

A Sermon on Responding to Bullying

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for November 1st, 2020 (and beyond)

This sermon is more about how to properly support a victim of bullying which includes ways to internally and externally respond to bullying. The demographic of victims and perpetrators doesn't matter and all apply. So, if bullied by a sibling, parent, teacher, coach, classmate, spouse, boss, or co-worker, this should help everyone involved.

Dialogue:

Bully: You are so stupid. I can't even believe they gave you a desk. Why am I assigned a desk next to you? This is cruel and unusual punishment.

Victim: [Silent. But, shares with a third-party later.]

Victim Supporter: You seem upset. What happened?

Victim: I've been bullied. I was called stupid. I was basically told I shouldn't even be allowed to have a desk. And, that even being near me was cruel and unusual punishment.

Now, there are different ways for the Victim Supporter to respond. Those are described below under categories applicable to the quality of the response:

Unsupportive Victim Supporter: Don't take it personally. Just ignore it.

Co-dependent Victim Supporter: That's terrible. I know you well and you aren't stupid. I'm sure you earned your desk and continue to earn it. There's plenty of evidence. And, I enjoy your company so I can't imagine why anyone would suggest proximity to you would be cruel or unusual.

Supportive Victim Supporter: Did you report it to the proper authority? Have you considered thinking about the bullies as hecklers and criticizing the art of their comedy?

Victim: I can't ignore it. It happens every day and there is more than one bully. It's nonstop. I'm really on edge. If it wasn't incessant and just once in a while, I could ignore it. Thank you for being so supportive and recognizing my merit. I didn't want to make a big deal out of it so I didn't report anyone to any proper authorities or principal shareholders. I just wanted to vent to someone and figured since we were friends, you'd listen and you have, so, thank you. Now, tell me how what the bully said was funny. How does this work?

Supportive Victim Supporter: Do you believe and/or know yourself to be stupid? If not, then you know it is either a lie or a joke. Now, if you believe the bully is pure evil and without any redeeming qualities, assume it is a lie. Know that people who lie have inferiority complexes they try to mask by lying about their own merits as well as other people to make themselves feel more important than they are and if you say this to the

bully where such is the case, they may get physical because it will likely hit a huge nerve. So, be cautious. But, say you want to give the bully a slight "Namaste" and recognize there is some redeeming qualities about them (maybe they smell nice or make you laugh sometimes when not the butt of their joke). If you see yourself as the star of your own show, then the bully is the heckler. But, the bully may see him/herself as the star of his/her own show and any response from you as bullying/heckling. So, assuming the bully is more narcissistic, you'd want to assume it is a joke and heckle back. This can be done by criticizing the entire bullying statement or body of statements as if they were all jokes.

So, (glad I separated paragraphs, don't always do I?), we return to the "I was called stupid. I was basically told I shouldn't even be allowed to have a desk. And, that even being near me was cruel and unusual punishment." to examine it as if it were a stand-up comedy short or set. Do you have a valid high school diploma at least? If so, all your academic credentials (including all grades successfully completed) evidence that you are not stupid. Stupid means incapable of learning. Passing kindergarten alone proves you are not stupid. So, one response to that might be "We're desk buddies so what does that say about you?" See, now you made the inferiority complex funny by using self-deprecating humor with a #TaoFu twist if you use that one.

That "desk buddies" retort covers the first two sentences and some of the third. But, to complete the heckling response, the whole response should be "We're desk buddies so what does that say about you? And, how do you think I feel? You smell so good it makes everyone else wonder if we all have body odor." Now, if everyone isn't laughing, I suck at humor and should just stick with proselytizing. But, I think you'll find you've made a friend out of an enemy and likely some more friends too with this strategy for social harmony. God bless you.

End Dialogue

That being said, I will now add a bit about perspective and context. One thing you may have noticed is that none of the victim supporters asked "What did you say or under what circumstances did the bully say that to you?" Now, the reason for not asking that question could be that the supporter already knew that the victim said nothing because that's typical and they are an introvert or believed to be so. Or, the reason could be that the victim is a narcissist and asking a clarifying question or for additional context is considered offensive or accusatory to those who need to control the narrative. So, in the second case, many supporters go silent as well as a result of passive coercion resulting from experience knowing asking questions will result in some form of social penalty. Unfortunately, failing to express yourself honestly to bullies and/or those who fail to disclose full context is conceding power to the offender/bully/narcissist. That can make an individual feel vulnerable which can in turn awaken the vicious side which is often the case for any living organism that feels threatened and vulnerable. So, my suggestion remains to respond with as loving a mock as possible which may include self-deprecating humor to tell the better joke, get the better laugh, and let the other "comedian" down easy that they just aren't as funny. If you dehumanize and demonize by calling them "evil"

and denying they have any redeeming qualities whatsoever, you might be right but should be prepared to back that up. If they haven't raped or trafficked anyone, likely not "evil" or at least have the redeeming qualities of not having done those things.

