

# Parenting & Family Life

## Jesus suffered from 'bullies,' too

Not long ago, I got a call from the nurse at my son's school. Bobby had come to her office complaining of a headache and stomach ache. The nurse told me that it seemed the real cause of Bobby's malady was a fellow kindergartner who was bullying him.

As we drove home, Bobby said, "I was sitting in the lunch room next to 'Frankie' and I leaned against him really by accident when I was trading my dessert with Chris. And he pushed his elbow into my stomach and said in a very mean voice, 'If you do that again, you're dead meat! And if you try and play with any of my friends, you're dead ice.' And I don't really know what dead ice is but I think it's a lot like dead meat. And all during gym class he kept trying to trip me and he would laugh when I would lose my balance. But I never fell. I wanted to leave because he was scaring me."

For me, and I suspect for many other parents, all the wonderful wisdom of "turning the other cheek," "loving our enemies" and "blessed are the peacemakers," goes right out the window when one of my children is intentionally hurt or threatened. Fortunately, these feelings are only fleeting because some of the most important lessons we teach our children involve loving and forgiving people who have hurt us.

My husband, Joe, and I have always taught our children to use words instead of fists unless it's to protect themselves. When other children have repeatedly hurt or threatened them or their friends, we have explained that the reason a kid usually does something bad to another kid is because he doesn't feel so good about himself. We ask our kids not to spend time figuring out the reasons but to make sure they always try to work out their problems peacefully.

We try not to use the word "bully" when we're talking about a child we know. As angry as a child's actions can make us, it's usually not their fault and labeling a child as a troublemaker only makes things worse for the child. A "bully" often has a mother or



family matters

By EILEEN MARX

father who "bullies" him or her and they need special understanding.

There are lots of reasons why children can be cruel to other children — emotional and physiological problems, stressful events in the home and even some stages of child development bring about changes in a child's behavior. Every child has his moments, but it's the repeated ridicule and put-downs, the persistent punching and shoving, the ceaseless name calling that can make life absolutely miserable for the child on the receiving end.

Bobby's teacher called to let me know that Bobby was on a long list of kids that "Frankie" had harassed. She told me that the school's guidance department has a series of conflict management programs for the students during the school year. But his teacher also remarked that these programs only work if the children are being taught and reinforced these same values in their homes. Children must be taught that there are consequences when they harm others with their words or their actions.

I know that this is not the last encounter that my kids will have with a troublemaker at school. Unfortunately it's an unpleasant part of life for children as well as parents because we can't be there to referee for our kids; we can only coach from the sidelines. The stakes seem so much higher in the world in which our children are growing up. Instead of sticks and stones, today's older bullies are using guns and knives.

I told Bobby he couldn't run away from his problem with "Frankie" or else he would always bother him. Joe and I told Bobby about the times we had to deal with bullies in our lives. We told Bobby that the reason he has so many friends is because he's kind and funny and knows how to be a good friend. And then we reminded him that he could use the "DeBug Program."

DeBug equips children with a series of steps they learn to solve problems when others are "bugging" them. It helps children learn to be assertive and, when possible, to resolve the difficulty themselves. The five steps of the DeBug systems are simple. The children are taught that if someone is bugging them, they should:

1. IGNORE. If that doesn't work ...
2. MOVE AWAY. If that doesn't work ...
3. TALK FRIENDLY. If that doesn't work ...
4. TALK FIRMLY. If that doesn't work ...
5. GET ADULT HELP.

The Bible is filled with bullies — kings who invaded other lands, Pharaohs who persecuted and oppressed the less powerful, leaders who carried into captivity entire cities of people. But the commandment, "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors," is how Jesus asks us to respond to cruelty. He knows it's the only way to get rid of the hatred in our world.

Jesus understands this isn't always easy to do. He suffered humiliation and agony. Soldiers mocked and ridiculed him with a crown of thorns and a scarlet cloak. He was blindfolded, slapped and beaten. He was jeered by a crowd and taunted by scribes and elders. He was led to a degrading death. But as he hung on the cross Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." And that is, without question, the ultimate lesson in conflict management.

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

## Videos offer little for kids

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each videocassette is available on VHS format. Theatrical movies on video have a USCC classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating. All reviews indicate the appropriate age group for the video audience.

### Annie

Although John Huston's direction of the screen version of the popular stage musical is somewhat cynical and definitely disappointing, it does preserve much of the exotic ambience of the comic strip about the little orphan (Aileen Quinn) and Daddy Warbucks (Albert Finney). With awkward dance numbers, some coarse dialogue and Carol Burnett's mean-spirited characterization, the movie's appeal is somewhat limited beyond uncritical viewers. The USCC classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### Jingle All the Way

Macho-themed comedy set on Christmas Eve as a harried dad (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and a frantic postman (Sinbad) chase around the city, desperate to get the last Turbo Man doll each has promised his son. Director Brian Levant's extended sitcom substitutes rudely aggressive behavior for genuine humor in a contrived series of tiresome skirmishes. Frequent slapstick violence and fleeting sexual innuendo. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### Casper, A Spirited Beginning

Made-for-video sequel to the 1995 feature shows how Casper became a friendly ghost after missing out on ghost training and winding up in a small town where he's befriended by a lonely 10-year-old (Brendon Ryan Barrett) who introduces him to a trio of ghosts haunting a mansion scheduled for demolition by the boy's father (Steve Guttenberg). Directed by Sean McNamara, the formula story develops at a pedestrian pace with the live-action proceedings of less interest than the animated ghosts and their special-effects antics. Slapstick violence, some bathroom humor and occasional coarse language. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### Men in Black

Zany sci-fi comedy in which a brassy New York cop (Will Smith) is recruited by a taciturn government agent (Tommy Lee Jones) monitoring extraterrestrial activity in order to save Earth from being destroyed by aliens disguised as humans. Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, the two leads are aptly paired in a story mixing understated hip humor with witty puppet creatures and amusing special effects. Broad comic violence and a few instances of profanity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

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