justification." I'm going to ask you to work on the quality of empathy. When you show empathy you imagine that you are literally walking in another's shoes, feeling what they are feeling and sharing their experiences. Here's what I want you to do:

1. If you see any incident of bullying – in real life – on a television show or movie – or in a book –try to imagine exactly what it would be like to have that experience happen to you.
2. If you see any incident of bullying – look around you and notice the reactions and responses of other people. Are people looking away? Are there people who are uncomfortable? Are there people who are laughing and joining in? Who do you want to be like?
3. Have one conversation with another person this week where you use the skill of empathy. You might say something like...
 - a. I could see that you were feeling really bad when they made fun of you. I'm really sorry.
 - b. Hey, Mom – you look really tired. I think you must have been really busy today.
 - c. Wow – that looked like it really hurt when you fell. Do you need a hand?

Truly my friends – using the skill of empathy is the key to turning all this around. I hope that you have a great week. We'll be talking a lot about empathy and justification in the weeks to come.

Take care!

Mrs. G.