

SPECIAL EDITION

Issue: Winter 2012

BULLY AWARENESS: THE SEQUEL *Empowering the Bystanders!*

Bullying continues to be a serious problem in schools and in our communities. This newsletter is our second issue devoted to the topic of bullying, with a special focus on bystanders.

Bystanders are the persons or groups of people who witness bullying. According to research, bystanders are most likely to be 85% of the school population. In other words, these bystanders are the majority of all students! With our guidance and support, they can become the "caring majority".

Bullies are great at camouflaging their behavior. Either they are smart enough to avoid adult eyes, or they find some other way to justify their actions. When confronted by an adult, a typical bully response is "It's just a game we play."

Bystanders are our eyes and ears of the child world. But bystanders don't get involved for many reasons. As a young person, who wouldn't be afraid of a bully? This is a very legitimate fear, and as a parent, you have to validate those fears.

Asking children to fight or stand up to bullies is not only unfair, but could potentially put children in harm's way. There are far more positive ways to help. The number one reason that a child is targeted by bullies is because he or she usually lacks a social support network. This suggests a simple and powerful intervention. Establish positive, caring connections with children who are typically alone.

Teach your child to reach out to their more vulnerable classmates. This does not always mean simply the weaker or smaller child. It could also include children who may



have poor social skills, are shy, or introverted, and choose to distance themselves from their peers. Visit the school cafeteria, and notice that if there is not assigned seating, chances are that you will see at least one child sitting alone. This child is an easy target for bullying.

Passionately teach your children to have empathy for others. The idea of standing behind less popular peers may be a hard sell to the older children. Social status is everything to a young teenager, and loners tend to be viewed as "losers." But they are not losers, they are people with thoughts and feelings like everyone else.

It's time to hold bystanders accountable for their role in bullying. They have the power to help others. As adults, we just have to teach them how, and actively support positive change.

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WHO ARE THE BYSTANDERS?

Fire starters. They instigate by baiting the bully into action.

Audience. They encourage and reinforce the actions of the bully by laughing and egging on the situation.

Joiners. They jump in to help bully, adding to the target's feelings of alienation and helplessness.

Silent observers. This group watches and does nothing. This translates into acceptance of behavior that is hurtful.

Why don't more bystanders intervene?

- They think, "It's none of my business."
- They fear getting hurt or becoming another victim.
- They feel powerless to stop the bully.
- They don't like the victim or believe the victim "deserves" it.



- They don't want to draw attention to themselves.
- They think that telling adults won't help, or it may make things worse.
- They don't know what to do.

Bystanders who don't intervene often suffer negative consequences themselves. They may experience:

- Pressure to participate in the bullying.
- Anxiety about speaking to anyone about the bullying.
- Powerlessness to stop bullying.
- Vulnerability to becoming victimized.
- Fear of associating with the victim, the bully, or the bully's pals.
- Guilt for not having defended the victim.

(Source: Eyesonbullying.org)

Examples of the Types of Bullying

Physical Aggression (Pushing or fighting)

Verbal or Written Aggression (Stating or writing negative comments)

Intimidation (Making threats to a person or group)

Cyber-bullying (Using the internet or texting to bully a person or group)

Racial, Ethnic or Sexual Harassment (Negative actions or comments that attack a person's race, culture or sexual identity)

Social Aggression (Alienating or bullying a person using relationships as an aggressive tool)

APPROACHES FOR DEALING WITH BULLY SITUATIONS

1. Make sure that children know what bullying is and why it is wrong. This means they have to understand the different types of bullying such as physical, written, cyber-bullying, verbal, and relationship aggression. Sometimes children think that if there is no physical altercation, the action isn't bullying. Words hurt just as much as skirmishes.
2. Children have to be able to identify all types of bully approaches: "In your face" behavior or discreet utterances. Remember that bullies are good at disguising their behavior.
3. Give bullies and the targets the tools for change. Act out different scenarios, research, discuss alternatives, and find a positive way to handle a variety of situations. Conflict is inevitable, so learning a positive way to resolve it is important.
4. Monitor children's actions and look for chances to reinforce progress. Look for events that provide a teaching moment, both real or through the media to help develop better insight into constructive change.
5. Teach tolerance and respect for everyone! Just because a child is different does not mean that they deserve to be alienated or targeted in any way.
6. Listen to your child. Regardless of how busy your life is, put down everything and just focus on what he/she is trying to say. You will be pleasantly surprised at how much more your children will share when they feel that the doors of communication are wide open.



