Bob: Bullying in our day has become a 24/7 phenomenon. Jonathan McKee says our children are never not in the crosshairs.

Jonathan: All of us sitting around this table here—maybe, we endured some tough stuff at school; but that bell would ring at, you know, 2:30 or 2:45; and we would go home to this other world, where we didn’t have to endure that kind of stuff until, maybe, the next morning at 7:45 or 8 am.

Now, when that bell rings at 2:30, kids enter a whole new world. It’s that world that’s right there in their pocket; so at 10 at night/11 at night—you know, there are not just snarky comments—but very often, it’s these mean pictures. You know, this is a whole new level of bullying, and it happens right/and extends right into that bedroom at night.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, March 8th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. When was the last time your son or daughter was mocked, or ridiculed, or belittled/bullied? We’re going to explore that subject today with Jonathan McKee. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re talking about a very common phenomenon this week. If you don’t think your kids are doing it, or having it done to them, or watching it done to others, then you’re just not tuned in. We’re talking about bullying.

You know, Dave, there is part of me that goes: “We don’t want to raise snowflakes who, you know, if somebody says, ‘Oh, your shoes untied,’ they go in the corner and they can’t function anymore”; but at the same time, there is a lot of very aggressive, very hurtful and hateful things that are happening in real life—and now—online through devices, and on Facebook®, and social media—that are really sending many of our sons and daughters into a tailspin.

Dave: Yes; it’s crazy to think of the world we live in today. I mean, I know we grew up in a day, where there was no internet/there was no cyber aspect to this. Yet, we saw bullying. Now, magnify that times 1,000 or a 100,000—that’s the world our kids are living in. Every minute of every day, there’s that potential of cyber bullying.
Ann: And they carry it in their pockets; so it’s with them in the morning, and it’s with them before they go to bed at night—so it’s constant. It probably has way more influence, in some ways, than a parent in terms of time spent with.

Bob: Well, Jonathan McKee is going to help us sort all of this out. Jonathan, welcome back to FamilyLife Today.

Jonathan: Oh, thanks for having me.

Bob: Jonathan is the author of a book called The Bullying Breakthrough. He has spent— is that right?—decades—you have spent multiple decades working with junior and high school kids and speaking about subjects like this all across the country. This book is designed, not so much for the kids; but for the moms and the dads and teachers—for the grownups—to help the three groups. You identify the three groups as the bullies, the bullied, and the bystanders.

In thinking about that—I’m thinking about the bullies: “There is a way to help bullies not be bullies?”

Jonathan: Yes; absolutely. It’s like what we’ve already been talking about this week—this is all about self-esteem. It’s not just a kid is getting picked on that feels bad about themselves, but this bully feels bad. Like they say—and I’m paraphrasing—it rolls downhill. Very often, the bully might be getting it at home or somewhere else; so they want to feel better about themselves, so they go in and bring someone else down.

We, as parents, may need to keep our eyes open for this; because our kid is probably one of these three: either the bully, the bullied, or the bystander.

Bob: What’s the difference between bullying in real life and, now, social media/cyber bullying?

Jonathan: Well, cyber bullying is a new kind of hurt. Cyber bullying victims are the most likely to attempt suicide. As a matter of fact, bullying victims are twice as likely, compared to a kid who is not bullied, to attempt suicide; cyber bullyings are three times as likely.

I am sure there were some rough days for us, where maybe we endured some tough stuff at school; but for a lot of us, we had a safe place to go home to. That bell would ring at 2:30 or 2:45; and we would go home to this other world, where we didn’t have to endure that kind of stuff until, maybe, the next morning at 7:45 or 8 am.

Well, now, when that bell rings at 2:30, kids enter a whole new world; and it’s that world that’s right there in their pocket. This world has no limitations, now; because most parents let kids take these devices with them everywhere. As a matter of fact, most of these devices follow them into the bedroom at night.
Dave: So, what do we do?

Ann: Yes?

Dave: I’m guessing you’re not going to say, “Get rid of your phones,”—although I’m sure you’ve got some advice on how to control that—but what do we do?

Ann: —as parents?

Dave: These phones/the internet are a part of our world.

Jonathan: Yes.

Dave: Kids are going into their bedrooms with their phones, or they are looking at it every day.

