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Our View: We should no longer shrug off concern over bullying

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Posted: Tuesday, September 6, 2016 9:46 pm

Appeal-Democrat Editorial Board

It's unfortunate that if you bring up the topic of bullying to someone who grew up before the age of smartphones, your chances are about 50-50 you'll get a roll of the eyes, a shake of the head, and a comment about how "we need to let kids be kids ... some kids and parents and teachers are way too sensitive and learning how to get along without a counselor is an important skill ... so what's the big deal?"

They need to deal with the reality of back then as well as the here and now.

Back then, bullying of course happened. And it probably wasn't the life lesson that many of us think it might have been. Most of us have been bullied, did a little bullying ourselves, or certainly saw it happening involving someone else. It's easy to dismiss it all with an "it happened to all of us, get over it" attitude, but the truth is it did hurt the victims and they had to adapt, which means they had to reroute their lives in order to deal with it — maybe they learned a lesson they could use, or maybe they just lost out on some things in life that would have made a real difference to them.

Bullying was always bad. Victims and perpetrators and onlookers ... all of them were affected. Even if you are of that age and you still tend to be dismissive about too much worrying about bullying back then, you need to re-evaluate your attitude about it today.

It's a lot different ... with today's technology, the tormented can be victimized anywhere anytime. And the bully can conduct the torture via social media from the comfort of his own home. Being counseled to be nice, walk a different route, stand up to them and fight back ... well, things change.

We bring it up because a lot of our schools and community groups have been organizing programs and presentations aimed at stopping bullying and cyberbullying. There will be more programs in the offing — parents, grandparents and older community members need to be supportive of the efforts.

Dr. Herb Schiro, a retired psychiatrist who is keeping up with the local bullying and cyberbullying fronts and supporting the anti-bullying group Stand for the Silent, can relate because he was one of those kids who was pushed around. He was interviewed for a story for the Sunday edition by reporter Chris Kaufman.

Schiro, 81, said he wore thick glasses as a young student and wasn't much into sports. He was bullied, and wants to help kids today. He noted how important it is for kids to have supportive adults and friends.

"Bullying is a powerful experience, and reaching out is, too, and after all these years, those experiences of people helping me are crystal clear," he said. "Anyone who knows of bullying can reach out and make a difference to someone. People often underestimate the power they have to help people."

Schiro noted that bullying has become more subtle. In the old days, a few kids would be pushing another kid around. Now it's more likely it will be verbal and online harassment.

Schools are utilizing or developing programs to make sure students receive information on what's acceptable, respectful, and responsible. Good acts are rewarded. Kids check in. The ideas of bullying and being bullied and watching bullying are dealt with.

All of us should be aware of it and of the new reality of social media and we should be willing to confront the issue as a community — instead of leaving it strictly up to teachers and school counselors.

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