

Teasing? Bullying?

I will never understand why some folks tease (Bully) others about certain things. I can understand why women and men tease each other, if the teasing is good-natured and not hurtful, because men will never be women or visa versa. I tease others and understand when they tease me about being too organized or compulsive about getting to places on time. I understand, and almost expect some of these comments.

What I can't understand is the commonly accepted custom of teasing folks about things, over which they have no control. For example, I am a seventy-seven year old man, five feet eight inches tall and have thinning red hair. (OK, most folks wouldn't say my hair is still red, but that is what my driver's license says! And some may say I am balding, rather than "thinning" but as my father used to say when anyone said he had thin hair, "Who would want fat hair?") But let me get to my point.

Why do folks tease others about things over which they have no control? I can't help it that I am older than the average person in the United States, or shorter or thinner-haired (if there is such a word). Folks have little hesitation to joke about my baldness (they haven't learned about the thinner-haired term yet), my height, or my advanced years. I look around and see folks who are grossly over weight, or put their makeup on in very strange ways, or wear clothes that are ill fitting or reveal too many bulges...but are they are not teased. What right do folks have to speak disparagingly

about anyone's age, or comment on thinning hair or anyone's below average height? I wish I could have remained forty years old for the rest of my life, but it doesn't work that way. I am grateful that I am a healthy seventy-seven year old man. I would like to have as much hair as most anchormen on television but my genes have decided to make my head look like my father's. At five feet eight inches tall I gave up my dream of playing in the NBA long ago, but again, as my five foot seven inch father said many years ago when I complained about my height, "As long as your feet touch the ground, you're tall enough." I have accepted these things about myself, but can't understand why folks have license to tease about these physical characteristics of mine, or others, as I/we don't have choices about these things.

Several years ago, a guest minister at our church kidded about the baldness and height of our organist...from the pulpit. A singer at a concert drew laughter by patting my head and giving the bald spot a kiss (I said nothing about her being thirty pounds over weight). A speaker at a recent public meeting teased my fellow golden agers and me by saying, "Blah, blah, blah, if you can still hear me at your age." (That speaker was wearing a yellow tie, green shirt with a mint colored jacket...which none of us mentioned. (Note: I forgot to mention it, but I am getting hard of hearing too! There are lots of things I am getting sensitive about nowadays.) At the Wellness Center where I go to exercise, a younger man watched me lift weights and said, "I am surprised you can still lift that amount of weight at your age." (I didn't mention that his exercise clothes smelled so bad I could barely stand it!)

Here is what we are going to do! The next time anyone teases you, or me, about one of our features over which we have no control, we are going to: accept their comments with grace; not respond in kind; walk on the higher road; accept their frailties; know they haven't grasp how to react to human differences with more appropriate empathic responses; understand that they have inferiority complexes that drive them to put others down to raise their own perceived worth-while-ness; realize that folks with low self concepts derive feelings of worth by self deluding thoughts about their own value; praise them for being able to complete full sentences even though the sentences are demeaning and without merit; and finally, look the other way. Remember, a response of any kind presupposes that what has been said is worthy of a response...and these comments add nothing to human understanding or our ability to improve ourselves. If this doesn't work...say, "So's your Mother!"

July 2013