

FROM THE AUTHOR
OF INSIDE THE TEENAGE MIND

SURVIVING THE WOLF

SARAH TERRY

Living with and surviving your own Bully



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About the Author

Sarah Terry is a Counsellor working in the Midlands, UK. She has over 12 years' experience of counselling, coaching, mentoring, and training in a variety of settings.

Sarah's varied career, from trainee Legal Executive to Project Manager to Waitress; has meant that she has been exposed to many different types of people in many settings. This has developed a passion for helping people to be the best version of themselves.

In her day job as a counsellor, Sarah works in schools with vulnerable 11–18-year-olds and in her successful private practice, she also sees clients of all ages.

Sarah wants to make quality mental health services accessible to all and is constantly striving to help make this happen.

Sarah lives in Staffordshire in the UK with her husband and dog where she enjoys an often much needed walk on beautiful Cannock Chase whenever she can.

You can find out more about Sarah by visiting her website www.sarahterry.co.uk



How to use this book

There are no real rules to using this book but to get the most out of it, I have provided a couple of case studies to bring to life what Bullying can look like in real life.

More importantly, I challenge you to try the exercises and explore your own experience of being a bully or a victim at certain times in your life with no judgement. This, I hope, will give you a much better understanding of yourself and will also enable you to put yourself in another's shoes.

If you like the book and are hungry for more, please have a look at my website www.sarahterry.co.uk where you can find lots more information and also contact me should you feel the need.

What is Bullying?

Bullying can be summed up with many different terms and can act as an umbrella word for other types of abuse. The relatively recent term, coercive control sums up bullying and bullies can be anything from a name caller to a physical abuser or even a murderer.

Bullying consists of two elements. A Bully and a Victim. For a successful bully, there must always be a victim, and each has their own role to play in the relationship. This can be hard for some people to understand, and in my view, is the key to how bullies continue to be successful.

If you are in a bully / victim relationship, you may not be aware of it, but you would feel that something is not right. Do you find that you always seek approval from another person? Are you afraid to talk about certain subjects with that person, always being careful what you say?

It is common for us to have a view of an abused wife. Bullied emotionally and physically by her partner or the school student who is a victim of cyber bullies. Bullying can be far more subtle than this and is as much about the victim as it is the bully.

Another commonality is that a bully has often been a victim at some point and processes the negative emotion attached to this by trying to make someone else unhappy.

It's actually quite sad when we look at it this way and I always tell victims that bullies are sad, confused angry and often have low self-esteem as it can help them to humanise their bully and elevate themselves a little in the process.

As with most human interactions, we always look for, or are drawn to those we identify with. The bully, therefore, will be drawn to someone who seems to be withdrawn, quiet, angry or upset with life (at this point, it is necessary to comment that we are talking about common bully / victim scenarios and not someone who may be the victim of a sociopath or narcissist – this is a far more in-depth issue)

The bully will choose their victim and will then “test out” how well the victim will respond. This is why victims often talk about the fact that things have escalated over time and this will be a response to their own behaviour.

Explaining to a victim of bullying that they have a part to play in the scenario can be the most difficult part of the therapeutic process because once they have “identified” or “decided” they are a victim; they may extend this behaviour into other relationships where they receive attention but of a positive nature from friends and family. Another reaction may be to clam up and withdraw from friends and family. Either way, the behaviour is a signal of some kind.

Case Study – Kate and Annie

Annie was a lovely 12-year-old girl who came to work with me because she was incredibly quiet, withdrawn and anxious. This was particularly affecting her at school, where she was spending an increasing amount of time with Student Support Services and missing lessons. Annie's mum, Kate, decided she needed some more targeted help and so she came to see me.

Kate told me that Annie had developed a lot of obsessive behaviours, e.g., routines at home, food, TV programmes, etc. Kate had accommodated these where possible, but she now felt that she was "enabling" these behaviours instead of supporting Annie to challenge her moods and behaviours.

