
School Experience: My Childhood Wounds

In primary school, I knew everyone in my class, even if I wasn't friends with them. But at high school, I looked around my class and only recognised a few faces. I knew I would have to make some new friends. But 'however' I was shy, and I hated putting myself out there. So I waited for people to come and talk to me instead, because I was too anxious to initiate the conversation.

Then the cliques started to form. There was a clear cut line between the geeks and the plastics, the sporty kids and the theatre kids and I drifted between groups, never really feeling like I belonged in any of them. I looked and acted like an outsider, and this made me a prime target for bullies.

I believed every nasty name they called me, I accepted it when I was left out of social events, and my grades suffered because all I could think about during classes was where I could eat my lunch without being jumped. I used to enjoy learning, but I started questioning if school was the best place for me to be.

Unsurprisingly, depression and anxiety crept in. I felt so alone, and so ill to the point where I didn't want to go to school at all. The school counsellor implied I was attention-seeking, and the teachers didn't know what to do with me. I'd gone from a bright student to a problem child, and I had no plans for the future.

I decided that regardless of my academic capabilities, I would leave school as soon as I could and get a job instead. I didn't care what job it was, anything had to be better than feeling like this every day. I felt stronger knowing that there was an end in sight to the daily teasing and harassment. As I got to my final year of school, I stopped caring about what my bullies thought of me, because I knew I wouldn't have to put up with them for much longer. I held my head high for the first time in years.

However, I fear I took this mentality too far. I became arrogant, I believed I didn't need approval from anyone - including my teachers - and I thought I knew more than them. I went from actively listening and taking notes in class, to rocking up late and putting in the bare minimum effort. I became one of the 'cool kids' for just not caring at all, and I got high off my own hype. All those years of being cast out and being picked on for being myself, and now I was finally respected, but for all the wrong reasons.

My teachers tried to get me back on the rails, they encouraged me to stay on at school and not give up. But I didn't see it as giving up, I saw it as defiance against their failure to protect me from the bullies in the first place. I thought I knew better than them, I was determined to go my own way, if anything, just to prove them wrong. I wanted so badly to be successful without an education, because the education system let me down.

I fell into entry level jobs, never feeling fulfilled. I saw former classmates graduating from university and always wondered if I made the right choice by not listening to my teachers. It was only after confronting my deeply suppressed mental health issues that I realised I had an

interest in psychology, and helping others like me. Once I'd healed my childhood wounds through a year of counselling, I quit the last miserable office job I'd ever do, and took a leap of faith back to the environment that caused all of this in the first place.

So here I am, eight years later and finally in college. I realised all along that I was a lost teenager, who cared so much about fitting in and being liked that I stunted my personal and professional development for it. Looking back, I wish I'd had the courage to stand up to my bullies sooner, but not let their approval get to me. If I did that, I would have got more out of my educational experience by taking school seriously.

However, I don't regret leaving, because I didn't feel nurtured or protected by my teachers, and I clearly wasn't emotionally ready to pursue higher education at sixteen. Getting into work at a young age allowed me to grow my confidence and help me choose a career path. I have done so much growing up and reflection since leaving school, and now, fitting in means nothing to me. This time, I won't throw away my future for the easy way out.