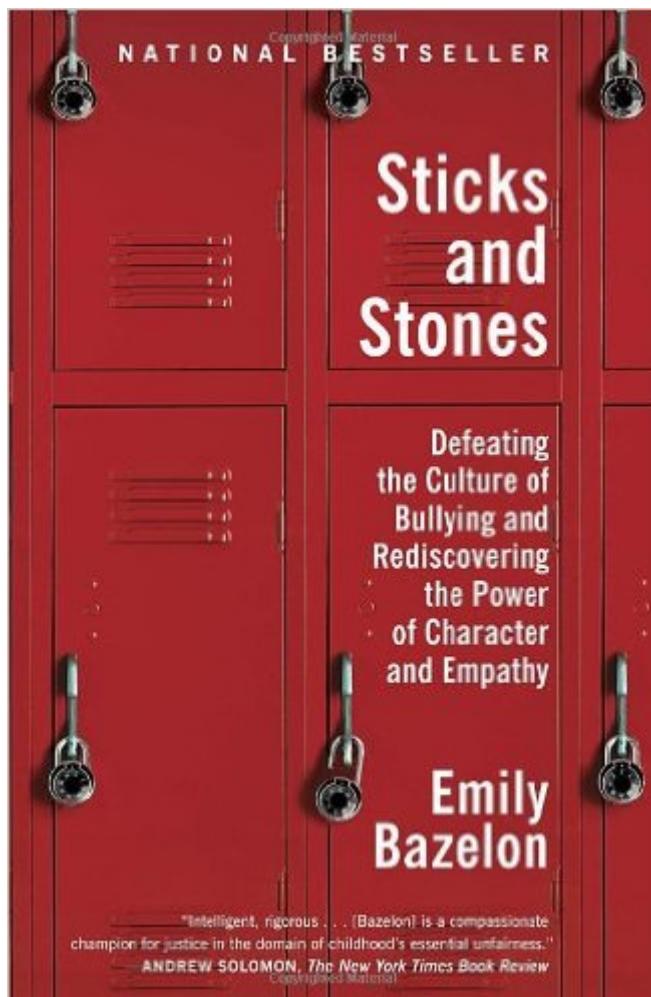


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Sticks And Stones: Defeating The Culture Of Bullying And Rediscovering The Power Of Character And Empathy



Synopsis

NATIONAL BESTSELLER Being a teenager has never been easy, but in recent years, with the rise of the Internet and social media, it has become exponentially more challenging. Bullying, once thought of as the province of queen bees and goons, has taken on new, complex, and insidious forms, as parents and educators know all too well. No writer is better poised to explore this territory than Emily Bazelon, who has established herself as a leading voice on the social and legal aspects of teenage drama. In *Sticks and Stones*, she brings readers on a deeply researched, clear-eyed journey into the ever-shifting landscape of teenage meanness and its sometimes devastating consequences. The result is an indispensable book that takes us from school cafeterias to courtrooms to the offices of Facebook, the website where so much teenage life, good and bad, now unfolds. Along the way, Bazelon defines what bullying is and, just as important, what it is not. She explores when intervention is essential and when kids should be given the freedom to fend for themselves. She also dispels persistent myths: that girls bully more than boys, that online and in-person bullying are entirely distinct, that bullying is a common cause of suicide, and that harsh criminal penalties are an effective deterrent. Above all, she believes that to deal with the problem, we must first understand it. Blending keen journalistic and narrative skills, Bazelon explores different facets of bullying through the stories of three young people who found themselves caught in the thick of it. Thirteen-year-old Monique endured months of harassment and exclusion before her mother finally pulled her out of school. Jacob was threatened and physically attacked over his sexuality in eighth grade and then sued to protect himself and change the culture of his school. Flannery was one of six teens who faced criminal charges after a fellow student's suicide was blamed on bullying and made international headlines. With grace and authority, Bazelon chronicles how these kids' predicaments escalated, to no one's benefit, into community-wide wars. Cutting through the noise, misinformation, and sensationalism, she takes us into schools that have succeeded in reducing bullying and examines their successful strategies. The result is a groundbreaking book that will help parents, educators, and teens themselves better understand what kids are going through today and what can be done to help them through it. Contains a new discussion guide for classroom use and book groups.

