



Teens Seek Plastic Surgery to Combat Bullying

Child Psychiatrist Says Risks of Surgery Outweigh Benefits

By MARY PFLUM

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High school senior Erica Morgo says she likes what she sees when she looks in the mirror, but that was not always the case. Erica was [bullied](#) horribly by her classmates in middle school.

"In sixth grade I was in the bus, and a lot of boys made fun of me for having a big nose," Erica said. "They would call me Pinocchio. And in school, in class, people would point it out. I felt helpless. I felt like a loser."

The situation grew so severe that Erica grew depressed and started missing school. She estimates she missed a total of month's worth of classes to avoid the taunts of classmates. Finally, one night she says she couldn't take the teasing any longer, and decided to take matters into her own hands.

"I tried breaking my nose once. I was so fed up with the bullying that I tried banging my face against the door," she said.

After the incident, her mother, Dana Manzella, said she knew that she had to do something. She decided to allow her then 15-year-old daughter to undergo cosmetic surgery to shape her nose to her liking.

"I think that was definitely a good decision, because it brought her back -- her self-esteem back up to be able to do activities that she did before, with comfort," Manzella said.

Erica is among a small but growing number of [teenagers](#) who say being teased or bullied prompted them to consider or even undergo [cosmetic surgery](#). Nearly 90,000 teenagers had cosmetic surgery in 2007, and doctors say the numbers are growing.

"I do see a fair amount of parents coming in with their child because of bullying and teasing and feelings of self-consciousness," Dr. Michael Fiorillo, a cosmetic surgeon, said. "My preference is, of course, to

work out the issues first, the bullying, the teasing. But there are certain situations where people are mature enough. And surgery is a final resort."

[Popular cosmetic surgeries](#) for teenagers include nose jobs, breast reductions, [breast augmentations](#), ear tucks and [Botox injections](#).

Erica Morgo's younger sister, Breanna Morgo, was teased as a small child for her droopy grin. To even out her daughter's smile, Dana Manzella allowed her daughter to begin Botox injections at age 5.

Child Psychiatrist: Plastic Surgery to Avoid Bullying 'Seems Crazy'

"We only do it twice a year in September for school pictures, and then again in June for her birthday," Dana Manzella said, referring to the Botox.

But while teens like Erica Morgo say plastic surgery helped them gain self-esteem, critics say they're potentially losing on a number of levels.

"The idea of someone getting plastic surgery to avoid bullying seems to me as crazy and worrisome as if a black person were to go to a doctor and say, 'I wanna become white to avoid racism,'" Dr. Ned Hallowell, a child psychiatrist, said. "The problem is clearly with the phenomenon of bullying, and not with the person's nose."

Hallowell said parents who allow their teens to get plastic surgery may be putting them at risk, both psychologically and physically.

"Any time you have any kind of surgery, there's risk of infection, risk of -- the wrong patient getting the wrong procedure," Hallowell said. "So, you [want to] have darn good reasons for doing it. And when you do the risk-benefit analysis, cosmetic surgery, to avoid bullying, unless you are severely deformed, clearly doesn't pass the test."

Hallowell says teens who are determined to have cosmetic surgery should, at the very least, wait until they've reached adulthood.

That's what Michelle Martin did. For years, the 19-year-old says she was teased for having a small chest. "People were just mean, Martin said. " Like, I felt ugly. I felt, like, undesirable."

Martin said her mother told her repeatedly she didn't need a breast augmentation, but Martin thought otherwise. And last week, she traded in her A cup bras for D size breasts.

Martin said the painful recovery and scars from the surgery were a small price to pay to make up for the scars left by years of teasing and feelings of inadequacy. She said she "absolutely" feels prettier.

"This was just something to make me feel better. To make me happy. To make me feel like a beautiful

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woman".

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