

PINK SHIRT DAY

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In 2007, a ninth grader in Nova Scotia was bullied simply because he came to school on the first day wearing a pink polo shirt. In response, two twelfth grade students bought fifty pink shirts and distributed them. That same year, the premier declared the second Thursday as "Stand Up Against Bullying Day" in recognition of these events. That was the start of events that led up to Pink Shirt Day being celebrated as a day of raising awareness on the subject of bullying and how we must take a unified stand against it for the sake of our children and everyone else who has been a target for harassment, taunts, threats, and violence. Wearing pink on this day is how people raise awareness on the subject of bullying. Yet pink can be worn any day of the year. If we do, it is because we choose to. For bullying is not a subject to be taken lightly. Anybody can be a target.

I know, because I too was a target of bullying throughout my childhood in school, and even into adulthood, by schoolmates and family. I only wish this day had been established when I was in school. Unfortunately, for me, this was back in the period from the mid 1980s to the early twentieth century. Anyone can become a target of bullying. Whether it is due to your intelligence, looks, behavior, beliefs, or whatever makes you 'stand out'.

Sadly, bullying isn't just confined to school. It can happen anywhere in society. It gets even worse when you live in a conservative town or city where everybody expects you to follow what is considered normal by the standards set in society and from the bible. And if you live outside of 'the norm', you can expect to be shunned and harassed by people who give you an ultimatum: change who you are, or be permanently shunned. Anyone can be a bully if they choose to. Bullies may act tough, but in truth, they are all cowards who only target those who are unable or unwilling to fight back. Many of them are insecure just like their victims, but others are just arrogant and believe they have the right to treat others harshly. They all live life like a seesaw; in order to feel high they have to put others down. Whether they are in school, at work, in public, or at home, they all have one thing in common, they want to shame their target, either to gain power and control over you or to force change. Studies show that fear and shame do not motivate change; they only make people more depressed and miserable, leading to guilt, lowered self-esteem, and stress. Bullying often results in victims inflicting self-harm upon themselves in their shame. These acts include drugs, weight gain, and in some cases, suicide. But bullying isn't just done in person, it can also be done online. Cyberbullying can be even more dangerous because often the victim has no idea who their tormentor is in many cases.

In fact, even before Pink Shirt Day was established, there have been times in real life and in outlets of fiction where men have been harshly judged and mistreated just for wearing pink. One of the most famous examples was an episode of the Simpsons where Bart threw his lucky red hat into the wash, and Homer was forced to go to work wearing a pink shirt. This resulted in him being labelled a radical anarchist, deemed insane, and sent to an institution.

As seen in that Simpsons episode, pink is the result of two colors combining: red and white. Red is often associated with anger, courage, love, and passion, while white symbolized purity, innocence, and happiness. Pink is simply a lighter shade of red after white is mixed in. Pink is often seen as the color of love and kindness, which is appropriate for taking a stand against bullying when you combine every emotion red and white symbolize. But pink can also symbolize femininity, which is why many men refuse to wear it for fear of being seen as a sissy by their peers, fathers, and even women. In some cases, as what happened to that ninth grader in Nova Scotia, they could even be accused of being gay, which can lead to shaming,

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or in extreme cases, acts of violence with the purpose of 'straightening them out'. But many women, especially tomboys, often refused to wear pink either because they believe it is too 'girly'. Pink, however, is valued by feminists who market it as part of their identity as individuals, the most important part of their existence. Even today, many men are reluctant to wear pink, with blue often used as a more masculine color commonly worn. But while blue can symbolize calmness and serenity, it also represents sadness. But many people, even today, target people for harassment and violence simply because they stand out, even in ways that are as subtle as wearing a pink shirt. But the more we shame each other, the more we lower our self-esteem and confidence. Studies show that fear and shame do not motivate change. They only make people more depressed and miserable. Our standards of 'manliness' are crimes against us to trick our fellow humans into believing we must behave in ways that is considered normal for society in order to be accepted.

Today, more and more people, especially men, are wearing pink. And if others wish to make life hard for us because of what we wear, that's their problem, not ours. Because the way a bully acts and speaks towards someone says more about them than their victim.

Today, Pink Shirt Day is a day where anyone who has one is encouraged to wear it to raise awareness of bullying. However, trying to raise awareness is one thing, but it is another matter to get people to listen or to take an interest in what you are trying to teach them. Year after year, people wear pink to spread the word, but unless everyone is willing to listen to them and bullies are willing to change their ways, they are fighting a battle they can never truly win. Children who are being bullied need to fight back the only way they can in order to truly win: by talking to someone they trust and who cares for them, whether that person is a parent, a teacher, or a friend. Other than that, the best advice for children who are being targeted by bullies is to just ignore. It sends a powerful message to your tormentor, denying him or her power and control.

So when you wear pink on this day, do so with pride, as you are taking a stand against bullying. A bully may be the big guy, but even the little people can still triumph against the enemy as there is strength in unity. Even on any other day, continue to wear pink if you so choose to, and do not be ashamed of it. There is nothing to be embarrassed about wearing pink. So if someone taunts or belittles you for wearing pink, tell them they are the ones with a problem, not you. For bullying is never a good thing. And even if we can never truly win the war against bullying, we can make a better community by educating others on this subject.

Just as we wear orange on Orange Shirt Day to show our support towards the First Nations and sympathize with their struggle against racism, so too do we wear pink shirts on Pink Shirt Day to take a stand against bullying. Because who we are is defined not by what we wear, but by what we believe. When we wear pink, we stand firm against bullying of our fellow men and women and of others who may be targeted for being 'different.'