

# **COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT REACHING “ABOVE AND BEYOND”**

**Vincent F. Cotter, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools**

## **PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT AND BULLYING**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Careful review of the literature and research currently available on the Prevention of Harassment and Bullying Behavior formed both the basis for the following Administrative Guidelines but also the compelling motivation to act now given what we know. Prevention of harassment and bullying is not about developing yet another new curriculum. True prevention in this context is about changing our language and culture.

It is a myth to conclude the schoolyard bully is as much a part of developmental growth as puberty. It is a myth to believe that “sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me”. The truth of the matter is words do hurt and therefore the language needs to change. We need to decrease the vocabulary of meanness and increase the vocabulary of kindness.

Further, we need to redefine the role of “bystander” to harassment and bullying. One can no longer be a bystander and uninvolved. A bystander needs to both help the victim and report what you see. For the purposes of these guidelines, “harassment” will be considered synonymous with “bullying.” However, in certain situations, harassment connects directly to legal consequences and as such is to be considered a legal term.

Finally, the modern day bully, contrary to the age old stereotype, may in fact be very bright, academically high achieving, athletically talented but who may still act in sadistic ways to advance oneself socially. Adults need to be watchful for these signs if they are to be successful in intervening and again changing a culture that sometimes condones such behavior. The image of bully as perhaps a less intelligent, academically struggling loner simply is no longer valid.

### **Compelling reasons why we must act:**

- 74% of eight to eleven year olds and 86% of twelve to fifteen year olds say teasing and bullying occur at their schools. Both groups ranked teasing and bullying as “big problems” ranking the issue higher than racism... higher than the pressure to try drugs. (*Kaiser Family Foundation and Nickelodeon, 2001*)
- When reporters went looking for reasons why a Southern California boy would open fire on his classmates, they heard the 15-year old, charged with killing two fellow students in March 2001, was the target of frequent bullying. The same week, a 14-year-old girl in Pennsylvania was accused of shooting a fellow student in the shoulder. Her parents said that she, too, was routinely bullied at school. (**The Safety Zone**, *National Resource Center for Safe Schools*, Spring 2001)
- Former bullies have a fourfold increase in criminal behavior at the age of 24. Young adults who were targets of bullying as children have higher levels of depression and poor self-esteem than peers who were not bullied. (*Journal of American Medical Association*, April 25, 2001)
- 285,000 students are physically attacked in school each month (*Batch and Knoff, 1994*)
- Every day, 160,000 children stay at home from school because they are afraid of being bullied. (*National Association of School Psychologists, 1993*)
- Addressing bullying is best done through the interactions that normally occur between adults and children. One of the most effective components of a bullying prevention program is simply getting teachers to intervene when they observe bullying happening. By not intervening, they are passively saying that this is okay behavior.

### **What is Bullying?**

There are numerous definitions of bullying. These definitions include the following:

- Bullying is defined as something that someone repeatedly does or says to gain power over or to dominate another person.
- Bullying can be defined as repeated and systematic harassment and attacks on others.
- Bullying among children has been defined as intentional, repeated harmful acts or other behavior such as name-calling or threatening.
- Bullying has also been defined as negative actions directed toward a specific person or group of persons over a period of time.

Bullying may be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual in nature.

**Physical Bullying** includes such acts as punching, poking, strangling, hair pulling, beating and biting.

**Verbal Bullying** includes such acts as hurtful name-calling, teasing, taunts, put-downs and gossip.

**Emotional Bullying** includes rejecting, terrorizing, extorting, defaming, humiliating, blackmailing, isolating, ostracizing and peer pressure.

**Sexual Bullying** includes sexual propositioning, sexual harassment and abuse involving actual physical contact and sexual assault.

## **Who Are the Victims?**

Although almost anyone can be the target of bullying behavior for a myriad of reasons, the victim is often singled out because of his psychological traits. A victim of bullying may be shy, sensitive or perhaps insecure. Children may be bullied for physical reasons such as being overweight, being physically small, or having a disability. They may also be victimized for belonging to a different race, culture or religious belief. Sexual orientation, real or perceived, may also cause bullying.

## **Why is Bullying Important to Us?**

Serious school violence often begins with bullying. In a study conducted by the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center, it was found that in approximately two-thirds of 37 reported school shootings, the attackers felt "persecuted, bullied, threatened or injured."