Kate also told me that she had navigated a very nasty divorce and that her ex-partner, Annie's father, had been emotionally abusive towards her and Annie. Kate felt that Annie's problems stemmed from her relationship with her father.

During my work with Annie, we very quickly realised that she was a Highly Sensitive Person*, HSP. A lot of young adults that I work with, tend to be HSPs and this can often be what brings them to the counselling room. Generally speaking, a HSP is someone whose senses are highly tuned to others and their environment. Annie told me that she could feel the energy of her classroom and this would often overwhelm her. If one of her friends was feeling poorly or unhappy, Abbie would feel it too.

This had escalated for Abbie and she was now hyper-sensitive to almost everything. It was affecting her ability to get through the day. Many victims of bullying are HSPs and it is this internal ability (or superpower!) that makes them more likely to "act" like a victim. This is because they may appear to be withdrawn and quiet. they usually have a very small, select group of friends who tend to share a lot of these traits (read "powers"!)

Before we could tackle Annie's feelings around her father, I wanted her to be able to get through her days more effectively so that she could experience some sense of control.

*Highly Sensitive People are thought to have a higher deeper central nervous system sensitivity to stimuli. Being Highly Sensitive is not a condition, it is a personality trait, but it can help to know more about it. Check out the "Personality Stuff" area of my website for more info.

Session 1

I gave Annie lots of examples of HSPs and what their World is like. I'm not an expert in the study of HSPs but I happen to be one, so I think that gives me some knowledge of the subject. I asked Annie if any of the following statements rang true for her...

- If a close family member or friend tells you they feel sick, you feel sick as well?
- Sometimes, you enter a room and feel that something is just "off", but you don't know what or why?
- Do you often have a feeling of dread for no apparent reason?

Annie told me that she agreed with all of the statements. She felt as if she were in a constant state of fear and anxiety which was starting to take over her life.

Before we took things any further, I explained that, far from being a problem to be dealt with, or something to be extinguished, being a HSP is in fact a type of superpower which enables some people to see what others do not see.

We spent some time thinking about superheroes who often use something thought to be negative and turn it into a power and a force for good. (think Spiderman, Hulk, Iron Man, Daredevil)

Annie responded really well to this and her demeanour began to change. When Kate came to collect Annie, she commented that she looked happier and brighter somehow.

I told Kate and Annie to research* Highly Sensitive People so that they could continue the discussion together.

Bullies often choose victims who are unlikely to fight back or rebel. Victims will often be quiet or sensitive, but it is still always important to recognise what the victim gets from the relationship with the bully.

Here are some examples...

- Love
- Affection
- Attention
- Money or gifts
- Recognition

It can also satisfy deeper feelings of inadequacy by proving to the victim over and over that they are correct to feel as hopeless as they do.

Whatever the reason, ultimately, the relationship ends or gets stuck in a toxic circle of events and behaviours. In Annie's case, we had to find out what she had been getting from the relationship with her emotionally abusive father.

*www.hsperson.com

Session 2

Annie had been reading about Highly Sensitive People and felt some confidence in the knowledge that there was nothing “wrong” with her.

Annie was doing a lot better at school and at home and Kate reported that she had been able to relax some of her obsessive behaviours.

Now, it was time to talk about Annie’s Dad. Annie described him as a very overpowering, loud man who seemed to rule his house with an aggressive authority. He was currently living with his parents who, Annie also told me; were also aggressive and cold.

Annie told me stories of her, and her younger sister being segregated from the family at mealtimes, when visiting Dad. She also told me that Dad would choose a “favourite” for the weekend they went to stay with him. The favourite would be lavished with gifts, asked to choose TV programmes, trips out etc. whilst the other sister would be made to stay in her room for the weekend often without food.

Another time, Annie’s father would make her and her sister call Kate and tell her she was disgusting, and they hated her. Kate never believed this, but, unbeknown to Annie and her Sister, Kate was fighting a vicious custody battle to win sole custody of the girls so that they never had to spend time with him again if they chose not to.

