ON BULLYING

A JOURNAL OF YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

ONECA

Ontario Native Education Counselling Association

INTRODUCTION

We know that bullying is an urgent and pervasive problem that has long lasting effects on all of us.

The Ontario Native Counselling Association (ONECA) has complied these personal stories, insights, poems, lyrics and artwork from our youth. We hope that through their words, we can gain a better understanding of the impacts of bullying, so that we can affect change together.

CONTENT WARNING

The following reading includes emotionally difficult material, including topics related to eating disorders, racism, verbal abuse, physical violence, self harm and suicide. This content may be difficult and we encourage you to care for your safety and well-being. If you believe that reading this may be harmful to you, then you may choose to forgo it.

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HOPEFORWELLNESS.ca
Indigenous Help Line
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TALK4HEALING.com
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YOUTHLINE.ca
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1 800 268 9688
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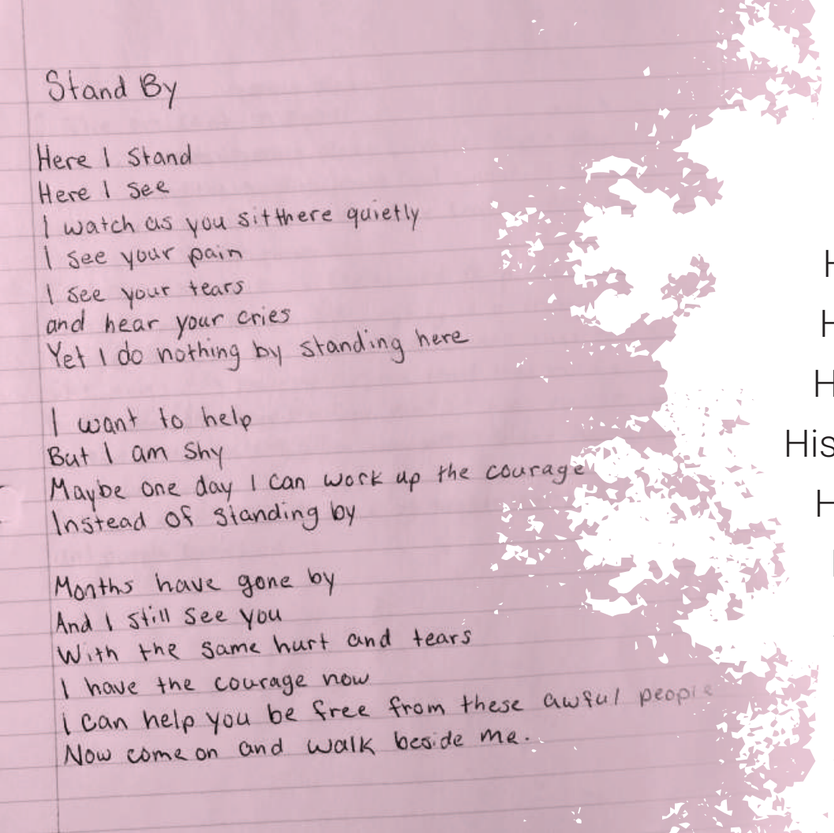


He got quieter.
His nights got longer.
His blades got bigger.
His sleeves got longer.
His music became louder.
His meals got smaller.
He became skinnier.
And no one noticed.

Too WHITE, Too BROWN

I am of mixed race. My father is Indigenous and my mother was a Caucasian woman. When I was in high school, I went to a predominately white school. There were other native kids but I never belonged with either group. I was too white for the native kids and too brown for the white kids. The native kids would ask me, "*If you're native then let's see your status card.*" And the white kids would ask me to "*chant and dance like an Indian*". I thought of my elders and ancestors and would remember to be strong and resilient. I am a proud mixed woman and now want my son to grow up the same way.

– 21 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"This stuff goes on all the time and kids are afraid to speak up because it will make things worse for them. It will make them targets in the future for other reasons too."

