



Fitting In

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Near the beginning of the popular movie "Sound of Music" there is a song that begins "How do you solve a problem like Maria?".

The tune is about a novice nun who has great difficulty following the rules of the convent. Even though she is eager to please God and take her final vows, she often becomes lost in nature and late for her commitments. The nuns obviously love her but are frustrated by the fact that she is always in trouble and doesn't fit in to their way of life.

Then Maria is sent to work for Captain Von Trapp who is a single parent of seven children and a strict disciplinarian. Maria charms not only the children but also their father with her unconventional ways. In the end she realizes that marrying the Captain and mothering the children is a better fit for her than becoming a nun and living in a convent.

It can be very difficult for individuals who do not seem to "fit in". They are frequently bullied and lonely. Many times they suffer from depression or anxiety. They may have kind hearts and eagerness to build good relationships but just can't seem to find the place where they are comfortable and feel connected. It seems that the harder they try, the worse it gets.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that can be very judgmental. When I hear stories of bullying it makes me wonder about the perspective of the individual who is actually doing the bullying. Where they abused and bullied themselves? Have they experienced trauma that causes them to lash out at others? Do they think that it is best to attack others before being attacked? Are they lacking in skills and think that this is only way that they can face the world?

The person who is targeted can respond in a number of ways. Many find that they move from one situation to another, always receiving the same negative treatment. They want to fit in but it is almost as though they are reenacting that old cartoon where the person wears a sign on their back that says "Kick me". They get to the point where they not only rehearse trauma over and over again in their minds but they also come to expect it.

The opposite reaction is to ignore the bullying and not let it take hold. Usually this takes power away from the person who is doing the bullying and wanting a reaction. It definitely isn't an easy thing to do, especially for teenagers who desperately want to have friends and fit in.

One of the best things that the victim can do is to find a place where they do fit in. Maria never expected that her future would be with a family that she had never met. They needed her and appreciated the exact impulsivity that had caused problems for her at the abbey. The fellow nuns who had been so frustrated by the fact that she didn't follow rules actually were thrilled that she found a place where she was a better fit and needed.

Instead of trying harder to fit into the place where you think you "should" be, try finding a career, support group or other environment where you can be loved for who you really are. This may take awhile and be somewhere that you least expect.

Bullying is a very traumatic and damaging occurrence. But it takes three factors in order to continue: the bully, the target and the environment that allows it.

We are all part of society and because of this we each have an important role in the quest to end inappropriate treatment and foster a world that is healthy for everyone.

What are you doing to prevent others from being bullied and treated poorly? Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?