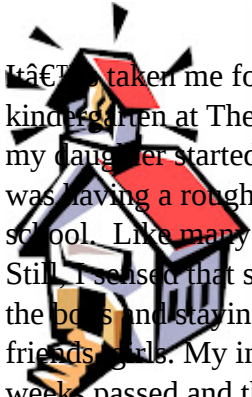


Kindergarten And The Bully

Description



Itâ€™s taken me four years to feel strong enough to write about my daughterâ€™s first few months of kindergarten at The Willows Community School in Culver City, CA. Even thinking about it is difficult. When my daughter started kindergarten, I knew something was wrong starting from about the third week of school. She was having a rough transition to kindergarten. She didnâ€™t cry when I dropped her off and she seemed to like school. Like many kids, she took time to get used to her new surroundings and the new kids. Thatâ€™s normal. Still, I sensed that she wasnâ€™t connecting with girls in the class like she usually would. She was playing with the boys and staying away from most of the girls. Hmm. Something was off. In preschool she had three best friends, girls. My intuition was telling me there was something wrong, but I couldnâ€™t put a finger on it. A few weeks passed and things still felt off. Then, about two months after kindergarten started, the answer emerged.

My daughter had a bully in her class who was picking on her and a few other girls. Yes, a B-U-L-L-Y. This girl had started in Developmental Kindergarten a year earlier so she had been at the school a year longer than my daughter who was new to kindergarten. This girl also had a teenage sibling who had already graduated from the school. I knew my daughter was having a hard time making friends with the girls in her class. She was doing just fine with the boys, but the girls were a different story. Then, as kids do, she broke down sobbing one day and told me enough for me to piece together details. I still remember it vividlyâ€¦where we were, what we were doing, what she said. Still, I was new at the school and the last thing I wanted to do was to start calling the school with complaints. Yet, this was too serious to ignore.

Luckily, a mom in our class who has two older kids, asked me if my daughter was having similar problems to her daughter. We compared notes and then to my surprise and relief, our daughtersâ€™ experiences were virtually the same. They were being excluded from play with the girls in the class. They were being told they couldnâ€™t play certain games on the yard. They were being called unkind names.

The mom of my daughterâ€™s classmate knew exactly what to do. She pulled the head of the school aside at Back To School Night and told her the situation. The school moved quickly to address the problem. It took many months for the situation to be resolved, but it was finally under control by the end of kindergarten. It was a rough year. At the end of second grade the bully was asked to leave the school.

The parents of the bully seemed to take little or no responsibility for the problems. They seemed to find her bullying endearing and even charming. At a playdate, with me and her parents sitting right there, this girl suddenly picked my daughter up, lifted her and dropped her. My daughter fell hard on the ground, startled and scared. I didnâ€™t know the bully and her parents were going to be at the playdate or I would not have taken my daughter. Her parents chided her and let it go. We left.

I found the behavior of the child and parents appalling. I never spoke to them about it and they never approached me to discuss it. I can say this: if either of my kids ever bullied or were unkind to another child, Iâ€™d be on the

phone to the other parent to let them know I was handling it at home. Our kindergarten year was up and down, not nearly as welcoming as we would have liked. All it takes is one child to disrupt an entire grade. Ours had it. Yours might too. You just never know what your new class will be like—the kids or their parents.

Private elementary schools encourage parents to let the school handle problems. They don't like "helicopter parents" and parents who meddle. That's fine, but sometimes, you just want to talk to another mom in your child's class and get her thoughts, opinions, ask her the question, "what would you do?" I recently asked the mom who helped me identify the bullying problem how she was doing. She said "great, now that (the bully's name) is no longer at the school." Even she has bad memories that will last a long time.

Calling parents directly when there is a conflict between kids is discouraged by the schools. I understand why. It can—and does—lead to arguments, accusations, disagreements. Still, I will always call another family if my kids ever do something I feel requires an apology. Parenting is difficult on a good day and sometimes we all need another parent to talk to who understands the situation. And, I'll always reach out to other moms. It helps me be a better mom.

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