

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

3 Conversation-Starters If Your Athlete Is Being Bullied by Michelle Wells, Guest Contributor



“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” – Plato

Unfortunately, not everyone heeds this advice, and at some point, your child may have interactions with a mean person.

Learning to cope with the not-so-nice words and opinions of others is a natural part of growing up. **However, when the occasional negative interaction turns into a continuous and painful reality, it becomes a form of bullying.**

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Unfortunately, sports teams are not immune to the antics of bullies.

What's a parent to do when YOUR athlete becomes a target?

First and foremost, it's important to recognize that the coach is responsible for the culture of the team.

Not only does he need to be modeling a respectful attitude toward his athletes, parents, and opponents, but it's up to him to demand the same from all his athletes. Speaking to him is a good place to start if you are uncertain about what is going on, but SUSPECT that your child is not being treated well.

If the bullying seems to be on a larger scale – than the coach can handle – it is wise to involve the athletic director so that it can be addressed from the top of the entire program.

Often, young athletes are embarrassed to admit that they are victims of a bully. This makes it difficult for parents to engage their child in an open and honest conversation.

But communication with YOU is their best shot at a healthy perspective on what is going on, so it is imperative to find ways to talk to them.

Here are 3 conversation-starters to have if you feel your athlete is being bullied.

1) What Do YOU Think About You?

We are all vulnerable to the opinions of others but never is this more pronounced than in the teen years.

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[Dr. Wayne Dyer](#) shares a story of when his young daughter came home upset because some of her friends decided they no longer liked her. She lamented to him that their opinion of her seemed to change suddenly.

He looked at her and said, **“What do YOU think of you?”** She thought for a moment and said well, I think I’m nice. I like me. He went on to point out that her opinion was more important than her friends’ opinion.

Your athlete needs to hear that the fickle opinion of friends does not trump how SHE views herself.

2) Does Your Value Change?



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When a person is teased, shunned, or physically pushed around for a period of time, the emotional weight becomes enough that he may start to question his value.

Ask your athlete this: **Does your VALUE change when someone pays you a really nice compliment?**

Point out that although praise, flattery, and admiration feel great, they don't increase your VALUE as a human being. And the same is true – in reverse – when a mean comment is made.

A person's worth or value does not change – regardless of the opinions or actions of others.

3) What Do Both Mean People and Nice People Need?

Bullies are insecure. They cope with their self-doubt by belittling someone else.

Brainstorm with your athlete about the possible insecurities the bully might have.

Perhaps she:

- Struggles in school
- Doesn't have loving parents
- Feels unattractive
- Alienates friends

Ask your child this question: **What do all kids need, whether they are nice or mean?**

One of the strongest human desires is to have friends. And mean kids are no different.

Help your athlete to see that, although the bully may ACT like they don't care about anyone, they in fact do. They need friends too.

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Moving Forward

Bullying is a serious situation that should never be ignored or minimized. It requires immediate attention and diligent follow-up.

Conversation with your athlete may be awkward at first, but asking the right questions, while showing support is the best way to get to the bottom of what is going on.

The more you know, the better your course of action will be.

Michelle Wells is a wife to one and a mom to six, with 20 plus years of experience at both. With a love for being active in sports, she took her passion for competitive training to the world of triathlons. In an effort to share her enthusiasm for a balanced and healthy life she inspires others through personal training and freelance writing.

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