Now, with Unsupportive Victim Supporter, the reason the response is unsupportive is because it seems insensitive on its face. The Unsupportive Victim Supporter is likely busy and an authority figure who feels "if no one lost money or suffered grievous bodily harm, why bring it up?". So, this one may be extra guarded about being emotionally manipulated and a survivor of malignant narcissistic abuse. Bullying and verbal abuse may be a trauma trigger which the Unsupportive Victim Supporter deals with personally by not taking it personally and ignoring it. So, it may actually be how they manage their own trauma and shouldn't be taken personally or as particularly insensitive. They may be saying they are too traumatized themselves to really be open to hearing about the trauma and find it best to ignore it.

Co-Dependent Victim Supporter clearly is a bit of a "kiss-ass" or "brown-noser" depending on perspective. But, with Co-Dependents that behavior is genuine and not malignant narcissistic manipulation. It is soothsaying bullshit. But, often very sweet. The issue is the fear of upsetting the malignant narcissist and so over-compensating to keep the peace even if it means denying the Truth and thereby rejecting God to supposedly keep the peace or deescalate in the event Co-Dependent is a Co-Dependent and Victim can't handle the truth or Co-Dependent can't handle the Victim when the Victim considers full objective context and reality.

Supportive Victim Supporter handled it the way I would handle it so if you guessed that that was my response as I would actually handle it, you guessed correctly. So, how do I manage my traumatic stress and harassment? Patience, due diligence, and a sense of humor with trust in the justice system and law enforcement. Often when people complain to me about something I know to be legally actionable or would likely result in some disciplinary action depending on environmental protocols, I recommend it be reported to the proper authority to manage discipline where someone feels it is significant enough to complain to me about it. You've got three choices: Vigilante-style Vengeance, Let Go and Let God (which may or may not include forgiveness, but, faith that the person will repent or perish forever), or law enforcement and the courts (or disciplinary department at work/human resources). I can't support vigilantism because I don't want victims going to prison as a result of becoming perpetrators because they didn't recognize laws exist with teams of people who enforce them so didn't report it and took the law into their own hands without realizing we have people for that who just need everyone to understand that they have protocols that must be followed so there can be a fair trial and conviction where someone is actually guilty of a crime or tort. And, there are over 300 million Americans with many who require assistance from law enforcement annually so sometimes there's a wait and we have to be patient and exercise due diligence ourselves while understanding justice requires the process be slow so all evidence can be objectively considered. Let Go and Let God is what I'm part of and helping out with a virtual purgatory of sorts for alleged/accused offenders/bullies enrolled in the Conversion Program at COPE provided in large part through the HEAL Mission. If serious enough

for disciplinary action in private sector or the courts, report it. If not, understand other people live with trauma and may be triggered by any discussion about anything they find triggering. If you don't want to live in that world where you aren't free to express yourself, understand everyone else feels the same way. And, in the USA, that's why freedom of expression and speech is the law. But, you can always get a restraining order/no contact order against anyone you find annoying (even if just neighbors who play music too loud on the weekend) if you can prove it or they don't fight it effectively for any reason. Then, if they violate that order, they can be fined or arrested and spend up to 1 year in jail in some jurisdictions.

If dealing with a bully in any environment who won't stop no matter how much you've stated or implied through body language that you'd like it to stop, you need to likely put it in writing or have witnesses that you definitively set a boundary unless the bully is exceedingly considerate of you for some reason. You need to make it clear that it needs to stop and have evidence that such a boundary was explicitly set, then report it and get a restraining order. Now, if the bully is your employer or where the restraining order would create a barrier to your doing your job or being respected by friends, family, or neighbors, then that's a consideration to take into account.

But, with schoolchildren being excessively bullied for any reason, my recommendation is to make it funny. A good teacher should be able to make any bullying funny in a manner that deescalates tension rather than humiliating anyone. For teachers, I'd suggest if you witness a bully that you say this to the bully "You are being so unmerciful. Did no one teach you mercy? You poor child. [Victim's name here] please show this bully mercy by not prosecuting him/her but forgiving his/her trespass." Now, that will make the bully likely feel a little cool and annoyed at the same time while empowering the victim simultaneously.

