

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of The Jewish World, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

Our eight-year-old daughter is attending a day summer camp. It's only a few weeks into the season and our daughter has come home complaining about her camp wardrobe.

There is evidently a good deal of competition and discussion about what the campers are wearing, at least among the girls. Our concern is more about the message this is sending than the cost of the clothing. However, we know that some families don't have a lot of money to spend on "designer clothes." This problem is a bigger one than just at camp.

What can we do to help our children focus on what we think are more important matters?

Clothes Concerned Parents

A. Dear Clothes Concerned Parents,

Wearing the "right clothes" has always been an issue among children in schools and camps. That is why some public schools and day schools in other areas have opted to have the children wear uniforms.

Parents can play an important role in resolving this issue. Children take their cues from their parents' behavior. It is not wrong to wear fine clothing, but it is wrong to judge others by what they wear.

Perhaps you could get a group of parents together who can work with you and the camp to help sensitize other parents and children about this problem and some of the implications, which are deeper than the surface issue of what a child wears. Parents need to model the behaviors they expect their children to follow.

You might also discuss the pros of switching to a uniform for the camp or at least a camp shirt.

This might be an issue that you stay with and work on during the school year as well.

I am sure you will get support from many parents. Sometimes it just takes one person with a passion to make something happen.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

Summer is here and school has ended, but the bully lives on in our midst. This past year we dealt with a class bully. The school was aware of this problem and worked with the parents and children. By the end of the school year, we had made some great progress in alleviating the problem. Now, we are facing a similar problem at the camp that our children attend.

The time frames are short, so how can we make sure our children are safe from this bully?

Worried Parents

A. Dear Worried Parents,

Bullying has been recognized as a serious problem, which can be indicative of more serious future behaviors. The child who is a bully needs help and the victims of bullying need help because they also can carry the experiences with them, which can result in serious negative behavior.

You should bring the situation to the attention of the camp personnel. The camp should have a training program in place for counselors to help them recognize and deal with this problem.

Often, children are afraid of speaking up because they are concerned that the bully will get even.

If they see that parents are concerned and doing something about the problem, they will feel the support. Talk with other parents and approach this as an issue that parents need to be concerned about.

Schools and camps need to approach bullying in a proactive way.

We educate our children about many things and this is another issue that they need preparation in how to handle.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail info@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.