Jonathan: Yes—no; the answer isn’t deny them phones; but it might be to delay because we are so quick in this country to just hand our kids devices. I mean, as we’re sitting here right now, you can’t get through a week without seeing some article from some expert talking about rethinking screens; you know? We saw a recent article, back in The New York Times, talking about the dark side of social media and how, in the Silicon Valley, all the Silicon Valley parents, who work with technology all the time, when they go away during the day, their instructions to the nannies are: “Take them to the park; no screens.”

We are more and more becoming aware that these screens aren’t necessarily the greatest thing to just hand our kids; but we also live in a country where the average kid gets a smartphone at 10.3 years old. Of course, the first thing they want is—they want to be on social media. The number-one social media that young people want to be on, at 11/12 years old, is—they want to be on Snapchat®. Well, guess what? If a little kid, who is 11 or 12 years old, goes to sign up for Snapchat or Instagram®—because of the Federal Trade Commission’s COPPA, which is the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act—Snapchat will tell them: “Oh, I’m sorry. You’re too young,” because they enter in their birth date.

So, that kid will, of course, go back to school and be like, “Oh, I wasn’t old enough.” Well, their friend goes, “Hey, stupid; just change your birth year.” “OH!” So, kids, then, lie about their age. That’s why there are countless stories in that book about 12-year-olds, who are being blasted on social media. Their parents are like, “I don’t know what to do.”

Well, you know, the simple thing, honestly—if your 11- or 12-year-old is being blasted on social media—is to say: “Hey, guess what? I’m sorry; it’s against the law. You’re not even supposed to be on social media.” The answer isn’t, “No”; it’s just, “Not yet.”
starts with, you know, having some loving guard rails; and the guard rail of: “I’m not saying, ‘No’; but just like you’re going to be able to drive a car when you’re 16, if you want.” They’re like: “Well, I don’t want that. I just want the smartphone.”

Dave: Yes.

Jonathan: “Well, that’s cool. You’re going to be able to get that someday.” We can have guard rails like that.

Another guard rail that parents really should have—that really could take a lot out of cyber bullying—is no phones in the bedroom. They wouldn’t be alone saying that because, from the American Academy of Pediatrics to The National Sleep Foundation—I mean, again, here’s something that all the experts are saying: “Don’t let your kids have that phone on their bedside all night. It’s keeping them up at night. They are looking at all kinds of stuff they shouldn’t be looking at anyway. They’re also throwing snarky or just plain mean comments at each other.”

Bob: Best practices, as we’ve talked to parents about this: “Have all of the phones by 9 or 10 at night in a common place, where everybody’s off of them.” That’s just what we do as a family.

Then I would also sit down with your kids, and I’d pull out last month’s cell phone bill; and I say: “Look here. Can you see where it shows when the calls are made or received? So, if you come down after Mom and Dad are in bed, and you get your phone and you get on your phone, I’m going to know when this happens; and at that point, you’re going to lose your phone for a week,” or”…a month,”—or whatever you want to do.

You can help your kids understand: “These are the rules of the house; and we love you—this is why we’re doing—we do it for us. We all put our phones here. They sleep here at night just like we sleep in our rooms at night. If you decide you needed something in the middle of the night, I’ll find out at some point; and there will be consequences for it.”

Jonathan: Well, Bob, our kids are so much savvier than that. There’s no way they are going to text, or there is no way they are going to call. They are going to use some app, where there is no trace.

Bob: Right.

Jonathan: That’s why it’s even better to—I mean, I tell parents all the time—I say: “Hey, you know what? If you’re going to do this”—because I’ve had parents tell me the stories of their kids at 3 am, downstairs, grabbing that phone off the charger. You know, this is just a reality. Put it on your night stand right next to you. I joke with parents—I say,
“And, then, crush a light bulb right on the ground right next to it. [Laughter] So, you can hear the crunching as they...”—you know?

The kid will still be like, “It’s worth it!” This is something they want; and sadly, this is a tool they use for bullying all the time. It’s one of those areas where we can just, as parents, say: “Hey, you know what? We can kind of save them from that.” Honestly, when you’re 15 and 16, they are going to still be dealing with this during the day; but at least, they won’t be plagued with it throughout the evening.

