

Bullying – by Lynda Morris



“Is that what you call a break fall you thick idiot! I’ve seen my granny do a better break falls than that. Get your lazy useless butt back in line before I kick you out of here. One more word and I’ll knock your stupid head off your worthless shoulders”

Uncomfortable reading isn’t it. There are times we can all remember someone using this sort of language. Even if it’s not directed at you it will have the affect of making you feel uncomfortable, and probably unwilling to have a go. If you are the individual receiving this sort of verbal abuse which is just one form of bullying, it can have an irreversible affect on your whole ability to function as an individual.

Bullying is defined rather clinically as *“a person or person’s intimidation by verbal, physical or mental abuse”*. What the dictionary doesn’t, and cannot define is how negative the affect of bullying can be on an individual, and thereby the reputation of the offender, and indeed if not dealt with quickly, a club.

Bullying can take on many forms including:

People calling you names

Spreading rumours

Making things up to get you into trouble

Threats and intimidation

Hitting, pinching, biting, pushing and shoving

Making silent or [abusive phone calls](#)

Taking things away from you

Sending you [offensive phone texts](#)

Damaging your belongings

Bullies can also frighten you so that you don’t want to go to school, so that you pretend to be ill to avoid them

Stealing your money

Taking your friends away from you

Posting insulting messages on the internet or by IM ([cyber bullying](#))

Verbal bullying can be as simple as name calling or insults to an ongoing verbal engagement which belittles or negates a persons worth. Often it will start as a simple gag or laugh, however if it persists it can quickly escalate into bullying. The person saying these things may or may not be aware of the affect he or she is having.

Physical bullying is often defined as punching or kicking someone. Another way the physical bullying can take place, however, is far more subtle. It is good practise within our sport in a randori session to work with a higher graded player, in order to learn from them. The more experienced, and higher graded player needs to be aware of the lower player's ability, and allow them to try grips, holds and techniques without completely overpowering the other player in order to allow them to develop. This is not to say the higher grade should allow his opponent to win, but at the same time to be professional in their approach to the session. It would be easy for a bully to use a session such as this to overpower his opponent so completely that the Judoka will feel a sense of worthlessness and unwillingness to continue.

Mental bullying is often the most subtle form. Overloading an individual with tasks or things to learn, giving no responsibility when it is due, non verbal communication – for instance the “look to the heavens” every time the victim offers his or her opinion for example can all be forms of mental bullying. The end result is the same, if not worse than the other forms, because as well as the other feelings already described the victim can on top of this believe that should they speak out they will not be believed, as they have no witnesses to this.

As described the principle target of the bullying can feel many things, and each victim will process the bullying in a different way, and thereby react in a different way. It is stereotypical to assume that every victim will withdraw or be tearful. This is just one of many reactions to this abusive process. Victims can be loud and aggressive, which if not identified correctly could be compounded by the Sensei taking them to task over their outburst's The Victim may simply become quiet and withdrawn, as if they are trying to disappear. The worst possible outcome of bullying can be suicide the individual so completely over-whelmed by negative feelings and emotions that they may feel their life is worthless.

The other less obvious victims of bullying are those in the immediate area who can identify with the principle victim, either by age, sex, ethnicity or ability. Although not directed at them, they can experience negative feelings of discomfort, dread and foreboding, often leading to them leaving a club altogether. They often do not want to talk about how they feel or what is happening to anyone in the club in case they become the next principle victim.

Other features that may direct a person to bully an individual are:

- Your weight
- Your looks
- The colour of your hair
- Your family
- Your schoolwork
- If you are popular
- If you work hard
- If you have a disability
- If you are a different [religion, colour or culture](#)
- If you wear spectacles or a hearing aid
- If you have dyslexia or dyspraxia
- If you've been off school due to illness

Bullies often are, or have been victims themselves. It is too easy to compartmentalise them as undesirable members of the club, and indeed the first reaction is to try to force them from the club or ban them completely. Their behaviour may indeed be a cry for help, and this needs to be investigated by the Sensei and other senior players before taking punitive action. It may well be that once the root of the problem is dealt with the individual concerned will go through a transition themselves, thereby being aware of what they have done and altering their mannerisms to stop the bullying activity.

Other bullies may not be aware of their actions, and the affect they have on an individual. What seems obvious to one person may not be to another, especially if they are mentally impaired or disabled, or have other learning difficulties, such as autistic spectrum disorders. These persons must be dealt with in a different manner. Firstly the Sensei must be aware of the mental capabilities or disorders the person is affected by, and may have to seek specialist advice in how to approach the problem with the individual.

Who should deal with a bully? "It's not my problem" is something often said – It's down to the sensei to deal with. This is quite simply wrong. It is every Judoka's responsibility to behave in an appropriate manner, and to assist where they can in the running and teaching within the club. All members should be confident to speak their mind in a positive and respectful manner, and also should speak out as individuals and collectively against bullying. The Sensei should be mindful of the abilities of all the players within the club, and strive towards making the learning experience and sense of family and belonging as positive as possible. The Sensei should not have to do this alone, however. If they are willing to share their vision with the other senior members of the club and lead from the front the atmosphere created will often stifle negative feelings within the members, therefore minimising the opportunities for bullying to take place.

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