Annie told me that, although Kate has reassured her many times, she still feels extreme guilt and thinks her mum hates her for what she said. She also felt that her sister blamed her for not being able to protect her from her father.

To get to the route of the bullying relationship, we had to pick apart Annie’s memory of these times and ensure they were accurate.

Annie, like a lot of children who have experienced abuse, blamed herself for most of what happened with Dad. She very much saw that most of the abuse would not have happened if she had not been present or had done something to stop it.

Sometimes, it is helpful for victims of bullying to see the situation from another perspective. As with Annie, the victim can become introspective and find it difficult to get a view on their situation.

With the bullying relationship, there is also an element of grooming of the victim which ensures they stay in their subservient role.

We turned the tables a little to help Annie understand. I asked her if she blamed Kate for anything that had happened with dad. Annie said that she did not at all blame Kate. She added that Kate herself had been the victim of a bully in her Dad.

I smiled at Annie as she slowly began to see herself as she saw Kate, the victim of a bully!

We enhanced Annie’s thoughts by adding that her Dad had bullied Kate, herself, her sister and her grandparents. Now, Annie had to acknowledge her role as a victim and what she gained from remaining Dad’s victim.’

Annie established that she got satisfaction when she was not chosen as the “favourite” because it meant that her sister was treated well. She also said that if Dad was bullying her, it kept him calm somehow with everyone else.

THIS IS WHAT ANNIE GOT FROM THE RELATIONSHIP!!!

As you can see, when we talk about a pay-off and the fact that the victim also gets something from it, people can feel uneasy, but every interaction has a pay-off, no matter how skewed that may be.

I closed the session by reminding Annie that she was a victim of an abusive bully and she had not done anything to harm anyone else.

Once a victim sees their self in the role, they can more easily see the bully in theirs too!

My hope was that Annie would continue to see that her Dad’s behaviour was the problem, and she had a choice as to whether or not she played her part in the future or if she wanted to change her “role”.

Session 3

In this session, I wanted to try and use Annie's new knowledge, both of herself as a Highly Sensitive Person and her role as a victim of a bully. I wanted her to turn the tables on the negative connotations of both and use them to her advantage.

Annie had already researched HSPs and, along with Kate, had learned to make changes at home and at school. She had requested a Time Out card to show to teachers and enable her to leave lessons should she need to. This had really helped Annie. Just knowing she had the card should she need it, made all the difference. Annie had also told her best friend how she had been feeling and they made sure they went somewhere quiet at break and lunchtimes if Annie needed to.

Annie told me that she had only used her Time Out card once and knowing she had it really helped. She also found that accessing quieter areas helped her cope with the rest of the school day.

I wanted Annie to see what she had learned as an arsenal of new skills. She had uncovered skills she didn't know she had. I asked her to list some of them...

- I know if friends or family aren't ok.
- I am good at identifying danger or risk early.
- I can sometimes let others have control.
- I can choose not to be a victim.
- I can help other people who have been through similar things.

I used the analogy again of a Superhero. Often Superheroes learn to harness an aspect of themselves and use it to gain power...self-power!

Annie liked the fact that she had not only become empowered for herself but could help others too.

Session 4

I didn't see Annie for a few weeks. Kate had messaged me to say she was like a different girl and seemed much happier and more relaxed.

Some weeks later, Kate contacted me and asked me if I could see Annie again.

When Annie arrived, she looked more confident, happier and taller!

Annie told me that she had been doing really well. Her relationship with her Dad was improving. I asked her in what way, and she said she really didn't know. She didn't feel like she was doing anything differently. I explained to her the difference I had seen in her and we talked about whether her Dad may have seen the change and adjusted his behaviour. Maybe she had moved out of her role as victim?

Annie smiled as she considered this...

So, why had she felt the need to see me?

