

Are you an 'adult survivor of peer abuse'?

By **Jodee Blanco**, Special to CNN
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The scars from the cruelty of bullies can last a long time, author Jodee Blanco says.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Jodee Blanco suffered nasty pranks, spit-balls, ridicule and mockery at school
- She says bullying victims feel insecure about appearance, intelligence or competence
- Blanco: Don't let anyone tell you your pain isn't real, or "you just need to get over it"

Editor's note: *Survivor, expert and activist Jodee Blanco is also the author of "Please Stop Laughing at Us ... One Survivor's Extraordinary Quest to Prevent School Bullying" and the creator of the anti-bullying program It's NOT Just Joking Around!*

(CNN) -- When most of us think about school bullying, we envision a student being teased or ostracized by classmates, someone who typically sits alone at lunch, doesn't get invited to parties and who others make the butt of cruel jokes.

While that image may be accurate, there's another side to school bullying that's rarely acknowledged: its impact on adulthood.

I ought to know. From fifth grade through high school, I was mercilessly bullied and excluded for the same reason so many other kids struggle to fit in today -- simply for being different.

[Have you ever faced a bully? Tell us about it](#)

My school years were a lonely, desperate blur of invitations denied, laughter in the hallway, nasty pranks in the locker room, spit-balling on the bus, ridicule and eye-rolling, rumor-mongering and mockery.

I'd love to be able to say I've gotten over it, that it's a distant memory ... but I'd be lying. The fact is, I'm still haunted by the psychic wounds sustained at the hands of my classmates. I suspect some of you may be, too. And there are thousands of us out there.

If you were chronically bullied at school, whether overtly -- teasing, taunting or physical abuse -- or more subtly -- simply being made to feel invisible day after day -- chances are, like me, you are what I call an "adult survivor of peer abuse."

Do you second guess yourself all the time? Do you worry that people won't like you? Are you bothered by nagging insecurities concerning your appearance, intelligence or competence? Are you a compulsive over-achiever or workaholic, but nothing you accomplish seems to diminish those negative voices from school making you feel like you'll never be good enough?

Or, perhaps you've never reached your full potential, because no matter how hard you try, something keeps holding you back. Have you received an invitation to your school reunion, then made every excuse why you couldn't attend, but the truth was you couldn't bear to face your former classmates?

If you're nodding your head knowingly, don't let anyone tell you that your pain isn't real, or that "school was ages ago, you just need to get over it."

The reality is that school bullying has implications far greater than most people could ever imagine.

Our educational system is sending wounded people into the world ill-equipped to navigate the future because the spurning they endured in their past is holding them hostage. School bullying doesn't only affect schools. For those who were victims of its terrors, it can inform every aspect of their lives, from their careers, relationships and parenting skills to their physical, emotional and psychological well-being.

I now travel to the nation's schools sharing my experiences as a former school outcast with tens of thousands of students, teachers and parents in an effort to motivate change. I meet thousands of adult survivors in towns all across America. They come in all shapes and sizes -- doctors, lawyers, housewives, grandmothers, aunts, bosses, employees, teachers. The list is endless.

One thing we all have in common is the need to heal, to reclaim that piece of ourselves lost to the indignities of our school experience. I'm here to tell you that there is hope, you can come back from your lonely adolescence whole, happy and fulfilled. Here are some guidelines for getting started:

- Acknowledge to yourself that the way your classmates treated you still affects you today and make a list of examples to help confirm this realization.
- Seek a therapist who specializes in childhood trauma and who applies the same importance to school bullying as other forms of chronic childhood abuses.
- If you and your significant other are in relationship counseling, make the counselor aware of the school bullying in your past and suggest that it be included as one of the issues being addressed.
- If you've received an invitation to a school reunion, ask a "safe friend," someone who makes you feel cherished and appreciated, to attend with you. Don't go with any expectations other than knowing that whatever happens, you had the courage to face your fears and survived!

Carrying the weight of adolescent insecurities into adulthood can be a heavy burden. Even now, though I've come a long way in the last several years, I still wrestle with moments of self-doubt, in which I'm gripped by an almost irrational fear that someone doesn't like me.

But I don't let those isolated incidents derail my life or my relationships. I've survived and so can you. All it takes is that first step.

And remember, as I always tell bullied kids in gyms throughout America -- there is nothing wrong with you and there never has been! It is probably everything that's right about you that makes you a target of unkindness. Stay true to who you are because who you are is wonderful!