

### **Domestic Bullying:**

Many of you will have seen the Prime Time Investigates programme on teenage bullying. If not, you will likely have heard some discussion about this on the airwaves or in the newspapers. It is indeed a timely revelation because so much of domestic, social, and workplace bullying are largely invisible.

There are extreme and visible forms of bullying are often easily identified and involve forms of physical intimidation or violence. In these situations it is easy to identify the bullying behaviour, the bully, and the victim. What is much more difficult to identify are the many forms of silent and subtle bullying that are so hard to explain or identify.

To understand the more subtle and invisible forms of domestic bullying what you have to examine first are the effects. If you can imagine that you are the victim of invisible bullying tactics you will end up suffering the following effects:

- Your self-confidence is eroded.
- You begin to doubt yourself.
- You know you are being controlled, intimidated, or negatively influenced but you find it hard to put your finger on what it is.
- You begin to be guarded about what you say or do in case you cause a negative reaction.

Parents can be bullied by teenagers, children can be bullied by parents, and siblings can bully each other.

The more subtle tactics employed by a domestic bully, if he or she is your wife/husband, might include some of the following:

- The bully presents such compelling arguments for treating you this way that you find it hard to defend yourself.
- The bully blames you, criticises you, or shows contempt toward you in ways that make you feel humiliated, inadequate, or weak.
- You notice that this person displays a Jekyll and Hyde type character where he/she can turn on the charm for others.
- The fact that others see the bully in such a positive light further confirms your own self-doubt.
- The bully can draw you in by praise or encouragement only to withdraw it all suddenly.
- The bully notices some small errors you have made and reacts to them with a disproportionate intensity that erodes all your confidence regarding the things that really matter. (A wife may scream and shout at her husband's failure to clean something properly).
- The bully catches you out on small details and though he/she is technically correct in his/her accusation the anger, righteousness, and intensity of the criticism is entirely disproportionate to the event itself. (A husband may come home and become outraged because the wife has parked the car crookedly outside the front gate thus blocking his entrance to the driveway).

A lot of bully's in a marriage relationship bully their partners over small things rather than big things. The bully can focus intensely on details and make a wife fearful for example about where she locates some kitchen implement, how she cooks something, the tidiness of a room, or the amount of minutes she spends talking to her sister. It is a long known fact that in prisoner-of-war camps the way to break the will of a prisoner was by punishing people for the smallest of infractions. The larger goal of fear and compliance is then easily achieved.

A word to describe a lot of subtle bullying is the term passive-aggressive. Passive-aggressive tactics are tactics employed by a bully that allow him/her to react with astonishment if you point out what he/she has done. These are mind-games wherein the bully acts nice or responsible by saying he/she is just innocently pointing out a few things and patronises you for getting defensive for no reason.

A teenage girl bully might pretend to befriend another girl, Sarah, and arrange to meet him/her at a certain place and time and then not show up, or show up with a bunch of friends and pretend that she was never going to meet Sarah and then tease for being so stupid.

Most victims of domestic abuse or bullying will talk about the mind-games and will suggest that they are so much harder to deal with than direct confrontation. Mind-games do exactly what it says on the tin. When a bully plays mind games they create false confidence in the victim and then abuse or humiliate them over something trivial; they create arguments that confuse the victim about what was really said or happened; they plan their excuses so well that the victim begins to doubt his/her own mind; the truth becomes fuzzy and unclear; the bully is so quick with reasons and excuses that the victim has to engage in continued self-doubt; the bully constantly asks the victim 'do you not believe me?' 'Do you not trust me?'

The bully therefore uses trust as a weapon. Because the relationship between the victim and bully typically involves trust, it is used manipulatively by the bully. This works because the bully knows that the victim will never resort to such tactics and is typically trusting. Therefore the victim is constantly on the back foot with questions like:

- "What's wrong with you, do you not trust me?"
- "Are you saying I am a liar, is that what you are saying? Because if that is what you are saying then this relationship is going nowhere?"
- "Your problem is that you don't trust me!"
- "Everything I do, I do for you and the family so how dare you question me about anything. I point out your flaws because I am trying to improve our relationship!"

As you can see, the victim in these situations always has to back-pedal from any position where he/she has to stand up for him or herself. The question "Do you trust me or not?" irresistibly forces the victim to say "Yes I Do." At this point the bully has won because, in truth, he/she has eroded that trust or else has never really earned it.