For those relentless bullies where even loving direction and gentle correction from a place of true wisdom is ineffective, they might be malignant narcissists. And, if it is worth fussing about, it is worth taking to court. I guarantee you that if parent "A" acting as legal guardian of "Victim" sues parent "B" acting as legal guardian of "Bully" that if there is sufficient evidence of wrongdoing, "Bully" will pay for it one way or another as a result of a court order. Do you know how pissed any parent would be to be sued because their child was bullying another child excessively and they had to pay for it? How quickly do you believe that would resolve the issue for that entire school district if not beyond?

You know what the Bully's defense is though? Free Speech. But, let's go back. Was it a lie or a joke? If what was stated was malicious, false, and injured the reputation of the Victim, that's slander and actionable in tort. If what was stated was a joke and not intended to be taken seriously, then that should be clarified and/or responded to in jest. Jest/Counter-Jest. Joker meet Heckler. #TaoFu. Remember, using profanity and laughter alleviate pain (see church homepage with sources cited at <https://www.cope.church>). And, it sucks when people in pain share their pain with others, but, empathetic, kind, virtuous, loving people often prefer to be helpful wherever

possible. So, you don't have to hug a bully and depending on the bully that could go so south so don't do it and certainly not without express permission to make physical contact. But, if they throw figurative/verbal feces at you like a half-mad caged primate, maybe that's exactly how they feel in that moment. If so, that's protected speech and self expression. I've found often humor makes everyone feel better even if in the moment where the Bully is possibly enraged it can deescalate to a verbal "Shut up" with a #WalkAway attached rather than escalating to more aggression or violence.

If you don't believe humor is the right virtue to respond to bullies of any sort, then report it but everyone will think you are a "NARC", "tattletale", or "crybaby". At least that's what the bully wants you to believe everyone will think, but, if everyone knows full context and that the bully has it coming, everyone will be happy you said something who is a victim or potential victim too.

If you don't report it and don't need help making it funny, I don't know what you want from me if the above in any way describes your problem as you see it. I'm not a Co-Dependent, just really competitive regarding being the most virtuous and sometimes I work more on one virtue than another or a specific set of virtues I tend to connect with more or feel apply more effectively in a given situation. And, I've extensively considered the best way to handle a bully/offender. I'm most dedicated to Truth because it is the foundation of everything else including all the Virtues. And, for me if it isn't equality, it isn't love. I'm not going to censor myself or be subjugated for the sake of appeasing bullies or soothing their victims. That being said, love everyone enough to be honest (including intellectually honest) when communicating while also recognizing some comedians really should find a new line of work.

That's another comeback you could use to address someone who is bullying you. "Is that a joke? If so, thank God there is no cover charge because you are a no talent hack and I'm not paying for that shit." Now, that's going to be funny no matter what in most cases regardless of venue or circumstance. Good luck. God Bless You. Hopefully Helpful.

On a more serious note, if you are afraid of authority figures and/or bullies where the identifiers may apply to both, keep this in mind. You may wish to contemplate or meditate on the following information:

Fear is focusing on worst possible outcomes/results of an immediate or ongoing situation or circumstance. Reason in light of that may result in finding there is nothing to fear upon further inquiry or investigation. Reason may find there is a substantial risk of some type of harm given the situation or circumstance which could include being in a burning building where the fire was accidental. Regardless of the circumstances resulting in fear, you may be in the best position to help yourself if you prepared for the event of a fire and how to safely exit the building prior to their being one. If not, you may stay in place and hope for rescuers who are your equals though heroic in nature with knowledge of how to navigate the emergency situation you may be experiencing to get you to safety given your ignorance on how to get out of that situation without help. The Fire Department nearest you may have literature and advisories on how to prepare yourself, your office, and/or

home for evacuation in the event of a fire or other emergency. If you choose not to do that, know they do their best understanding that many fail to take recommended precautions for any variety of reasons.

That being said, plants have two primary defenses against herbivores which are resistance and tolerance. Plants hate herbivores more than you might imagine. They've been evolving to defend themselves with more and more advanced defense systems. "The Happening" by M. Night Shyamalan isn't as "crazy" as you might think as a potential future. Plants are serious. Luckily, only 0.5% of the human population is Vegan or "The Happening" might be happening now.