Annie explained that she was going on a school trip for 5 days and her anxiety was through the roof. Kate and Annie had tried their usual strategies, but nothing seemed to work. I asked Annie what she was particularly worried about because often, when we feel anxious, we struggle to get to the heart of the matter because our brains run away with us. This only serves to add to our anxiety.

Annie was, understandably, nervous about the unknown. How would she cope if she was asked to do something scary? It was an outdoor pursuits trip involving climbing, water sports, etc. so again, we discussed the fact that these thoughts were understandable.

Surprisingly, Annie wasn't so worried about being in a strange environment as she said her best friend was going with her and they knew they had beds next to each other.

During the session, Annie talked about missing Kate. Again, understandable; but it was at this point that she became upset. The more we talked, we realised that Annie was terrified of something happening to Kate. Almost that if Annie was there to look after Kate, everything was fine but what if something happened and Annie could have helped?

Annie was struggling with her "victim" again. She had taken herself back to the situation with her Dad and her fear of powerlessness. Just as Annie had put herself in harm's way to protect her sister, she was afraid that by going away from the house, she was leaving Kate in harm's way.

We just needed to re-visit Annie's superpowers and let them help her. But first of all, we needed to sprinkle some logic on the situation! I asked Annie...

1. Was Kate a capable and able Mum?
2. Would Kate's ability to be a Mum be affected by Annie's absence?
3. What would Kate's week look like without Annie?

Annie was immediately able to see that Kate was more than capable. She even reminded herself that it had been Kate who originally stood up to her Dad and threw him out of the house. Annie also saw that she hadn't been acknowledging Kate's strength.

Once Annie had remembered that Kate was in fact a pretty awesome person, I gave her an exercise to work through to help her relinquish control...

Any large commercial plane has two pilots. This is because at some point, the pilot has to take a rest, go to the loo, eat, whatever. To ensure the plane remains in safe hands, the pilot does a formal handover of control. It goes something like this...

PILOT TO CO-PILOT: "You have control"

The pilot will not stop being in control until he hears the words from his co-pilot.

CO-PILOT TO PILOT: "I have control"

When the Co-pilot needs to take a break, the same procedure is repeated. Only when the person in control has heard the other repeat that they have control, is it safe to hand over.

I asked Annie to try this with Kate and off she went to prepare for her trip.

I received a message from Kate a couple of weeks later to say that they had loved the pilot / co-pilot exercise so much, Kate was now using it with other things at home to help Annie relax and remind Annie that Kate really was in control of things. Furthermore, Annie not only enjoyed the trip but ended up helping others who were scared of some of the activities!

An exercise for you to try.

Are you the victim of a bully? Does someone make you feel like you are less than?

1. Think about the relationship and be really honest in asking what you want from it...
 - Security
 - Finance
 - Safety
 - Affection
 - Attention
 - Control
 - Feeling needed

2. Write for at least 5 minutes about what you are getting from this relationship.

3. Read what you have written. Imagine your best friend just gave you this piece of writing. What would you think? What advice would you give them?

4. Decide whether the pay-off is worth it. Only you can make this decision, there is no right or wrong answer.

5. Once you have decided, take ownership of your answer. Whether you decide to stay or go is **YOUR** decision. You must own it.

Parents as Victims

Another point to bear in mind is that if we have been bullied as children, we take that experience and keep it with us forever. This can lead to us unwittingly passing fears onto our children.

I have worked with many young adults who have suffered because of their parents fears and over-protection around peer relationships.

I may come in for some criticism here, but I wish to be honest about what I see and especially if it is unavoidable. I have often witnessed parents and even teachers slipping into self-dialogue, when dealing with issues around a child's relationships.

Interactions between one's child and others are often escalated into a bullying scenario when not needed. I re-iterate here that the bully / victim relationship is a two-way street and the person with the power to break the cycle is the victim.

Case Study – Rose

Rose had been referred to me via the school as her mother had been very keen for her to receive some counselling to help her deal with bullying issues.

