



Talking Points

For use by school leaders in papers or presentations about important issues related to public education

Bullying Hurts People

Key Message: Bullying in any form and by any name damages everyone involved – the aggressors, the victims, and the observers.

Every seven minutes, a child is bullied on the school playground. Every month, three million students miss school because they feel unsafe. One in four middle school students reports having been bullied online. An estimated 18 million students in the United States will be bullied this year. We can not afford these statistics.

In its simplest terms, bullying is any time when one or more person(s) persistently picks on another. People—children in particular—often feel isolated by bullying and may not even tell anyone else about their experience. Bullying often happens when onlookers are present. According to a recent CNN news series on bullying, more than 70% of the time the witnesses do not attempt to intervene. According to Katia Hetter of CNN, “Schools with rigorous anti-bullying programs are more likely to stop bullies in their tracks, but not every school has a commitment to stopping the abuse.”

The anti bullying educational organization, Bully Free[®], provides the following criteria to help distinguish bullying from other misbehaviors:

- The mistreatment is intentional.
- The mistreatment is hurtful (physically or psychologically).
- The mistreatment is threatening.
- The mistreatment occurs more than once (typically).
- There must be a power imbalance.

It has been rationalized that bullying is nothing new, that kids are too thin-skinned, that bullying is just reported more now than it used to be, or that kids should toughen up and fight back. What people too often fail to acknowledge is that bullying—in any form—is wrong and hurtful. It is the job of adults to help kids develop empathy, self esteem and peacemaking skills early in their lives.

Bullies tend to find vulnerable victims and often increase that vulnerability by capitalizing on or exposing an existing source of pain or insecurity. Bullies may have been the victims of bullying themselves. The consequences of bullying range from isolation or absence from school to suicide.

Bully Free[®] identifies some common (although not exclusive) characteristics of victims of bullying.

- They are generally quiet, cautious, sensitive, and perhaps easily moved to tears.
- They are insecure and lack adequate self-confidence.
- If boys, they are usually physically weaker than their classmates and they do not like to fight.

- They have few or no friends and may find it easier to associate with adults.

The Bully Free[®] program also identifies several characteristics of those students at risk of becoming bullies. (Additional characteristics are available at www.bullyfree.com.)

- They enjoy feeling powerful and in control.
- They seek to dominate or manipulate others.
- They may be popular with other students, who envy his or her power.
- They are impulsive.

There are some signs that a child might be being bullied. They may have a sudden decrease in school attendance.

- They may decline in academic performance.
- They may have difficulty concentrating in class and be easily distracted.
- They may have a sudden lack of interest in school-sponsored activities and events.
- They may be happy on weekends but unhappy or tense on Sundays.
- They may use victim body language.

Once families, communities and schools recognize the potentially devastating effects of bullying, they can help to reduce bullying in the future. There are things we can do to protect our kids from becoming bullies or being bullied.

- Model tolerance and resist using labels. *Forbid ethnic, racial, religious, or sexual orientation slurs or derogatory jokes or imitations.*
- Acknowledge and discuss the problems and pain associated with bullying. *Identify the types of bullying with your child.*
- Explore how we form impressions of one another and the risks of our assumptions. *Talk about what kind of assumptions we may make about people because of their size or gender or age or skin color.*
- Help children to step into one another's shoes. *How would it feel to be bullied? Why do you think certain people might be bullied? What feelings might cause kids to bully?*
- Encourage children to develop multiple circles of friends and activities. *This protects kids from isolation and helps them to build a greater sense of self.*
- Monitor children on the computer and talk about cyber-bullying. *Let kids know the risks and responsibilities of access to instant messaging (IM), chat rooms, facebook, websites and text messages.*
- Encourage kids to report bullying and help them to discern if what they report is bullying or occasional misbehavior. *Be aware of possible alternative motives for children to be victims (i.e. attention).*

“Our mission is to exercise the kind of loving care which will prompt the child to open his [or her] fist and offer up his truth, his individuality, the irreducible atom of his self. We must provide the kind of environment in which the child will joyfully deliver his message through complete self-fulfillment.”

– Sam Levensen, Humorist/Philosopher, *Everything but Money*, 1949

Information for this article was taken from the following resources: NAESP, *Report to Parents*, RP 28:5 and RP 28:6, *Bully-proofing your kids*, Katia Hetter, CNN, October 11, 2011, Violencepreventionwork.org, The Hazelden Foundation, Bully Free Program, (Additional characteristics are available at www.bullyfree.com.) www.bullyfree.com