**Dave:** Yes; I think most parents—you tell me; you’re the expert—don’t understand the problem—they’re like: “There is no big deal. I give my kid a phone. He’s 12/14. You guys are really over—you know—

**Ann:**—“overreacting.”

**Dave:**—“dramatizing how bad it is. There’s not that big a deal.” They really are clueless.

**Jonathan:** Yes; whenever somebody surveys young people and asks them to be honest about what they are doing with their devices and their phones—there was a recent survey, again, from Common Sense Media, who constantly is polling parents and kids on this subject. They asked young people; and the overwhelming majority of young people said, “If my parents knew what went on—on social media—they wouldn’t allow me on social media.”

**Ann:** We have some good friends—because they’ve seen the interaction of their daughter on social media/cyber bullying—she was really struggling with depression. They said she was becoming a different person: she was rebelling; she was doing things they weren’t—she was sneaking at night. They took away her phone for a year.

**Bob:** Wow.

**Ann:**—a year.

**Dave:** Junior year in high school, I think.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Ann:** And I said, “Could you put up with that, for a year, of her in your ear?” They said: “It changed her life. She came back to the person that she used to be. At the end of the year, she thanked us.” She said: “I was trapped, and I didn’t know how to get out. Thank you for saving me,”—which, that was extreme—
Dave: Yes.

Ann: —and bold, but their daughter never got back into that.

Jonathan: And that’s a tough situation; because I have parents ask me all the time—they’ll sit there and say: “Well, wait. I’d love to do something like that.” Of course, we’ve got how many thousands of moms, now?—they are going to be like: “Well, that’s what I’m going to do! I’m just going to take away my…”—how do you even approach that?

I think one other thing to do is constantly look for these opportunities for these face-to-face conversations—is dialogue more than anything else. If we walk away from this week, talking about this—this is the thing we should walk away [with]. We should look for opportunities to dialogue about this.

What does this actually look like if you really want to take away your kid’s phone? I would start at dinner, as you guys are all modeling this; so you have this no-tech-at-the-table rule. As you are there at dinner, read an article: Google® “Dr. Jean Twenge” or google “Jonathan McKee; “No Phone”—I mean one of us, who is talking about this kind of stuff—or “Media fast”—google that—you will find articles about kids who did this.

Dr. Jean Twenge’s research will show that—basically, in short—the more time people spent on social media, the more depressed they are; the less time they spend on social media, the happier they were. Read like the little explanation [at dinnertime with kids]—say: “This is an interesting paragraph. Let’s look at this. This is a doctor, who researches this—she wrote this book, iGen. Let’s look at this.” Read it and go, “What do you think?”

Or read a chapter from my Teen’s Guide to Social Media and Mobile Devices. It’s like: “Look at what Jonathan says here about Snapchat—these guys who created this. I don’t know—what do you think? Is he right?”

Just start the dialogue and talk about this stuff, because it’s amazing—so much research out there shows—and I’ve written a ton about it, so I could give you link after link—but so much of this research shows that young people are actually tired of this. Honestly, over 50 percent of young people say, “I wish I could spend less time on my phone.” I think they’re open to this. They just don’t want you to just come in and barge in and demand: “PHONE! NOW!” [Child speaking]: “You don’t understand,” “You don’t listen to me,” “You don’t…”—so start with that dialogue.

Dave: Obviously, the key would be, if you open up this discussion: “Shut up, parent; and listen.”

Jonathan: Amen.

Dave: Really; let your son and daughter—
Ann: —and ask the question.

Dave: —come to their own conclusion, because they will. They are going to look at it, and they’re going to end up where you want them to end up; but if you take them there, they are going to rebel—they’re going to put up defenses; right?

Bob: Well, I'll also say—because I think you’re right—but I think, as parents, we’ve got to be much more focused on instruction and training rather than spending a whole lot of time on correction—

Dave: Yes.

Bob: —and reproof. The reason we are dealing with correction is because we didn’t spend as much time as, maybe, we needed to on the instruction, and the training, and equipping. To your point, Jonathan, read a chapter from your book—talk about these issues, so that kids are equipped and prepared.