FOR MY KINKY HAIR

I was different. They had straight long blond hair, beautiful blue eyes like the ocean, pale smooth skin. And then there was me, dark brown eyes, kinky hair that would stick out in a crowd and brown skin that looked like chocolate. I despised school so much that I would fake being sick so that I could stay home, and my parents saw me change from being their cheerful little girl. I wish I could tell my younger self that it's completely fine to be different, and don't let others decide your worth. You are worthy, beautiful and strong. I am thankful I am here today, as sadly a lot of other kids can't say the same.

– 16 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"Adults should always try to make sure that they present themselves as someone safe to talk to and seek advice from."

ON THE SPECTRUM

People pick on me because I have autism. I often don't understand situations as I see them differently, and I don't understand the different meaning of words. I gave up going to the office because they don't help much and don't believe me. Other people were telling me that they were going to kill my guide dog. My dog guide was my best friend and really helped me when I had anxiety.

Autism is sometimes hard to see because it doesn't show unless you have a meltdown or if you can't talk. People think you are a bad kid that doesn't have manners.

Because I have been bullied so much, I have bullied other people. Bullying has shown me that I can get my own way, and I feel powerful. But after, when I think about it, I feel bad and remember how I felt when I was bullied. I like to spend my time with adults because they understand me better and are more patient when I act silly or tell them bad jokes. Instead of getting me in trouble, they explain why I shouldn't say things that can hurt others. Adults need to know if someone has a special need or disability before they judge you.

– 19 YEAR OLD

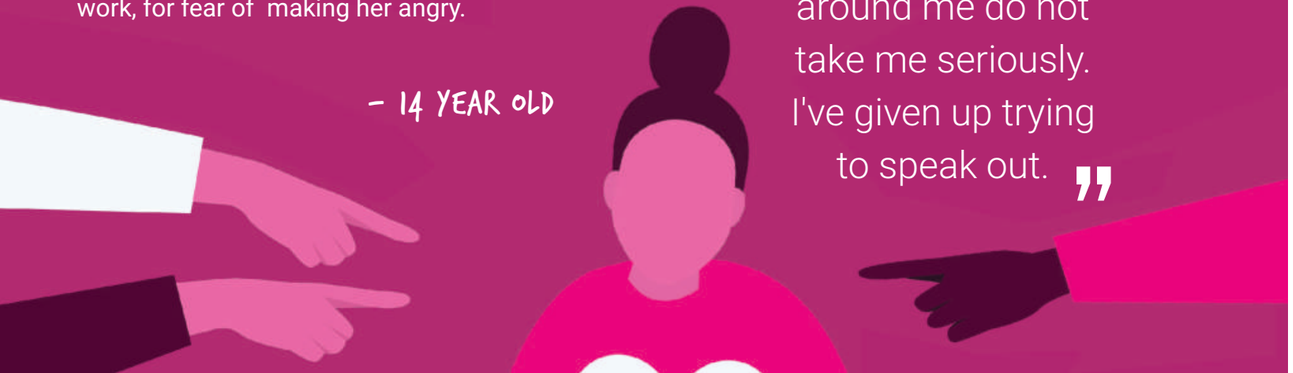
“Letting someone know that you're there for them is more important than you’d think. Some people don't have anybody.”

BULLIED BY A TEACHER

I feel bullied by my teacher. I was made to feel belittled, unheard and a bother to her. She has expressed multiple times that I make her life harder. I feel like she goes out of her way to pick on me and call me out in front of the entire class. I always wanted to skip school and was never comfortable asking for help with my work, for fear of making her angry.

– 14 YEAR OLD

"Talking to principles or teachers didn't resolve anything. I feel like adults around me do not take me seriously. I've given up trying to speak out."



NOT JUST DRAMA

When I was in 8th grade, I was bullied by people I thought were my friends. I suffered for a year with really bad depression and anxiety. I didn't want to leave my bed. I didn't want to go to school. I would feel sick and call home. I finally told my mom what was happening and she believed me. But I wanted teachers to help at school because it all happened at school. When I told teachers about it, they told me it was just drama and it would blow over. But it wasn't. I want adults to know that not everything that happens is just petty middle school drama. It's real and it effects people really badly.

– 15 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"Adults know that some students feel stressed about school, but they cannot perceive the quantity of students that hide these feelings."