Bully Bulletin Board

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

WALKING AWAY
WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE BEING PICKED ON
IS A WINK AND A NOD OF APPROVAL
EVEN WHEN YOU FEEL THAT YOU KEPT YOUR
FACE BLANK AND INDIFFERENT.

You become one less hope for the victim.

**First they came for the Communists,
but I was not a Communist, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists,
but I was not one of them, so I did not speak out.
Then they came for the Jews,
but I was not Jewish, so I did not speak out.
And when they came for me,
there was no one left to speak out for me.**

Martin Niemoeller

Bullying is an imbalance of power. One person or group is having fun, and the target is clearly emotionally distressed.

Discrimination is a learned behavior.

Teach respect and tolerance for everyone!

"He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it."

Martin Luther King

IGNORING BULLYING IS SILENT ACCEPTANCE.

ROLES IN BULLY SITUATIONS

Bully: Person who engages in intentional, negative, hurtful behavior to a person or group.

Lieutenant or Crew: Person or group who derives power from associating with the bully. The crew either encourages the negative behavior or directly joins in to assist the bully.

Victim (aka "Target"): Person who is the recipient of aggressive behavior.

Bystander: Person or group who witnesses the bullying but is not directly involved.

*"The world is a dangerous place,
not because of those who do evil,
but because of those who look on
and do nothing."*

Albert Einstein

Bystanders need to be held accountable for their actions or their inaction.

A FIRM BUT FAIR RESPONSE TO A BULLY

You chose to bully another child. (Acknowledge that your child has made a clear decision)

You violated our household behavioral expectations. (No "why" questions)

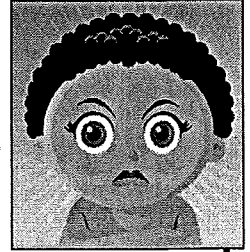
How do you think that person (use name) felt when you bullied him/her? (Build empathy for others)

Here are the set consequences for your behavior. (No chance to justify poor behavior)

What were you expecting to gain from this situation? (Looking for insight that may spark change)

Find a more constructive way to get your needs met in the future. (Push for positive replacement behaviors)

I will be monitoring your behavior and will ask other parents to do the same. (The issue is not over!)



THE ART OF SAVING FACE

Many parents are baffled when an obvious victim of bullying does not want to admit that something bad has happened to them. The answer to that puzzle lies in the concept of "saving face."

Children are often embarrassed to admit something negative occurred at their expense. In their quest for independence, they want to salvage their pride and protect their ego. No one wants to admit to being picked on, for this is perceived as being weak. Boys will rarely admit to fear, let alone vulnerability. Children want you to believe that everything is fine, even when it is clear that things are not right.

The art of letting a child save face is to provide a



way out while not turning a blind eye to the situation itself. This is not an easy feat. For example, if you know that your child is being bullied on the school playground, you may say something like this: "According to your teacher, there are children being picked on at recess time. I am not sure if you are one of those children, but let's talk about what you can do if someday someone is bullying you."

The beauty of this statement is that you are acknowledging an issue at recess without coming out and confronting the child about being the target. You can still teach the tools, while not having to play the denial game. If this approach does not work, you may have to gently pursue the situation a little deeper.

A PARENT RESPONSE TO A SENSITIVE TARGET

If your child tells you about a bully, focus on offering comfort and support, no matter how upset you are. Kids are often reluctant to tell adults about bullying because they feel embarrassed and ashamed that it's happening, or worried that their parents will be disappointed.

