

"My only goal is to stop other young girls going through what I did," she says.



WOMEN WHO INSPIRE



Dubojski started getting picked on in her first year of high school over her height. "The taunts grew worse as the years went on," she says.

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Dubojski encourages parents to keep pushing if they think there is a problem. "You know your child better than anyone, if you think something is off, it is," she says. She also advises them to seek counselling or support if they need help.



Now she shares her experience with hundreds of school girls each year.

# BREAKING the CYCLE

JACINTA DUBOJSKI IS USING HER EXPERIENCE WITH BULLYING TO EMPOWER TEENS

**W**ith her loving and stable relationship and a career she loves, Jacinta Dubojski appears to have it all, but it's a life she could only dream about a decade ago. Following years of "relentless" bullying as a teen that left her self-esteem in tatters, Dubojski continued into a cycle of abuse, making harmful decisions regarding relationships that resulted in her living in situations of domestic abuse. "I was trying to fill a void with anyone who would tell me they loved me, or that I was beautiful, regardless of how they treated me," the 37-year-old tells WHO. "It was because I didn't love myself."

Years of trauma took a massive toll, leaving Dubojski just a former shell of herself. Physically and emotionally exhausted, she was forced to seek help when she hit rock bottom and had a nervous breakdown.

"It got to the point where I had no choice but to make some changes or I wasn't going to survive," she explains. "I'm proud of myself that I did, even at this point, not everyone can."

Dubojski bravely sought professional help, spending years focusing on her mental health and rebuilding her shattered self-esteem with intense psychotherapy. Today, she is determined to help teen girls stop bullying in its tracks so it doesn't go to wreck the same havoc on somebody else.

Six years ago she launched Just Another Girl. Through the project, Dubojski visits schools, workplaces and sporting teams to share her story, warning girls of the early signs of abuse and encouraging them

to speak up and seek help if they are victims of bullying.

"I talk about some really confronting things, which isn't always easy," she admits of reliving her trauma. "But seeing me be vulnerable allows the girls to show it, too. Even if they don't speak up straight away, you can tell who the victims of bullying are by looking around the room as they're the ones with tears in their eyes. Their teachers see it, too, so it sets them on the track to get the help that they need," she explains.

Teen bullying is a serious issue in Australia. According to the Kids Helpline, studies have found that one out of four students in our schools will experience it. Sadly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics also reveals that one in four women will also suffer from emotional or physical abuse at the hands of a current or former partner.

Dubojski draws a direct line between the two in her case. "The childhood bullying planted a seed in my head, which told me

I wasn't good enough and didn't deserve any better," she explains.

While she admits that the last thing teens want to do is confess that they are a victim of bullying to their family, she is really proud to have seen some students work up the courage during her talk to share their own experiences.

"There was a beautiful breakthrough moment recently when one girl put up her hand and admitted she was living through a similar experience," Dubojski says. "After she shared her story, her classmates gave her a round of applause. It's a really wonderful moment to see someone feeling so empowered."

She adds, "I'm just trying to tell the young girls that it's always OK to ask for help - that's what I needed most when I was their age."

• By Kylie Walters (For more information, visit @just.anothergirl\_)



The bullying was so bad, Dubojski believed it when she was told she needed to lose 10kg off her lithe frame while working as a model.