FOR BEING INDIGENOUS

From ages 10-18, I was bullied for the way I looked or even because of the colour of my skin. I was mostly bullied for being Indigenous. This bullying made me feel alone, out of place, like I didn't belong.

I remember being bullied in my geography class in grade 9 because of my name. My name was different and new, that no one had heard before, and I think that made other people feel threatened. It made me hate my name. All I wanted was just to fit in.

– 18 YEAR OLD

"I handled my situations of being bullied by always telling someone, either a teacher or my mom. My mom always knew what to say to make me feel better and unique. I grew up and stopped caring about what other people think of me."

BULLY IN ME

The bully in me won't let you be
Hurt people hurt people, so I hurt you
I torment you, ruin your day
I don't mean to make people cry
I won't deny, I lie and fight
But that's what I've know to be right
I try to submerge the anger and rage
With all my might, replace it with happiness
Instead it comes out as spite
I say things to hurt to help me feel alright
To no prevail, I don't gain a thing,
I carry on with a sick feeling of guilt inside
I don't write this for pity
I write this so you see another side to me

– 15 YEAR OLD

FOR BEING LGBTQ2S+

When I was 4, I had my room painted purple and loved to play with barbies. Everyone at school said that was “girly”. Young me thought that was an insult, but soon it started my journey to figure out who I am. In grade 4, I started to have a relationship with a boy. Everyone ridiculed me for being gay, but I did not care. I was who I was, and that is it. My parents were more than supportive, but I was not accepted at school. To this day, I deal with everything; being Autistic, Pansexual, Non-Binary, a Furry and having ADHD. Through years of therapy and growing a hard exterior, I can deal with it. It still hurts, but not as much.

– 15 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

“I tried telling teachers about my situation and the principal every time, but nothing ever changed. My parents were my only advocates and the only ones who helped me.”

CHERS ADULTES

Je suis souvent passée à côté.
Ignorant les insultes chuchotées et les remarques déplacées
Je ne savais pas comment réagir.
J’essayais de me convaincre que c’était pour faire rire.
Je baissais ma tête dans les couloirs.
Je faisais semblant de ne rien voir.
J’avais honte de ne rien faire.
Mais la culpabilité que je ressentais ne m’empêchait pas de me taire.
Sachez chers adultes, que les sourires peuvent être fabriqués.
La joie de vivre peut être simulée.
Un seul “Comment à été ta journée?” n’est pas assez.
Car l’habituel “ Très bien! Et toi” est toujours répété.
Creuser au-delà de la surface.
Sauver les victimes avant qu’elles ne se lassent.

– 15 YEAR OLD

“People who you thought were friends, could be possibly bullying one another.”

ONLINE

They sit behind a screen
always so mean
all alone without a shoulder
where I can lean
cornered, trapped, terrorized
with happiness shining in their eyes
my tears well up, until I realize
they can't say it to my face
it must not be true
so I decide
person behind the screen
I won't listen to you

– 16 YEAR OLD

I WAS A BULLY

It was around grade 5 when it all started. People started picking on her, calling her names and not talking to her. Not knowing any better, I became one of those people. I wanted to fit in. I knew it was wrong, but you do not really think about that when you're young.

After a few months, I realized that all of the bullying she was getting was making her cruel like the rest of them. The bullied was becoming the bully. I regret being like the others, being childish.

– 17 YEAR OLD

A WOMAN OF COLOUR

Throughout the 17 years of my life, I have gone through the trials and tribulations of what it means to be a woman of colour, living within the walls of red and white, we call Canada. I know I did not deserve the heartache that I went through, and yet, I also know I would not be the young woman I am today writing this piece to you. I am here and breathing because I persevered through every late-night thought, every text, every message with the intent to erase me from existence. I am here because I believed in tomorrow and what it might bring. I am still living in the walls of red and white that is Canada, but this time there is a door.

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"For some people [bullying] gets so bad that they just want to end things. Adults need to pay better attention, because kids probably won't tell or share on their own until it's too late."