Praise for *Sticks and Stones*

"Intelligent, rigorous . . . [Emily Bazelon] is a compassionate champion for justice in the domain of childhood's essential unfairness." —Andrew Solomon, *The New York Times Book Review*

"[Bazelon] does not stint on the psychological literature, but the result never feels dense with studies; it's immersive storytelling with a sturdy base of science underneath, and draws its authority and power from both." —New York

"A humane and closely reported exploration of

the way that hurtful power relationships play out in the contemporary public-school setting . . . As a parent herself, [Bazelon] brings clear, kind analysis to complex and upsetting circumstances. "The Wall Street Journal" "Bullying isn't new. But our attempts to respond to it are, as Bazelon explains in her richly detailed, thought-provoking book. . . . Comprehensive in her reporting and balanced in her conclusions, Bazelon extracts from these stories useful lessons for young people, parents and principals alike." "The Washington Post

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Customer Reviews

As a former teacher, I find myself struggling tremendously with *Sticks And Stones*, which has received quite good reviews. One thing that is quite confusing is the "great equalizing" of bully and bullied. Yes, I imagine many bullies are depressed themselves, and I'm sure many are also suffering from other issues. But the notion that a bully and a bullied child suffer equally is simply wrong. A bullied child learns fear, dreads school, comes to believe that no one can help, and often becomes socially withdrawn. The fact that a bullied child may recover from this (which Bazelon seems to suggest) is nice, but why (in a society where every kid has to win a trophy and every child has to have an equal part in a school play) is protecting children from bullies that one thing that seems to make so many people talk about "equalization?" Moreover, I found Bazelon's notion that most bullies "grow out of it naturally" is completely wrong. Not sure how many workplaces she's been in, but there are always plenty of grown-up bullies on display. Did they just suddenly decide to become bullies for their 30th or 40th birthday? Probably not -- they probably learned many lessons

of intimidation on the playground. While I was teaching, I found myself in meetings with parents of bullies, and 80% of time those parents said one of two things: "My child is not a bully" (no matter how many notes or proof a teacher offered) or, much sadder, "I know he is a bully but I have no control over him." The idea that parents are not involved in how their children grow is bizarre, and unless a parent of a bully steps in to assist in guiding his or her child, school alone simply cannot help.

Emily Bazelon is apparently interested in bullying because (a) her friends "fired" her in the eighth grade and (b) her new best friend after that, Allie, was bullied by her former friends and their allies, although Bazelon admits she has no memory of Allie's worst experience of bullying, even though she must have been there at the time. To her credit, Bazelon does admit that her experience did not qualify as bullying, but her prologue just serves to give us a hint that perhaps Bazelon isn't really tuned in to what bullying is all about. And she spends the rest of the book proving it. The next six chapters are alternating stories of three teens who experienced bullying. The first is about seventh-grader Monique who inadvertently got the same hairstyle as a cousin of one of eighth grade mean girls on her bus and was harassed and humiliated mercilessly for it for months afterwards. Her mother and her grandmother took their concerns over Monique's treatment to the school, but didn't receive satisfying responses or resolution, so they took their grievances up the food chain to the police, the superintendent, the school board and the local government, all without receiving satisfaction. Bazelon's conclusion seems to be that the mother and grandmother were largely responsible for Monique's problems because they made such a stink over it (although she certainly doesn't fault their protective reasons for doing so). Bazelon further concludes that Monique's later problems weren't so much bullying as just "drama" because the second group of girls to harass her were her same age, and that Monique was also partly responsible because she escalated the situation by retaliating.

We all know the doggerel verse about sticks and stones is just a crock of bull manure. A heaping mountain of manure. Words can build or destroy esteem. Words are infinitely more powerful than any tangible weapon such as a stick or a stone. Bullying is an issue that is very trenchant for me personally. I came across this book and while the topic is one of great interest to me, I was glad I was able to get it without buying it. I got it simply to go over some of the salient points that were raised. There were a lot of things that bothered me. One was what sounded to me like condoning the bully. As one who was bullied, I know all too well how it feels to have adults condone the bully;

blame the victim; dread school and become one who tried to keep under the radar and by no longer saying anything in class. I know all too well how bullying can kill or maim one's self image and how blame the victim comments are just as harmful. I say, NEVER blame the victim. NEVER condone the bully. NEVER make light of what a bully is doing. Ignoring bullies is poor advice and it usually doesn't work. Bullies refuse to be ignored. They just step up their campaign against the peers they have targeted. A side issue that I'd like to speak to is that we, as a society have reached a point where by creating the false impression of a "level playing field" which doesn't exist. In so doing, we reward mediocrity at best, poor performance at worst by giving everybody a trophy or a certificate or a prize for every little thing (some schools have been known to give out awards for completing routine tasks!) Although well intentioned, many children are not fooled by this effort and many feel that such prizes don't count.

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