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Simon - who gets an orange thrown at him by a group of boys

Type: Overt - Physical

'Sorry!' I heard one of the boys shout. I looked at the half-eaten orange on the pavement.

My name is Simon Woodfield. I am 11 years old. I really like school. My favourite subjects are maths and science. I work really hard in all my subjects but especially those two. My teachers sometimes give me extra hard work to do at home and sometimes even in class.

In class I like answering the teachers' questions. They're usually quite easy. I don't put my hand up all the time but if no one else knows the answer then the teachers usually ask me and most times I'm able to give them the correct answer.

At recess and lunch I go to the library. Colin, Lindsay and I are working on writing a computer program. It turns a two-dimensional object into a three-dimensional object. Mr Hutton asked me to demonstrate it in class yesterday.

I hooked my laptop up to the oversized screen and showed the class. Mr Hutton asked me some questions about it and so did one of the students in the class.

During lunch while I was walking past the bench near the canteen on my way to the computer lab, I felt a hard thump on my back. I dropped my books. It didn't really hurt much, it just gave me a fright. 'Sorry!' I heard one of the boys shout. I looked at the half-eaten orange on the pavement. I picked up my books and the orange and kept walking, dropping the orange in a nearby bin. I could hear their laughter. I glanced around at them again. They certainly didn't appear to be sorry.

At the end of lunch, it happened again. This time one of the boys 'accidentally' bumped into me.

'Sorry!' he said again, holding his arms up. I managed to not topple over.

'That's okay,' I muttered, feeling totally stupid, because it obviously wasn't okay. This made the boys laugh again. 'What have I done to deserve this?' I wondered, walking quickly to class.

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Bullying is always hurtful, and when it hurts both emotionally as well as physically it is especially awful. Trying to avoid the bullies is an effective strategy. The plan here is to work on not being where the bullies are, to work out other ways to get to where you are going. Of course this is not always easy. Having some support with you, friends like Colin or Lindsay, will make the trip more comfortable if you do have to be near them.

People say that bullying is an abuse of power, so really work hard at not letting yourself be bullied without your permission. Stand up tall, hold your head up high, and walk away with confidence. Turning the situation into a bit of fun can also act like taking air out of a balloon. Saying something like, 'Probably better that you eat it rather than throw it away,' can help to diffuse the whole situation a little.

Make your point, then smile and keep walking. It might be that if the bullies see that their words and actions are actually not having that much effect they will be more likely to stop their bullying behaviour. It's a hard one, but it's important for the recipient of the bullying to try and not let what they are doing affect how they are feeling about themselves.

There is often no rational reason why bullies target people; the main reason is that they want power and control. It's about them much more than it's about the people they are bullying. But a person's self-esteem can definitely take a hit during these times. At this point, it might be good to consider self-talk. A great first step is to get to know how you talk to yourself. Sometimes we're unaware of the messages we give ourselves. For example, we can be our own worst enemy by telling ourselves that we're not good enough to achieve what we want. Give yourself encouragement and support. Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to your best friend. You can find more information regarding self-talk on page 135.

When thinking about the bullying problem, think less about what's happening and the associated feelings and focus more on what can actually be done about it. For example, a person may be feeling angry and hurt but can still act in a confident and controlled way.

Some people find exercise a really useful thing to do. It can help people feel better about themselves, reduce stress and can also improve thinking.

What's important here is to walk tall and walk away. There are things that can be done that can alter the balance of power and give control back to the recipient of the bullying. Body language is one of these. This is the standing up tall stuff and looking super confident. Doing everything to make it appear that the power and control is not with the bullies, especially on the outside. Walking with purpose and authority, showing a carefree almost uninterested attitude is a strong response. How we look or appear is often how people will see us.

Above all, the recipient needs to demonstrate that they are not in the bullies' power and that the bullies don't have control over them.

Key points to remember

Avoid the bullies by walking a different route.

Keep your friends close to you when you're having to cross paths with the bullies.

Use humour to deflect what they're saying.

Look and behave in a confident way.

Talk to yourself as if you're your own best friend.