FOR BEING TRANS

I'm transgender, female to male. I started highschool this past September and was put into a girls gym class. When school started, despite having changed my name in the system, they kept me as my birth name. I told my teacher my preferred name and pronouns, but he continued to use she/her for me. Throughout the time I spent in that class, I was called slurs and often treated different than all the cis gender girls. I've noticed that people often stare in the hallways and laugh, but that's easy to deal with. As a trans person, I know things have been like this for a while for people in my community. I started art and I was really excited but that quickly changed.

A group of kids in my class love to make comments and remarks. They started harassing me everyday, so I decided to go to the principle. But that didn't change anything. They didn't stop, so I went to the office again where the principal yelled at me and told me not to come back unless someone was bleeding or dying. I haven't told anyone because they won't understand. Everyone is old fashioned where I live, and they aren't very accepting. But out of all of this, I'm slowly learning to accept myself more. Just cause someone calls me a girl, doesn't mean I am. I don't owe anybody anything because they haven't done anything but harass me and make me feel like I don't belong in my own skin.

– 14 YEAR OLD

It's me, the quiet girl.

It's me, the shy girl.

These words define who I am
in the eyes of those who don't know me.

Or should I say, in the eyes of those
who don't care to know me?

It's me, the girl with the weird hair.

It's me, the girl with the crooked smile.

All these words echo in my head as I walk
by the girls without any imperfections.

It's me, the fat girl.

It's me, the ugly girl.

All these words change the way I look at
myself in the mirror, and I hate the way I look.

I just wish I could be as kind to myself
as I am to others.

RACIST BULLYING

As a child I was surrounded by kids with forcefully slanted eyes and roars that echoed "Ching Chong". They were monsters. These monsters would pretend to be my friends yet, they would make fun of my food. My Liang Ban Huang Gua was poison to them. My dried seaweed was bamboo, and I was a Panda. I begged my mom to make me a monster's lunch so they wouldn't make fun of me anymore, but I didn't like monster lunches.

They had new rules all the time. Suddenly, I wasn't skinny or pretty enough to fit in with the monsters. I found myself not eating at home, even when it was safe. Suddenly, it wasn't just school where the monsters had their hold on me. They were beginning to take over my life.

The marker I used to draw on myself began to sting. The ink turned red. Showers started hurting, but it's my fault. I'm the one that did it. Bruises scattered across my skin, but it's my fault. I'm just clumsy. Everything is my fault. I just want the monsters to like me.

Constantly, a tsunami of mixed emotions and invalidated feelings wash over me, making me drown. As it swallows me, I sink further and further. The surface light is dim and all I see is darkness. I never learned to swim.

– 15 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"Sometimes kids don't want to go to school because things are so bad there. Adults should look more into what's going on, instead of just thinking the kid just doesn't like school."

FEAR & VIOLENCE

When I was in elementary school, I had a lot of medical problems, and I was really small for my age. There was a kid in my class who was older and was really mean. He always made fun of me, pushed me around and generally bullied me. One day, he followed me to an area near the side of the school where there was some water flooding and pooling. He threw me down to the ground and put my head into that water. It was deep, and I couldn't breathe. I was drowning. Someone close by yelled, and he got distracted, so I was able to run away. The next day, he put me in a choke hold from behind. I felt everything getting foggy. I thought I was going to die.
So, I kicked backwards as hard as I could and connected with his groin. I was able to get away. He cried and told on me, and I got called into the office. The Principal told me that I should never respond physically. I would have passed out or died if I didn't. My dad told the Principal that, if someone assaults you, you have the legal right to defend yourself. I didn't get suspended, but they said I was still wrong and should have told someone instead of kicking him. I was scared and felt so bad about myself, that I just wanted to die instead of going to school. I tried to kill myself by trying to get hit by a car to avoid dealing with it all. I regret that now and understand it wasn't a solution. But at the time, I felt hopeless.
I went to counselling after, to learn how to cope with everything better.

– 15 YEAR OLD

I was cyber-bullied by many girls, which turned into in class bullying. It made me feel really bad and hurt the way I now trust people. It scarred me. I told my parents about it and showed them what's going on. It got so bad, that I had to change schools and start over. I would want adults to talk to their kids and let them know that bullying can ruin other kids lives.

