

FREE ADVICE

These are a few situations I have dealt with in my life. How they pertain to you or to someone you know is for you to decide. If you have anything you wish to ask or an issue you want to discuss with me, you can submit it on this site and it will be forwarded to me. I will do my best to answer it in a way that will help you and/or someone you know before the situation slides out of control. I will say as a qualifier for my "advice", that I am not given to niceties or skirting the truth. I will be honest, sometimes brutally so...because, aside from it simply being part of my personality, I feel very strongly about this subject and I won't sully it with psychobabble.

As you already know my own situation and its' unhappy results, let's move on.

As a young boy, and even into my middle school years, I was rather small, never one of the popular group, and an unashamed smart ass. These three things combined to make me a prime target for bullies and their like. (How surprising!) I had a couple of friends, but they were the same or worse off than me in the social hierarchy of school and neighborhood. I got my share and more of taunts and bullying, and got beat up many times, resulting in a lot of trips to the principals office. I won't lie, I cried about it and waited for someone to stop it or save me or whatever.

But when I was still young, my dad told me a story about how he had had the same thing happen to him, and what he did about it. Simply put, it was "Stand up for yourself. Take the beating if you have to, but give that bully as good as you get. You may only get in one or two good shots at him, but whether it's this time or next, he'll move on to an easier target. Because, if there's one thing a bully can't face, it's courage and heart." From then on those bullies knew damn well that when they came my way, it wasn't going to be a free ride. After that, for the most part, they left me alone.

However, my friends were not so well endowed with that elusive heart, and I ended up fighting (and mostly losing) for them too. Granted there were still the occasional taunts and popularity contests, but so what? Whether or not a lot of those bullies and their friends liked me, most of them respected me. And, amazingly enough, when I got older, that respect turned to outright friendship in some cases, and taunts were history.

While I'm not advocating the immediate action of fighting with your tormentors. I am advocating that you stand up for yourself and for your friends and walk with your head held high. Keep it up no matter how long it takes or how hard it is and eventually they will stop harassing you. Believe me, I have learned through personal experience, then and now, that attitude is 90% of the battle. If you carry yourself with strength and pride, others will start to see it in you too. And never think it is too late to begin. Do it now.

And now another disclaimer. It is really not legal to engage in a fist fight (especially in school), but kids have been doing it since the beginning of time. Bringing a gun to school and dusting your classmates has not been happening since time immemorial and never should happen again. Aside from being seriously bad karma, thousands of lives will be negatively impacted by this. People you've never met will have their lives ruined by that one single act. You might think that you'd be better off in prison and that then they would all respect you, but trust me, that is so not the case. Prison is a never-ending nightmare that will make anything you experienced on the bricks seem like a cool day at the park. And if you are planning on dusting yourself...also uncool. I've seen suicide first hand and seen loved ones lives turn to ashes in the wake. You may think no one cares if you live or die, but believe me, there are more who do than you can imagine.

Lastly, I know it's a tired cliché, but seriously, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Act like a strong-willed person and you will be treated as such.

Not too long ago, I encountered my first experience with suicide. A guy I knew pretty well. It was the strangest thing, because I had just read a letter from him not a week before and he seemed totally fine. The next thing I hear, he's dead, purposefully overdosed on heroine. Now, admittedly, he was in the joint with little prospect of release soon, and honestly, I sympathized with him because of that. But it still caught me by surprise and I was pretty upset about it. It was then that I realized that I had never really judged whether it was right or wrong if someone chose to end their own life. I had always figured that it was their life to do with as they chose. But I remembered seeing his parents and girlfriend coming to visit him and that they would no longer be able to. If his sudden end had affected me in this way, I wondered, with a sort of open-eyed dread, what they would be going through.

See, death is not a personal thing. Just because you die, it doesn't end the story. The story continues, and it will never be as good without you in it. Whether you want to do such an irreversibly stupid thing to end your pain or to somehow cause someone else pain, or make someone notice you, suicide is, at its base, inherently selfish. I can sit here all day and tell you not to do it for all the right reasons. But in the end, only your understanding of the ways our lives are intrinsically intertwined and how great the impact of your every action is on others will bring you peace. So if not for yourself and all of the beautiful things this life has to offer, choose to live so that others can experience those things without the trauma your unnecessary demise would cause.

If you know someone who you think may be suicidal, I will say only this; it takes only the tiniest spark to start to start a bonfire. Similarly, it takes only the barest glimmer of hope to save a life and bring it back into the light. Help your friend find that glimmer of hope to save a life and bring it back into the light. Help your friend find that glimmer, and you will help them grow into what they were meant to become.

As I have said, my current situation dealt with parental abuse, and rather than use its' end result as a deterrent or eye-opener, as the case may be, I will give you another example with somewhat happier results. I have an acquaintance in here who was beaten by his father since he was old enough to walk. His mother did nothing to stop it as she was an addict and was being beaten as well. He feared to say anything to his friends or their parents. But one day when he was around 11, one of his teachers pulled him aside after class and asked him why he was always bruised and jumped at the slightest motion. He was reluctant to speak of it, but eventually she convinced him she could help him, and so he told her what was going on at home. Even as he did so he was afraid, felt guilty about telling on his father and that he was somehow weak for having to ask for help. That's a lot for an 11 year old to deal with on top of everything else.

But sometimes you can't do it alone, and acting on that knowledge takes more strength than bearing all your problems alone does.

So his teacher told social services, and they investigated. They sent him to live with his grandmother, all thanks to his teacher and his own acceptance that he could not deal with it alone.

If you can't handle a problem on your own, you need to get help from a friend, family member, teacher, or whoever. Because a lot of times, handling this type of problem on your own ends up with you a runaway on the streets if you're lucky, or in the joint if you're not, or even worse in a casket. To be honest, the system doesn't always work as well as it should and sometimes you wind up on your own anyway. But before it ever gets to the point where you fear for your life or are contemplating taking someone else's life, get help. The road Nate and I traveled is a frightening lonely one with no U turns.