Session 1

Rose and I established quite early on that the “bullying” she had received at a previous school, had been nothing more than a group of other children not wanting to play with her. I often find that young adults and younger children especially are far more honest in their interactions. Not wanting to play with another child can occur for many reasons but in this case, Rose had wanted to be friends with a particular group who were already an established friendship group. The group were reluctant to have another person join them and had told Rose they didn’t want to be friends.

We often don’t give younger children enough credit in deciding whether they want to be friends with someone. More often than not it isn’t about the person, it can be anything. Parents, on the other hand, will do everything in their power to ensure that their children are not ostracised in any way.

After some communication between Rose’s mum and a mum from the group, Rose was asked to play.

Perhaps inevitably, the relationship broke down. This resulted in Rose being ignored by the group. Rose’s mum promptly fell out with the other child’s mum and went to the school to complain. Sadly, the school had little influence in “making” the children get on and mum eventually made an official complaint and took Rose out of school.

I was interested to see how Rose felt about this. She had no real feelings of regret or sadness except that she had to get up earlier to attend this school than she had before. Rose also told me that her mum got more upset about these things than she did!

In the meantime, the school had followed normal practice and put a “buddy” scheme in place for Rose, where another student would guide her to and from lessons and spend break and lunchtimes with her. Rose seemed fairly happy with this.

Following my meeting with Rose, I received a request to contact Mum. On doing so, I found Mum to be quite angry with me regarding the outcome of my meeting with Rose. Didn’t I understand what she had been through? How had I not seen the high levels of anxiety and stress involved? Rose’s mum ranted for some time about how difficult Rose found it to trust people because of what had happened to her. The longer the call went on, the more apparent I became that Rose’s mum was talking about her own fears and anxiety. In fact, before long, she was telling me about the terrible time she had at school with bullies. Rose’s mum was trying to make things right for her own “inner child”. I took the verbal onslaught but stood my ground on not having insisted Rose be protected at all times in school.

Session 2

Rose told me that her mum had told her she was going to put in a complaint about me and request another counsellor. Rose had stood her own ground this time and refused. She told her mum that things were going well, and she didn't need anything spoiling this for her.

Rose told me she would let her teacher know if she needed to see me again. I never heard from Rose again, but I know that she continues to flourish and enjoy school.

I hope one day that Rose's mum gets the help she needs and succeeds in soothing her own "inner child".

An exercise for you to try.

If you are experiencing what you interpret to be a bullying situation with your young adult or child, I urge you to try the following exercise...

- Find somewhere quiet where you will not be disturbed...
- Think about your own experience of bullying. This will take you back to your inner child, the child who was bullied. Often, when we experience trauma, it's almost like we take a screenshot of that time and it gets stored away in our memory banks. When we feel anxious or are exposed to anything similar, the screenshot re-appears.

As hard as we try. We are not communicating as ourselves but as the child from the screenshot. We are then looking at the new situation from this point of view.

Before you try and help others, you must try and help your own inner child.

So, remember how you felt as a child when you had this experience. What would you say to that child now? How would you help that child feel at ease?

Remember – you are speaking as your older self. Perhaps there were things your inner child didn't need to worry about. Would your inner child have been happier at the time, knowing you would get through this and go on to have a successful life?

Finally, before you take action with others, be that your child, your partner, or friend, just be honest with yourself and make sure it is not your own victim you are trying to save.

Conclusion

I hope that you have enjoyed this short handbook and that you will be able to glean something from it. Even if the case studies do not match your experience, you may still find the messages behind them relevant to your experience.

Bullying, coercive control, whatever we want to call it; goes on in all walks of life and most of the time we really don't realise that we are the victim...or indeed, the bully.

I hope that this handbook affords you the time to take a step back and see yourself from a kind and non-judgmental standpoint, no matter which role you may take.

If you enjoy my work and are interested in supporting me, please head on over to my website subscription page to see if you can spare the cost of a chocolate bar per month to help get access to mental health services to those who need it most.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah P." with a large, stylized initial "S" and a small "P." at the end.