– 11 YEAR OLD

POPULAR

I am the popular kid
Athletic, beautiful, kind, intelligent
Fooling people is our specialty
Giggling with our group
Smiling, hugging, praising
We are trained actors
When we are free to let down our facade
We are Geminis, becoming opposite
Yelling, blackmailing, abusing
Tears befriend pillows, mirrors criticise
Our phones hold all our secrets
But also, all our evidence
School is our stage
Feet pass the doors, and we are new
I am the popular kid
Athletic, beautiful, kind, intelligent

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

“When someone is labelled a "bully," they usually have a lot going on and are misjudged. Think about the bullies and what might be going on in their lives to cause this behaviour.”

BEST FRIEND & BULLY

It started with a girl. Me and her were best friends. I was so blinded that I couldn't see that she was manipulating and bullying me. So many people tried to help me, but I just kept going back to her. Looking back at it now, she was constantly putting me down, calling me ugly, commenting on how much I ate and how much I weigh.

I wish I could say that my bullying experience ended there, but it didn't. In grade 4, they mostly just told me, I was fat and I should go die. I was in the fourth grade. Can you imagine what that does to a kid? It didn't get any better throughout the years. I was constantly picked last for things and called names over and over again. One guy even punched me in the face. I used to skip meals, because I thought I was too big, and I didn't deserve to eat. I would starve myself for days. I remember in the fifth grade, it got so bad, I thought about just cutting my fat off. But I didn't.

To anyone who reads this story and maybe relates, I want you to know, the people who hurt you are just people who are hurt themselves, so they project their insecurities onto someone. No one is perfect. Some people act like they are, but deep down, they probably have insecurities. Never let someone make you feel bad.

– 14 YEAR OLD

BODY IMAGE

Once I reached the age of about twelve, I had a really hard time in school because I started feeling self conscious. I always got called different names and compared to other girls because they were smaller and prettier than me. It was a hard time, and looking back I feel really bad for letting my young self feel that pain. No child should ever feel this way, and I think it is terrible that people bully and belittle people.

As I have grown older, I have realised, the opinions of others should have nothing to do with me and how I perceive myself. I love my body, and I wish I could tell my younger self to ignore those feelings.

– 20 YEAR OLD

EX-BULLY

When I was little, I was a bully. Looking back, it makes sense why. My home life was really bad. I did not get much attention and was very neglected. There are many reasons why I was a bully. The one thing that really stands out for me is, I was really unhappy.

There are many things I needed from adults in my life. Attention, adequate basic needs, security and purpose. My life outside of school was mainly spent video gaming with no limit. I had no close friends. Our food, clothing and home was pretty shabby. We moved so many times, and my schools were often changed. My father bailed on me when I was a baby.

My mom dated a ton of men. Most of these men treated my brother and me badly or like we were nuisances. My mom lost custody of me in 2017.

We went to live with my grandparents. The first year, I got in 12 physicals at school. I had to eat lunch with the Principal every day. The second year, I got into 3 physicals. The third year, I got in no physicals.

Today, I have love, security, adequate basic needs and goals. Today, I am not a bully.

– 14 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"Adults don't realize how impressionable kids are. All it takes is one eye roll, one comment, one instance of exclusion, and your entire world feels like it's falling apart."

NOT "GIRLY" ENOUGH

I was bullied by the more "popular" girls for always hanging out with the boys. I played lots of sports and would rather be playing football or mini sticks, instead of sitting around and gossiping with the girls. I was called many names, like whore, slut, attention seeker, etc. The one name that stuck with me for years was "Mankayla" because I was "built like a man". I started to get insecure about my weight and figure, but then I met my boyfriend and he helped me overcome that by reminding me, I am perfect the way I am. People try to demolish you with words because they feel insecure about themselves.

– 19 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"If there is bullying within a big group, talk to the students INDIVIDUALLY. They will typically talk deeper and explain why they did such things better on their own."