I want to know, Jonathan, because as we’ve talked about this, we’ve talked a lot about correction; we’ve talked about changing behavior patterns. Let’s talk about our kid’s heart; because, ultimately, this is the issue—it’s not: “How do you put up fences?”—but: “How do you help a child know, in his or her heart, what to stay away from?—what are the good things; what are the bad things? How do we deal with heart issues with our kids here?”

Jonathan: Well, that’s an amazing question; because so much of this is helping our kids—not just giving them a list of: “Here are the five things you’re supposed to do.” In my chapter, writing about bystanders, the subtitle of the chapter is: “The Chapter You Might Want to Read With Your Kids”; because my whole goal is that, not only that we are dialoguing about this, but that we are equipping our kids to start thinking about this, not just on a task-list sort of level, but on a heart level—

Bob: Right.

Jonathan: —of how God is changing them and changing the way they think. This is—sanctification is happening in our kids’ lives, even if our kids don’t know what the word, sanctification, means.

As we talk with our kids about this, one of the things I talk about with our kids is helping our kids understand the difference they can make in the life of another kid. Research out there shows—and I cite it in my book—that if a kid, who is bullied, just had one friend—one friend makes the difference between a kid attempting suicide going on that downward spiral. Just helping our kids understand that they could, literally, save a life—helping our kids do that—helping them live out that Philippians 2 passage we’ve already talked about this week / helping them live out what Jesus modeled and do that. If they
realize: “Hey, guess what? This actually makes a difference when I go and sit down with a kid.”

Another thing that we need to help our kids understand is that this is something that needs to be enduring. This isn’t just a one-time thing; because—and I talk about this a little bit in the book—because one of the things I’ve seen, working in youth ministry as long as I have, is lots of times people will—you know, you’ll get that one message from a youth pastor about, “Why don’t you sit next to a kid at lunch?” We always hear that; right? [Laughter]

Here’s exactly what happens—this kid goes and sits next to another kid at lunch. When you sit next to a bullied kid—if you would have sat next to me in middle school at lunch, I’ll tell you what would have happened—I would have thought, “This kid is up to something.” I would have been skeptical; I would have probably been rude; and I was a little weird and hard to talk with. What would happen is—this nice kid, who wanted to sit next to me, would be like, “Well, I can see why he’s alone!” and that would be it.

If we could prepare our kids for this—and that’s one of the things I talk about—is sometimes, kids who are bullied are—and this is really a confession—are quite awkward. This has followed me into my marriage. Honestly, I’ve gone to counseling; because, in my relationship with my wife, this comes out. Because I am so socially awkward at times that, sometimes, she doesn’t even mean something—and when she says it—and I think, “Oh, man; she doesn’t like me,” or “She’s saying this…”; so this is tough.

We need to talk to our kids about how to care for a hurting kid: “We’re all broken, and we could all use a friend,” and “Here’s what making a difference can do…” That’s where it’s fun; because interviewing as many people as I did for this book, I encountered some great stories of seeing how this actually works.

On campus—there were some campuses that actually had a program, where teens would basically have an underclassman—so like a junior or senior might be assigned a freshman or a sophomore—and they would sit with them at lunch. These kids were trained and were told, “Hey, this may not go well at first.” It’s amazing to see some of those stories—how they played out and how they made a difference—because someone that felt completely alone, all of a sudden, had someone who cared.

**Dave:** Yes; I mean, one of my dreams, as a parent, was to try—and I try to do this, now, as a pastor to our congregation—is try to inspire people to be a blessing. When you study, even the Old Testament, what a blessing looked like—it had three elements: see people the way God sees them; know them, which is everything Jonathan is talking about—ask questions, draw them out, enter into a dialogue. Do you know what the third one is?—speak it out.
Here is what I would say: “All you bullies out there: Quit it!” [Laughter] “Just stop it!” That’s all I can say to them—it’s like: “You’re projecting your own low self-esteem on somebody else." To the ones, who are being bullied, and the ones who are standing beside looking at it—I’d say: “Bless!” See, which is what you’re saying about—go to school/go to your workplace—"See people; get to know them/enter into a relationship; then, third, speak life.”

You know what hit me was Ephesians 4 [verse 29]—says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.” What would it look like if you were the one that spoke life?—what I see, beauty? I mean, that person would follow you around. Think about this, parents: “What if your kid is getting bullied; but when they come home, they hear from you: ‘You’re special,’ ‘You’re unique,’ ‘You’re beautiful’?”

