



***Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy***

Emily Bazelon

(This month's book review comes with a bonus! Join Issaquah Middle School Parent Ed. Reps Jana White and Kristen Allen-Bentsen, as well as fellow parent and technology/parenting blogger Anne Livingston for a Book Group style discussion of the book on Thursday May 16<sup>th</sup> at 7pm in the IMS Library. 5 copies of the book are available for check out in the IMS Library)

Emily Brazelon's book, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy*, addresses the issues of bullying in young people at school and on-line and delves into the reactions and responses of schools, parents and the community at large. The book begins as a journalistic case study of 3 real life bullying incidents. In each, a child's self-esteem and self-confidence are bruised and battered by the bullying she/he receives from peers. Each child's story is unique and each case of bullying is dealt with differently by the school, the community and the media.

However, the book is not pure journalism. Brazelon departs from her role as the objective reporter and asks the reader to reflect on how we can raise our kids to be strong enough to withstand "drama" (her word for hurtful exchanges between peers that may not be criminal) and stronger still to refuse to engage in negative, hurtful behavior and to help those who are suffering it. She asks us to examine the role schools now have to play in dealing with the emotional lives of students and different programs in place for addressing bullying specifically. But she also reminds us that parents play a critical role in teaching kids to be resilient, learning to help kids separate "drama" from true bullying and working with schools towards reasonable solutions.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the novel is the chapter entitled, "Facebook" wherein Brazelon tours Facebook headquarters and meets with the department in charge of addressing bullying and harassment on their site. She reports that each report of harassment gets less than one second of attention to decide if it warrants a response or not. And while Facebook is trying to put together a system that empowers victims to find support in their immediate environment, Brazelon also points out that "No one from the world of schools has a seat at the Facebook table." During her tour she manages to point out to a Facebook employee a particularly harmful Facebook Group linked to one of the bullying cases she followed...a group that violated Facebook policy but that was overlooked by the systems they have

in place to take down harmful and hurtful material.

Brazelons' book is an excellent catalyst to conversations already taking place in Issaquah middle and high schools. What role do parents play in bullying? What is the difference between hurtful and criminal on-line activity? When should schools intervene in bullying happening on-line? How do we make the values of character and empathy more important than social status in our children? Join us as we tackle these questions and others in our book group discussion: Thursday May 16<sup>th</sup> at 7pm in the IMS Library.