

Parenting style as a contributing factor in bullying

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FULL TEXT

HOST: Marci Ien

GUEST: Dieter Wolke, University of Warwick

IEN: The fight against cyberbullying in Nova Scotia is heating up in Halifax.

[Taped segment begins]

ROSS LANDRY (Nova Scotia Minister of Justice): Nova Scotians have sent their message loud and clear. They don't want bullies to terrorize our children online. We're putting tools into the hands of victims, families and communities.

[Taped segment ends]

IEN: Nova Scotia Justice Minister Ross Landry announced the creation of the Cyber-Safety Act, the first law of its kind in Canada. The legislation would allow victims to sue the cyberbully and could make parents liable if their child is under 19.

Dieter Wolke is a professor of developmental psychology and individual differences at the University of Warwick. He's studied the topic extensively, compiling over 20 years of research. The professor joins us from Coventry, England, with his findings.

So good to have you with us. I want you to tell us a little bit more about this study and whether parents are raising victims unknowingly.

WOLKE: Well, what we did is we conducted an analysis of 70 studies carried out in the world -- actually four studies from Canada as well -- with over 200,000 children. And we looked at how parenting is related to becoming a victim at school of bullying.

And what we found is the usual suspect: harsh parenting. Shouting at children and in particular abusive parenting made children also more frequently victims, while positive parenting, like good supervision, warm parenting and with good rules, reduced it.

What was a little bit surprising was that those parents who are anxious about their children and are overprotective control very much their behaviour and find it worrying when they're autonomous, they also had children who were more likely those who were picked on by others.

IEN: Isn't that interesting? So, tell us how then parents can decrease this risk, how they can then raise kids in a way that they're strong but don't become victims.

WOLKE: Yeah, I think the ultimate aim of good parenting is that your children become independent, that you give them coping skills that they can go out into the world.

And remember, like for example, we do inoculations, like for our body. We give a little virus, we build antibodies, and then we can cope with a big infection. And it's a similar thing. Children do need to experience a little bit of pain and a little bit of hurt, which actually means that they have conflicts. But with these conflicts they can then learn how to cope with, for example, a bully. And parents cannot all the time sit on the school bench next to them because at school they're on their own. There are teachers there which might be able to help them, but actually they need to learn their coping skills.

LEN: What about the bullies themselves? What's the parenting style linked to them?

WOLKE: Actually it's quite interesting that there are fewer studies of bullies than there are studies on those who become victims.

But the parenting style is for bullies very often that they're harshly parented and they're very demanding. There is sometimes a misconception that you think that the bully is this brutal brute, but actually the bullies who don't get victimized themselves are very often very good in social understanding. They know how the group work. But they're callous.

And they can go in two groups later on when people have looked at their development. They can go into the crime area, but they could also become the captains of industry because they can hire and fire without sleepless nights.

LEN: You know, it's so interesting. Professor Wolke, thanks for sharing with us. Appreciate it.

WOLKE: You're welcome. Thank you.

DETAILS

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