It was just about time for our fifteen-minute break. As I was helping “Kayla” (my 9 year old mentee) finish her homework, she paused to talk to her friend “Melinda.” Kayla began telling her about what had happened at recess today. I stopped what I was doing and intently listened to their conversation. “Melinda, I really wanted to play jump rope today, but the cool girls wouldn’t let me join in,” remarked an extremely upset Kayla. Melinda replied, “You know we’re never allowed to play with them because we aren’t cool like them. They never include us because we don’t fit in with them and they don’t like us.” My eyes darted to Kayla. I was caught so off guard, and instantly I felt like a concerned mother. “Kayla, what happened and who are these girls?” I asked. Kayla refused to say anymore. Her face lost any trace of color it had, and her eyes became dreary at the thought of being a bully victim.

Authors Marini et al. (2006) define bullying as a form of hostility found among peers (p.551). Fleming et al. (2009) associate bullying with side effects such as depression, anger, resentment, anxiety, shattered self-esteem, and antisocial behavior (p.131). For example, one night for homework Kayla had to find five words in the dictionary that best described herself. For ten minutes she sat and stared at the pages. I said, “Kayla, what about ‘smart,’ ‘intelligent,’ and ‘beautiful?’” But she frowned and lowered her eyes to the floor. I was later informed that at the Youth Assist Program, in which I volunteer (Cortland, N.Y.), all 28 of the youths from the ages of nine to seventeen are bullied. This program is designed to provide the youths with a haven. Kirsty Scott (2010) claimed that such programs are vital because they help youths manage with social and emotional setbacks, which often go unseen in the school (Scott, 2010). In “The bully as victim?,” author Gillian Patterson (2005) claims “one in four primary school pupils are bullied,” and the harassment ranges from direct physical bullying (such as shoving, kicking, and hitting) to indirect bullying, which in Kayla’s situation includes social exclusion, rumors, and made up tales (p. 27).
The high levels of depression that arise from being bullied can do serious damage to a youth’s psychosocial emotions, which are his or her feelings that come about after psychological/social interactions with others. Authors Marini et al. (2006) say that damaged psychosocial emotions can range from social anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, bad temperament, and unbalanced peer relations (p. 551). These psychosocial changes in children’s activity levels (such as socially excluding themselves from activities involving others) and emotions have been linked by Marini et al. to bullying “because they limit children’s ability to self-regulate impulsive, inappropriate behavior” (p. 553).

Based on T. Buggey’s (2007) observations, the chart below represents Marini et al.’s study of the impact of psychosocial emotions, and shows that bully victims had higher rates of depression than non-bullied youths, and bullied youths had lower levels of self-esteem than non-bullied youths (Diagram). Patterson (2005) states, “children who experience chronic stressors such as disability, socio-economic deprivation, long-term parental arguing and repeated abuse” are likely to suffer the side effect of depression from bullying (p. 28), which means that the young boys and girls are likely to get picked on for being poor and for having learning disabilities which I’ve seen and heard about at the Youth Assist Program. Youths who are victims of negative social environments (bullies) don’t know how to regulate their actions and behaviors because they have been so physically and verbally attacked by others. They no longer know if who they are and what they do is considered acceptable by the “cooler kids.” This growing vulnerability in bully victims has become a global phenomenon.

Lila C. Fleming and Kathy H. Jacobsen (2009) conducted a study in Chile to better understand the relationship between bullying and the symptoms of depression (p. 130). This study was the first ever to examine bullying and its symptoms of depression in South America. The Chilean study was focused on youths from low or middle range incomes, which Fleming and Jacobsen saw as a factor relating to bullying. After reviewing the Chilean students responses, Fleming and Jacobsen concluded that students who had claimed that they were being bullied due to socio-economic deprivation, were more likely to be depressed and lack a group of close friends (p. 133). Here in Cortland County, many of the children who attend Youth Assist Program (YAP) are from lower income families which makes them susceptible to bullying. I have heard the children at YAP say that they feel picked on if their clothes aren’t nice like those of other kids in their class, or that they had to buy their Halloween costume from a thrift store instead of getting a newly packaged one at Party City. It is upsetting to see how society has grown so accustomed to judging others by their material aspects, which only continues to widen the gap between class levels.
Being socially excluded by others leads to the youths having no strong peer connections, and they begin to feel lost. Author Gillian Patterson (2005) stated that this feeling of hopelessness is just another sign of depression (p. 28). I had seen this in Kayla: she had been socially excluded at recess games. This sparked her call for help and guidance from the Youth Assist Program.

As YAP provides aid for bullying victims in Cortland County, the Committee for Children offers the same support, except on a larger, global level in countries from Japan to Slovakia. This international organization reaches out to children in hopes of preventing bullying, violence, and child abuse. Their program, Second Step, was formed to diminish bullying, and to help create a safer environment for children and relieve them from this burden (Committee for Children).

MEEDUCO (Mind, Education and Heart), a program partner of Committee for Children, translates and assimilates the program teachings into Chilean schools and culture. Chileans refer to this program as Paso Adelante Chile, or Step Ahead Chile. Step Ahead Chile carries out the prevention of bullying and aims to help children live in more peaceful harmony. Like Fleming and Jacobsen’s study, Step Ahead Chile researched Chilean bullying, but instead of studying students who had not been participants in a program that addressed bullying, they studied students who had been participating in their bullying prevention program. Their results showed that when comparing students who participated in the program to those who did not, “78% improved their social skills, 42% showed to be less aggressive, 37% were more apt to choose positive social goals, and the students needed 41% less adult intervention to resolve conflicts” (Step Ahead). This being said, it is important to give bully victims proper aid and mentoring because as Step Ahead Chile demonstrated, aid leads to positive results from the youths.

Kayla is a beautiful, smart, and unique young girl. Every Tuesday for two and a half hours, I make it my goal to help her see that she is all those things plus many more. It kills me to witness how bullying has made her become sensitive and defenseless. A nine-year old girl should never have to hesitate to be herself. As a proud member of the Youth Assist Program, I want to be able to help Kayla recognize all the great things she has to offer, and help lift the victimization off of her shoulders.

Works Cited