FIGHTING BACK

I moved to Canada from Haiti when I was six. It was difficult for me to learn and understand basic things. As a result, I was picked on. This went on for a while. It was hard to explain to teachers because of how bad my English was. My parents tried to help me, but they could only do so much. After a while, I got tired of it and began fighting back. This resulted in me getting into a lot of trouble, suspensions and bad grades. Teachers would say, *"If you tell us someone is bothering you, they will get in trouble, not you."* I tried this a few times, but it didn't work. I never wanted to fight, but I didn't want to get beaten up either.

– 17 YEAR OLD

ADULTS SHOULD KNOW

"You can never know how someone is getting treated by others at any one point in time. [Bullying] can happen to anyone."

INSIGHTS FOR ADULTS FROM OUR YOUTH

- Believe kids when they report bullying.
- Kids are often scared to tell adults about being bullied.
- Kids fear they will be bullied more for speaking up.
- Anyone can be a bully, even a teacher.
- Take reports of bullying seriously.
- Bullies need help too. There is a reason they bully.
- Talk to kids separately, when addressing bullying.
- Make yourself approachable and available to kids.
- Signs of bullying are easy to miss.
- Friends may bully each other.
- Avoiding school could be a warning sign of bullying.

THE MOST COMMON INSIGHT

Sadly, a prevailing theme we heard from the majority of our youth was, after mustering the courage to speak up, kids felt unheard by adults and that their fears and concerns were dismissed.

Take reports of bullying seriously. Listen and believe youth. We heard asking for help is really scary. If someone is reaching out, you know that bullying is severely impacting their life.

- Bullying is occurring far more often then adults assume. Many kids are bullied.
- Kids may need to fight back against a bully if physically threatened.
- Teachers and staff should meet to discuss strategies to address bullying together.
- Using someone's incorrect pronouns is a form of bullying.
- Online bullying is just as harmful as bullying at school. It may feel like there is no escape.
- Don't dismiss or ignore signs of bullying. One adult can make a big impact on a kid's life.
- Barriers to communication may prevent a kid from speaking up. These include English as a second language, autism spectrum disorder and social anxiety.
- Someone being bullied may start bullying to try to build themself back up.
- Be tactful when addressing a situation of bullying. It is stressful for the kid being bullied, and they are probably worried what their peers will think if they hear about it.
- Parents/guardians should check in often with their kids, in case they need to talk.
- When someone is bullied, they may feel shame and actively work to hide the situation.
- The bullied and the bully are both suffering from this situation. Reach out to the bully too.

INSIGHTS FOR YOUTH
FROM OUR YOUTH

- It's ok to be different.
- You are stronger than you think.
- Bullying is real and can ruin someone's life.
- You are worthy, beautiful and strong.
- Bullying hurts the bully too. They feel worse after.
- It is not your fault. No one deserves to be bullied.
- If you are bullied, there isn't anything wrong with you.
- Bullies hurt to try to feel more powerful.
- I wish I could tell my younger self to ignore what people say. I love my body.
- Anyone can be a victim of bullying.

THE MOST COMMON INSIGHT

The prevailing advice from our youth, was to not internalize bullying. Looking back, many noted that they see themselves much differently now, feel strong and love themselves. Once they decided to stop listening to those who bullied them, it got better.

The advice to not be afraid to seek help was also a meaningful, frequent insight.

- Suicide is not a solution. Ask for help. Counselling helped me get my life back.
- Don't let fear stop you from asking for help.
- Telling my mom didn't stop all the bullying, but she knew what to say to build me up, which helped make bullying less painful.
- If you see someone being bullied, you may not feel safe jumping in to help at the time. But talking to them after, letting them know you are there for them, is more important then you may think.
- I gave in to peer pressure and joined in on the bullying. I was just trying to fit in.
- The main thing I remember about when I was a bully was that, I was really unhappy.
- It gets better.
- You are not alone.

CHI-MIIGWETCH

ONECA wishes to thank all of the youth that participated in this meaningful project.

We were overwhelmed by the response we received from our youth. Their stories and insights were honest and brave, reflecting an earnest, powerful appetite for change.

SKINNY
HOPELESS
LAZY
STUPID
FREAK
FAKE
TRASH
WEAK
IDIOT
FAILURE
UGLY
WEIRD
LOSER
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