"Plants have evolved an impressive diversity of defenses to protect themselves from a correspondingly diverse assemblage of herbivores. These defenses include toxic chemicals, trichomes, tough leaves, resins, volatiles that recruit extra defenders such as parasitoids, and compensatory growth following damage, to name a few. Understanding the mechanisms that plants use to defend themselves, and the ecological drivers of plant defense evolution, have been major research problems for over a century... In this issue of *New Phytologist*, Carmona & Fornoni (pp. 574–583) report on a field experiment in which they test whether patterns of natural selection on the two principal plant defense strategies – resistance (i.e. traits that reduce damage) and tolerance (i.e. traits that reduce the fitness impacts of a given amount of damage) – depend on the complexity of herbivore communities. They show that this ecological complexity selects for mixed resistance–tolerance strategies, contrary to a long-standing prediction that resistance and tolerance are mutually exclusive defenses." Source: <https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/nph.12103#.X5dHKhhqUp4.twitter>

So, resistance such as releasing toxins or natural pesticides to avoid predatory herbivores (from the plant's perspective) is one defense strategy. The other is to build a tolerance for the threat so even if leaves or branches of a tree are eaten, they can grow back or develop impenetrable bark through adaptation for survival.

I feel we can all take a lesson or two from plants. And, to make this part funnier for you because plants are serious about defense, here's how to humanize it. Ever passed gas that cleared a room or been there when someone has done that? Skunks do that as a defense mechanism too. Not just plants and people. Skunks. Okay? Now, the skunks have weaponized stench as a defense mechanism. But, those exposed to it regularly may develop a tolerance for the smell or decide it isn't worth it and just #WalkAway.

Plants are scary and they are everywhere. Have you noticed the rise in cases of allergies? It has begun. If you think the scare-tactic about plant defense strategies (based on facts) is a scare-tactic, it isn't. It's like Grover being the monster at the end of the Sesame Street book about that. The same life force and will to live that keeps plants going, is in all of us too. What you learn from them about how to defend yourself or apply their defense strategies in your own life and survival is up to you. Resistance and Tolerance are not mutually exclusive regardless of species. You could look at it as Offense and Defense though that may be confusing since both are defensive strategies for the plants.

Herbivores have to be stopped. They are freaking out the plants to the point some are eating mice and trying to evolve to eat other animals. The plant that eats mice and other rodents is a member of the Pitcher Plant family known as *Nepenthes spathulata*. Source: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2124440/The-Mousetrap-Flesh-eating-plant-grows-5-metres-high-dines-rodents.html> So, if we can let the plants know we're happy to be omnivores and take their lead where herbivores aren't going to be the status quo for humanity then maybe they'll relax and allergy season will be a thing of the past.

If you've never considered how plants feel or why they may be defensive given their life experiences where hyper-vigilance responding to threats is an everyday occurrence, know resistance is normal and building a tolerance to being repeatedly maimed and injured is a bit much of anyone else to ask of a plant or anyone else. Also, it is possible bullying between people is intended to be more like sparring so everyone is more tolerant or learns effective means of resistance including available remedies at law. Forgiveness isn't guaranteed, but, mercy can be shown even where forgiveness is reserved for full repentance and making amends. If someone has violated the law and refuses to repent or make amends for something actionable at law, seek remedies at law. If not, tolerate it because resistance to lawful activities where said resistance amounts to an unlawful act is actionable itself. Or, resist in a lawful manner like heckling back and if they get physical when you haven't, totally legally actionable in both criminal justice and personal injury trials. The plants have no system of justice beyond laws of the jungle. There's no authority to call to nor recognition of property rights or autonomy. Show some respect to plants, why?

Those defense strategies of resistance (seeking to harm, injure, or kill predators/threats like herbivores through chemical warfare, I'm not kidding plants do this shit) and tolerance (reinforcing own strengths, repairing harm/damage, strengthening physical body as far as plants, this may include thorns or metal-infused bark (Tree that bleeds metal: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-45398434> "Researchers have been studying *Pycnantha acuminata* in particular - a tree that grows on the island of New Caledonia in the south Pacific." which is infusing metal researchers "think it may use the nickel to defend against insects." (same source))). Trees are attempting in some places to actually establish body armor.

Plants may very well feel that herbivores show them no mercy and respond in kind. Don't underestimate plants. They're everywhere.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<https://www.cope.church> and <http://www.heal-online.org>