

Dealing with loneliness



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I never had many friends. I was always the loner kid, sitting in the corner, not talking or even looking at anyone, you know? The one with the glasses, the braces, the 'uncool' shoes; the classic victim. For as long as I could remember I'd been picked on. Whether it was someone thieving my books, or pushing me over 'by accident', there was always something. The awful thing was, nobody seemed to care. The teachers chose not to see it, and my parents just told me to deal with it; "just ignore them" was one of their favourite lines. So I built up a wall. I learnt to keep out of peoples' way, and just do what they told me to do.

I never drew attention to myself in lessons; pretended that I was dumb, that I didn't know anything. My teachers despaired of me, I think; after all, wouldn't you? So when I started secondary school, I saw it as an opportunity to start afresh. No one knew me, I could be a different person, and maybe people wouldn't be so mean. And at first, it worked. I had a group of friends, which was a novelty for me, seeing as it had never happened before, and I made more of an effort in lessons. My parents didn't mind that I was going out every night to hang out in the park.

They were just relieved that I wasn't still a loner. I actually spoke to them at home, told them about my day; they were amazed. Over the next few months, my popularity increased. I found myself in the middle of a large group of friends, and it was fascinating to me that these people actually wanted to be around me, to be my friend, to talk to me; and this time, they said nice things, not insults and threats. I never told any of my new friends about the bullying at my primary school. I guess I thought that if I told them,

they might change their opinions of me and maybe think that I wasn't so cool after all.

About half way through my first year at secondary school, a boy started at our school. When we were told in assembly, the name rang a bell in my memory, but I couldn't put a face to the name. But as soon as he walked into our class, I knew who he was. I must have done a double take or something, because my best friend sitting next to me immediately asked me what was wrong. He was a guy from my primary school, the leader of the nastiness. I don't think he recognised me; at least he didn't show it - after all, the glasses had gone and I was sitting with loads of my friends, not in my old haunt in the corner.

For about a week he did nothing, he didn't even speak to me; I was stupid enough to think that maybe he had forgotten. But I was wrong. About a week after he started, I started to get these texts, saying horrible, cruel things; worse than they'd been before. I knew it was him straight away, but he never said his name, so I couldn't prove it. My friends didn't know. I didn't tell them. My parents didn't notice, it was a busy time at work and they were too wrapped up in their own lives. I became more and more shy, more closed off, and slowly my school work started to suffer.

It was like being back at primary school all over again. Luckily, the teachers at my secondary school wouldn't let it slip so easily. They phoned home and told my parents they thought something was wrong. My parents sat me down and wouldn't let me leave until I told them what was going on. I didn't want to, it was like admitting defeat, but finally I showed them the texts. They were horrified. I didn't want to contact the school, I didn't want to do

anything about it, but they did, and I realise now that it was for my own good.

The school sorted it all out; he's gone from my life now, and I don't have to speak to him ever again. My friends were shocked when they found out what had been going on. They couldn't believe I hadn't told them about it before. What surprised me the most was that they didn't think I was weak or stupid, and they didn't change their minds about me; in fact, it made our friendships stronger, because I felt more open with them. I think I would have dealt with it better if I'd told my friends. But it's in the past now, and I try not to stay on it. My life has moved on.