Sometimes kids feel like it's their own fault, that if they looked or acted differently it wouldn't be happening. Sometimes they're scared that if the bully finds out that they told, it will get worse. Others are worried that their parents won't believe them or do anything about it. Many kids worry that their parents will urge them to fight back when they're scared to.



Praise your child for being brave enough to talk about it. Remind your child that he or she isn't alone, and that a lot of people get bullied at some point in their lives. Emphasize that it's the bully who is behaving badly, and it is not your child's fault. Reassure your child that you will figure out what to do about the problem together.

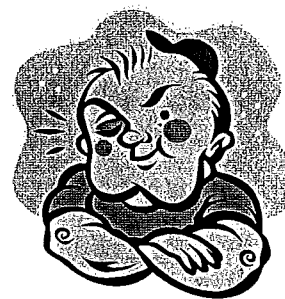
Talk to the school staff and see what options are available for support, both in and out of the classroom. Work with the staff to brainstorm strategies for change, without drawing a lot of unwanted attention to the child.

Source: Kids Health

IDEAL LAYERS OF SCHOOL SUPPORT



Bully and Crew



Classroom Teacher
"Bullying?"
"Not on my watch!"



Other Teachers
"Our eyes are on the bully."

Principal
"Bullying won't be tolerated."

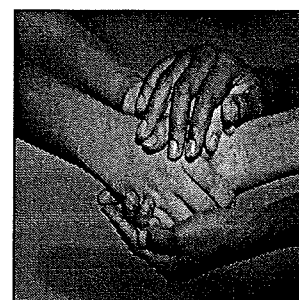
Auxiliary Staff
"We can help change behavior."

Parents
"We will support positive change at home."

Aides
"We will help monitor student behavior."



Student Bystanders
"We will connect to our vulnerable peers."

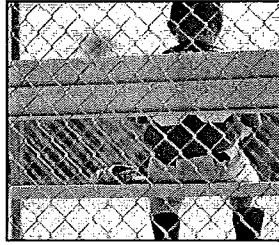


Target
"I feel supported, included and safe."



NO CHILD SITS ALONE!

In the school cafeteria, one student sits alone, avoiding eye contact with others, and acting more interested in their lunch than those around them. This is not an uncommon scene in our schools, and it is a sad reflection on how students can be deliberately alienated from their peers. For whatever reason, this student does not belong, and sitting alone each day is a sad reminder of their low social status.



If your child sees someone who is alone, have them ask the person to join their group, walk home with them or just invite them to sit with some friends at lunch. Surrounded by peers, a bully may have to look elsewhere for a worthy target.

There is one important lesson that you can teach your child: "No child sits alone." Talk to your child about reaching out to others in the lunch room, on the playground or in the classroom. The number one reason that victims are chosen is because they lack a consistent support system. Children who are alone make easy targets because the bully does not see a threat from others.

New students face adversity the first day in the classroom. With friendships and groups already established, it is hard to find a place to fit in. Ask your child about new students in his/her classroom. Do they try to connect with the newcomer, or do they turn their heads and let them fend for themselves? Start your discussion with: "How do you think it feels to be a new person in a classroom?"

"No child sits alone" means taking a stand! It is a step in the right direction, and a win/win for all students.

**TEACHING OUR CHILDREN THE TOOLS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE
EMPOWERS THEM TO IMPROVE THE CLIMATE OF THEIR
CLASSROOMS, THEIR SCHOOL, THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD,
AND THEIR WORLD.**



SYSTEMS CHANGE

There are hidden forces in the peer group that make bullies stay bullies and victims stay victims. Intervention has to overcome these forces. Interventions with one bully or one victim will not be successful if the rest of the peer group is left untouched.

It is also necessary to address the reward value of bullying. This may be the biggest challenge, because society at large often reinforces aggressive and controversial tactics as means to become dominant and successful.

Author Information: Antonius Cillessen is a professor in The Netherlands

SPECIAL EDITION

Written by Barb Butcher
Edited by Susan Quinn
School Psychologists

School City of Hammond

Dr. Walter J. Watkins, Superintendent
Connie Manous, Special Ed. Director
219-933-2400

Hammond School Board

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