

Bullying Prevention Consulting Newsletter

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DOES STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH BULLYING HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE BRAIN

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When a person gets bullied, this experience can cause major changes to one's brain that could lead to cognitive and emotional issues (Bates, 2015). Sometimes these issues and their effects are almost akin to the effects of child abuse and other forms

of abuse and violence. People who are bullied often deal with issues of anxiety, depression, issues of self-esteem, relationship issues, as well as a range of physical issues. For a developing brain, bullying can manifest itself in the crevices and various parts of the brain which can exhibit lasting effects on the brain as a whole.

Bullying can alter stress hormones which can in turn affect brain function. If your boss is sabotaging and humiliating you as a target, then a natural reaction is to feel that you want to run away from your boss. Since most of us cannot run away from their supervisors, our stress levels around our bullying supervisors are affected. Miczek (2015) has found that too much of the stress hormone can remain in the brain long after the stress has ended.



ABOUT CLARA

Clara Wajngurt, is an executive coach, author, speaker and professor in higher education for thirty five years, an expert in the self-development of others, and in empowering those around her. She is also the founder of Bullying Prevention Consulting.

Clara Wajngurt has written several peer-reviewed articles on workplace bullying prevention and has written two books on this subject. Her educational background includes a BS in both Mathematics and Psychology from City College of New York and a Doctorate in Algebraic Number Theory from City University of New York Graduate School.

Bullying Prevention Consulting offers workshops and consults to small and large scale groups including individual sessions.



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When exposed to physical or emotional stress, our bodies have an elevation of white blood cells, which in turn help release substances (like neutrophils, lymphocytes, etc.) that help our bodies ward off infection. When someone is in constant stress, like on a job exposed to a yelling colleague, or at home with a domineering spouse, our immune systems don't work as well since there are so many white blood cells formed to ward off infection.



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When an individual recovers quickly from strained conditions such as an aggressive boss or domineering husband, by talking back constructively, fewer blood cells are formed and therefore this individual better deals with the bullying experience. The heightened immune response exhibited by a non-resilient individual promotes changes in one's brain and therefore encourages behavior changes. Since the brain is responsible for regulating our behavior-we infer that brain changes can lead to changes in one's behavior.

Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin studied social stress in hamsters and found that 'juvenile hamsters who were bullied by adult hamsters became more aggressive towards the smaller hamsters while being fearful and subordinate with the bigger and older hamsters.' Such behaviors are also exhibited in individuals who have been both bullied and act like a bully. Delville found that high levels of vasopressin are associated with increased aggression, while lower levels of aggression are associated with serotonin. Bullied hamsters had lower levels of vasopressin with the bigger hamsters and higher levels of serotonin with the younger and smaller hamsters.

We need to find effective treatments and medications for balancing vasopressin levels with serotonin levels when being bullied by someone.

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