

Dr. Kelli's Parent and Teacher Corner

In all of the StinkyKids books, I love that these creative stories allow us to explore important topics at an early age with our kids. *StinkyKids Have a Heart* is another incredible installment in the StinkyKids book series and deals with the issue of bullying. This is an issue that really touches MY heart as both a mother and an educator. When I met with Britt Menzies to discuss this book, I exclaimed, "I love this one!"

As a counselor, I see so often that children need us to help them navigate through the feelings of belonging and kindness. We can all remember what it feels like to be left out and hurt, from our early days of not being "allowed" to play with a group of kids to our days in high school when we may have been a little different from the "in crowd." Even in our adult years as parents, we might encounter bullying within our children's social groups. Sharing our emotions is a very powerful tool that we can utilize to help guide our children when their hearts hurt.

Communicate with your little ones!! Open dialog is one of the most important tools to mend a broken heart. We can't fix problems for our children but we can always listen and make ourselves available to support them.

When we talk with our children, discuss more than why it is unacceptable to be mean to others or what it feels like to be hurt by others being mean. Discuss also about what it feels like to be the bystander when witnessing another person being bullied or bullying someone. It is just as important to give our children language for helping others when they are bystanders or bullies as it is to give them language to express when they are themselves hurt by others. In the story, Britt was able to express herself in a direct manner to Jen, but Joey, Johnny and Max were there too and they had to figure out what to say and do to help their friends.

To say "I'm sorry I hurt your heart" seems so simple, but for some people these words are the hardest to express. In life, even best friends fight. It is helpful for us, the adults in a child's life, to explore with children how to disagree and still be kind, what to say when someone is being mean to them or others, and how to apologize when they are wrong. Remember that actions speak louder than words, so we need to model kindness and respect, as well as talk. We also need to have the courage to model for children how to be wrong, how to make mistakes, and how to apologize – to be a Leader of Good.

And...don't forget to play! Play is the natural language of children and we can engage more effectively with children through the use of some specific toys and play. Encourage your little stinkers to play in a positive manner with others. Help children learn how to include others by learning to say, "Tell her/him what she/he can do, how to join in and play." Play with the inspiration to make people feel good, to help others and we will be pleasantly surprised how this positive play will transpire on the playground.

Using This Story as a Teaching Tool

As I mentioned, it is never too early to start having conversations with children about the things we believe are important. *StinkyKids Have a Heart* is a great story to inspire such conversations. Here are some questions that you can use during the reading of this book to engage children in the topic of bullying:

- ♥ Have you ever felt left out or hurt by friends or others?
- ♥ What could you do if someone was being mean to you or someone else around you?
- ♥ What do you think about differences and liking different things? How do differences make us special?
- ♥ What do you notice about the StinkyKids' expressions? What do you look like when you are sad? Happy? Confused? Tasting a yummy treat?
- ♥ What does it mean to "have a heart"? To be a "Leader of Good"?

Helpful Language to Teach Children

- ♥ "I'm not for hurting."
- ♥ "It's not okay to be mean (to me or others)."
- ♥ "You can't say I (or he/she) can't play/join in/be a part."
- ♥ "When you do/say _____, I feel _____."
- ♥ "I'm sorry" and "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."



Takeaway Messages

- ♥ Be kind, let everyone play together.
- ♥ Support a friend when they are sad or their heart hurts.
 - ♥ Be brave enough to say "I'm sorry."
 - ♥ It's ok to say, "It's not okay to be mean to me."
- ♥ Appreciate that we are all different and like different things.
 - ♥ Learn from our mistakes.
 - ♥ Always Be a Leader of Good!

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