

Rowe in tears at bullying

Victims' tales of survival

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Education Reporter

TELEVISION personality Jessica Rowe broke down and cried at a public forum yesterday as she told of how she was bullied over everything from her weight, her hair colour and even her laugh.

Rowe became emotional and had to stop part-way through her address to an anti-bullying conference after telling of the ridicule she faced as a TV host.

She said she was an easy target for critics during a "tumultuous" period when she moved from Channel 10 to Channel 9's *Today* and would "collapse in a weeping heap" when she got home.

"The criticism, jibes and remarks continued in certain sections of the media for days, then weeks and then months on end," she said. "I remember thinking, it can't get much worse... and the following week it would."

Rowe said she opened one "hideous piece of correspondence" and found critical newspaper clippings.

"I recall being shocked that someone who didn't know me could be so mean-spirited and cruel," she said.

"I remember seeing the front cover of one of the television guides voting me the most annoying person on TV.

"It felt like the final straw and it made me wonder: 'What had I ever done?'"

Rowe, who shared the stage with another victim, former Australian rugby league star Jason Stevens, broke down as

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she told of finding out she was pregnant "thanks to the miracle of IVF".

She is expecting her second child in five weeks and said her family helped put the unpleasantness into perspective.

"I was diagnosed with post-natal depression and got the professional help I needed to help me over that rocky patch," she said. "My year of living dangerously taught me much about myself, what I'm made of, what I can endure and what really matters."

Stevens told the conference, which was organised by Enough is Enough anti-violence movement, that he was picked on by older boys at school due to his size. "It was like I had a target on my chest... they would grab my stomach and shake it around," he said.

"Several years later I ended up at a job interview and it was between me and the bully. He was actually a nice guy but I was happy that I got it [the job]."

Year 11 student Nathan Cassar from Camden told the conference he had suffered "psychological trauma" as a result of long-term bullying.



Survived bullying: Jason Stevens, Nathan Cassar and Jessica Rowe yesterday

Picture: Tracee Lea