Bullying

I had a chance this week to go speak to ACE Charter School about bullying. My own, homegrown expert went with me. My 18 year old daughter, MacKenzie has always had a special interest in this topic and was a great resource in communicating with the young crowd. Great school and great leadership, by the way.

 I’ve had some experience working with this behavior in relationships, too. Along with Melvin Harris and Susan Johansen, I’ve helped facilitate a family violence intervention program for many years.

 To say it plainly, some folks have some horrible relationship skills. Their attitude is “my way or the highway.” They tend to operate by force. Out of a sense of fear, hurt or pride they selfishly guard and control the rules of the relationship.

 The bully or dominant person in the relationship has some predictable behaviors. They want to make the rules. They will keep the same rules as they see fit. And if caught breaking the rules they will manipulate and bamboozle such that the victim or more passive person feels confused and crazy.

 The most common features of a bullying relationship are to minimize, deny, and blame. Essentially the bully wants to set the reality for the couple.

 I’m hoping this is not sounding too familiar.

 I use the word familiar on purpose. Some times patterns are set early. Behavior experienced in the family we grew up in magically appears in our adult relationships. And it seems like a coincidence. Our partner seemed so perfect when we met, how did things take this nasty turn?

 Family patterns do repeat and cycles of violence echo through generations and cultures. We could do some extensive digging to figure out why, but lets not. Lets just answer the question, what now?

 First and above all, if safety is a concern then proceed with caution. But do proceed. Call the Crisis line at (478) 745-9292. Carefully make your plan to find your safety.

 If you find that your Coupling has gone off track and you are just trying to cope with a bully, then maybe we can find some help from what you might tell your own child.

 Separate the action from the impact. The bully blusters to build their ego. Therefore they have a weakened ego that needs defending. The bully does this with attacks. So let their words and behaviors be about them and not about you. Their behavior has impact only as you are receptive to it. Put up an emotional boundary and reduce the effect of the behavior. If bullying doesn’t work, they won’t do it.

 Confront the bully if you can. It is good to name the behavior as not okay, but don’t get into a tug of war. A tug of war takes two, state your case and put down the rope.

 Be nice first and stay positive. Do this especially with yourself. Move your relationship to higher ground by being a better person; strong, kind and brave. You certainly won’t promote healthy Coupling by getting in the mud or being the doormat.

 Finally, be less tolerant of inappropriate behavior and build toward a culture of healthy coupling. Empower yourself, believe in yourself and don’t accept the unacceptable.