**Ann:** I would take it one step further because—with teenagers, we had a lot of their friends in our home—and I heard more, sometimes, from their friends of what they were going through than from my own kids. I’ll never forget having these kids sit at our island; and I would say, “Has anyone told you how smart you are?” They would say, “No.” “Has anyone told you how gifted you are in this area?” “No.” I think, even for our kids’ friends, we can make a big impact—just what you were saying, Dave—with our words of breathing life and identity into our kids and their friends.

**Bob:** This is a great topic for moms and dads to have a conversation about, to talk with other parents about, to develop strategies around. And Jonathan, your book helps us do that. Thanks for being here and talking with us about this.

**Jonathan:** Thanks for having me.

**Bob:** The book is called *The Bullying Breakthrough*, and it’s a book we’ve got in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. You can go, online—get your copy. Our website is FamilyLifeToday.com, or call to order the book: 1-800-FL-TODAY is the number. So, again, get a copy of the book, *The Bullying Breakthrough*, by Jonathan McKee. Order, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY,” to get your copy—1-800-358-6329—1-800-FL-TODAY.

Now, Monday night, we have a get-together planned for those of you who are Legacy Partners, regular monthly contributors to the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*. Dave and Ann Wilson and I are going to get together with you by phone or online for, kind of, a neighborhood meeting. It’s a big conference call. It’s interactive—a chance for us to introduce you to Dave and Ann—help you get to know them a little better. We’ll talk about their book, *Vertical Marriage*, and about their recent trip to New York to be on *The Today Show*. That was pretty exciting, and we’ll have an opportunity for you to interact as well.
So, if you’re a Legacy Partner, you should have received an email. I hope you’ve already opened it and signed up. It’s got all the information about how to connect with us on Monday night. If you’re not a Legacy Partner, why don’t you join the team? Help make FamilyLife Today possible in your community and in cities all around the world. Here’s what you’re doing—you’re investing in bringing practical biblical help and hope to marriages and families; and certainly, in this culture, that is an urgent need.

When you become a monthly donor of FamilyLife—a Legacy Partner—we want to say, “Thank you,” by sending you a gift card to attend an upcoming Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway. You can use that for yourself or share it with a friend. You can become a Legacy Partner, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to join: 1-800-FL-TODAY is the number. Of course, you can join us Monday when you become a new Legacy Partner as well. And for those of you who already Legacy Partners, we’ll see you Monday night.

Now, this has been a tough subject to deal with today—the subject of bullying. Before we wrap up, David Robbins, the President of FamilyLife®, is with us again with some thoughts on this subject. David—

David: Thanks, Bob. You know, the Scripture that comes to mind, as I’m listening to the conversation today, is Psalm 139. We need to believe it for ourselves, and I think it’s really important that we speak it into our kids’ lives often. I just want to take a moment to speak it over us right now. Psalm 139: “O Lord, You’ve searched me and known me. You know when I sit and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways." Then, in verse 14, he says, “I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows them very well.”

The truth that we need to hang onto today is that God knows everything about us. He is the One that gives us identity to relate well to others and to be able to empathize with whatever anyone is walking through.

Bob: That’s a great way to tie up all we’ve talked about today. Thank you, David.

One final note: I want to ask you to pray for those couples who are going to be attending one of our Weekend to Remember marriage getaways this weekend—folks joining us in Akron, Ohio; in Kansas City, Kansas; in Minneapolis; Redondo Beach, California; and Sun River, Oregon. We’ve got five getaways happening next weekend as well in Boise; Minnesota; Nashville; Reston, Virginia; and Ventura, California.

Again, pray that these couples would have a transformative weekend in their relationship—that their marriage would be strengthened as a result of investing this time to getaway together, and to focus on one another, and focus on God’s design for their marriage. If you’d like more information about the Weekend to Remember, go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com.
And we hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend, and we hope you can join us back on Monday. We want to share with you some of what we heard, recently, on the FamilyLife Love Like You Mean It® marriage cruise. We had a great week—heard some great messages—and we’re going to share those with you all week next week. Be sure to join us Monday for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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