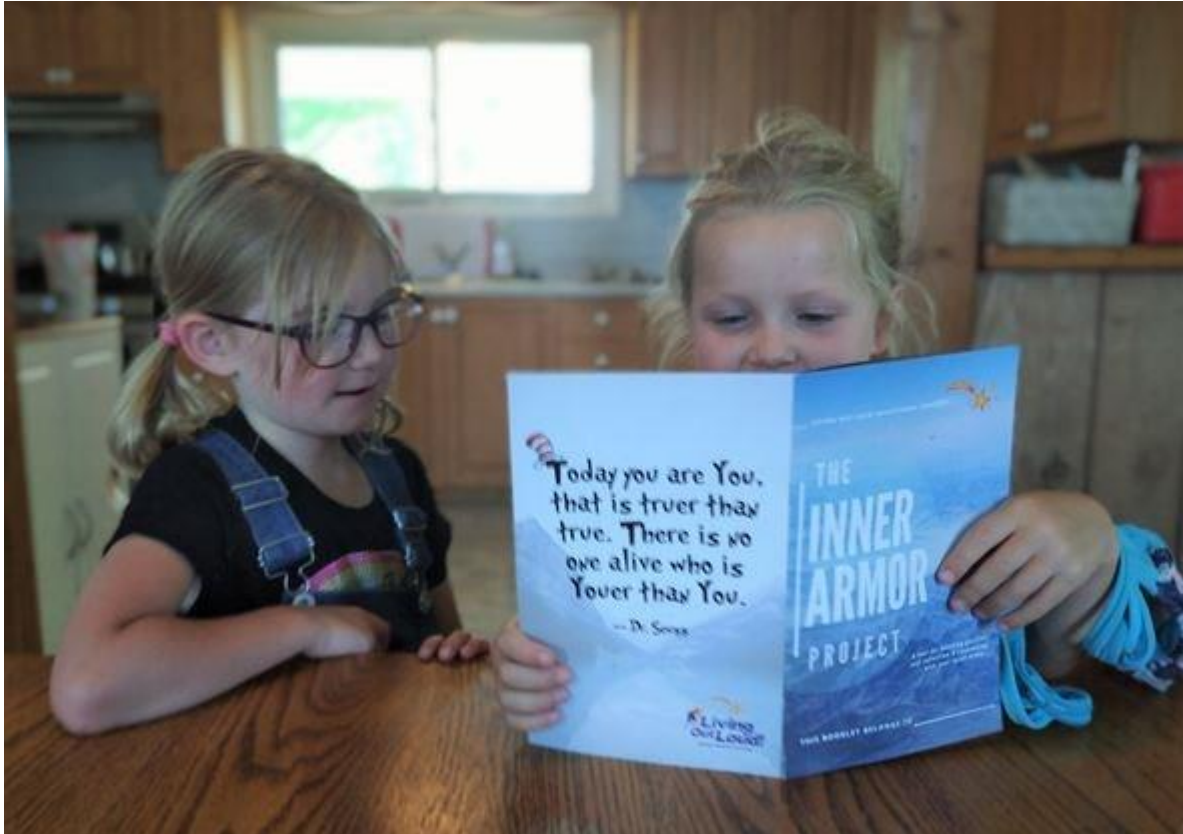


Port Colborne mom bringing positivity to battle bullies

Inner Armour booklet all about building up kids' self-esteem and confidence

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For parents, finding out your kid is the victim of bullying is one of the hardest things to come to terms with. Schoolyard bullying seems to start younger and younger, but even still, Morgan Cooper was alarmed when her five-year-old daughter, Avery, came home talking about the issue earlier this year.

“She walked in, hung up her backpack, and then told me, ‘Mom I don’t want the bullies to bully me’ and it really caught me off guard,” said Cooper. Fortunately, Avery wasn’t actually the victim of bullying. “What happened was she had her first anti-bullying seminar at school and she came home talking about it and about how she didn’t want to get bullied.”

While relieved that her daughter wasn’t being bullied, it got Morgan thinking about the inevitable day when she does come home to find out that Avery had been bullied. Rather than fret about that inevitability, Morgan decided to instead develop a plan for how to give her daughter the tools and confidence to deal with bullying when she does end up facing such adversity.

She calls it “Inner Armour” and it’s a way of building up children’s self esteem so they can overcome the type of negativity that bullies spread.

“One of the real damaging side effects of bullying is when someone actually starts to believe what the bully is saying about them,” said Morgan. “It can be hard and eventually they start to really believe they are stupid, or ugly, or whatever other horrible things the bully is saying to them. This helps them not bring that toxicity with them.”

Cooper designed a small booklet which teaches kids to build up their inner armour to shield themselves from the negative effects of bullying. It’s full of techniques and ideas she picked up watching her daughter interact with her brother, Logan, who has special needs.

“We noticed Avery was helping Logan with a lot of things, because of his special needs, and that makes her feel good because she’s helping him,” said Cooper. “But now we make sure to go the other way also, and to have her ask him for help, that way Logan gets to help her the way she does for him. That builds him up and raises his self-esteem.”

The booklet prompts children to write down examples of things they do or have done, that demonstrate their positive qualities.

“I am fun because —,” said Hilary Robins, 6, one of Avery’s friends who was checking out the booklet. “I know I’m fun because we play together and laugh.”

By having the children read the prompts and getting them to write down examples, Morgan said it creates a connection between the child and the act of positivity they are reflecting on.

“It’s easy to just say it, but when they write it down, it becomes concrete, and it has much more of an impact,” said Morgan. “There is something very powerful about the act of them writing down those positive activities.”

After putting together the booklet, Morgan tested out the system on 100 children. Though she admits it’s not the most scientific test pool (most of the children were friends or family from around the same community) she said the results were encouraging. Using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale questionnaire as a baseline, Morgan said of the 100 children who completed the booklet, parents of 84 of the children recorded some increase in self-esteem.

“The system is designed to be very easy to teach,” said Morgan, who hopes to eventually have the Inner Armour booklet get introduced into classrooms. “The goal is to have the biggest impact possible, so getting it into the schools would be a great way to reach as many students as possible.”

The booklet, which is also available as a digital format for use on tablets for those with physical challenges, is available on Morgan's website. For more information, visit <https://livingoutloud.education/inner-armor>.