Victims of bullying often develop emotional and social adjustment problems, perform poorly in school and show lasting problems years later.

## **Dynamics of Bully-Victim Situations**

- A power differential exists between the bully and the victim.
- Bullies tend to be confident, aggressive, and lack empathy for the victim.
- Bullies frequently come from homes where there is poor supervision and aggressive behavior is tolerated.
- Victims of bullying tend to be quiet, passive children with few friends.
- Bullying is often done so that adults are not aware of it.
- Children who are victims of bullying are frequently ashamed, and often don't tell an adult. They can be very unhappy children who suffer from fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem as a result of being bullied.

## **What Causes Bullying?**

- Children from violent homes are more likely to become a bully.
- Poor supervision in the home (from parents) contributes to bullying.
- Aggressive or bullying behaviors by parents or older siblings contributes to bullying.
- Children who have an impulsive temperament are more likely to become a bully.
- Boys who are physically larger or stronger than peers of the same age may become bullies.
- Bullies often crave attention and show-off or act tough to get attention from their peers.
- In schools, the amount of adult supervision is directly related to the frequency and severity of bullying. While teachers and administrators do not have control over individual and family factors that produce children who are inclined to bully, bullying problems can be greatly reduced in severity by appropriate supervision and intervention in schools.
- Bullies can be identified as early as preschool. Lack of identification and intervention programs at an early age can lead to further and more serious bullying at a later age.

## ***Bullying on the Internet***

Some youths are using the Internet as a medium to bully other youth. They may create their own websites and post insults, corrupt the personal profile of another Internet user, or make repugnant comments using the name of another youth. In some cases, insulting messages can be sent anonymously. In England, one girl committed suicide after she was bullied via the Internet for being overweight. Other girls have received harassing telephone calls after they were cited as promiscuous, complete with name, address and telephone number.

### **What Can Be Done to Minimize Bullying?**

There are numerous strategies for school administrators, teachers and parents to employ to reduce or minimize bullying. In developing and implementing these strategies, it is important to note that much bullying occurs without the knowledge of teachers and parents and that many victims are reluctant to tell adults about their problems with bullying. They may be embarrassed or ashamed to be a victim or afraid that adults cannot or will not help to resolve the situation. They may also be fearful of retaliation if they tell.

Important strategies in reducing or minimizing bullying include:

- ✓ Providing good supervision for children;
- ✓ Providing effective consequences to bullies;
- ✓ Effective communication between teachers and parents;
- ✓ Provide children opportunities to develop good interpersonal skills; and
- ✓ Create a social context in which bullying behavior is not tolerated.

### **What School Administrators Should Do**

- ✓ Assess the awareness and the scope of the bullying problem at your school through student and staff surveys.
- ✓ Closely supervise children on the playgrounds and in classrooms, hallways, restrooms, cafeterias and other areas where bullying occurs in your school.
- ✓ Conduct school-wide assemblies and teacher/staff in-service training to raise awareness regarding the problem of bullying and to communicate a zero tolerance for such behavior.
- ✓ Post and publicize clear behavior standards, including rules against bullying, for all students. Consistently and fairly enforce such standards.
- ✓ Encourage parent participation in school activities and projects.
- ✓ Establish a confidential reporting system that allows children to report victimization and that records the details of bullying incidents.
- ✓ Receive and listen receptively to parents who report bullying. Establish procedures whereby such reports are investigated and resolved expeditiously at the school level in order to avoid perpetuating bullying.
- ✓ Develop strategies to reward students for positive, inclusive behavior.
- ✓ Provide school-wide and classroom activities that are designed to recognize special talents, hobbies, interests and abilities of all students and that foster mutual understanding of and appreciation for differences in others.

## What Classroom Teachers Can Do

- ✓ Provide students with opportunities to talk about bullying and enlist their support in defining bullying as an unacceptable behavior.
- ✓ Involve students in establishing classroom rules against bullying. Such rules may include a commitment from the teacher not to “look the other way” when incidents involving bullying occur.
- ✓ Provide classroom activities and discussions related to bullying and violence, including the harm that they cause and strategies to reduce them.
- ✓ Develop a classroom action plan to ensure that students know what to do when they observe a bully/victim confrontation.
- ✓ Teach cooperation by assigning projects that require collaboration. Such cooperation teaches students how to compromise and how to assert without demanding. Take care to vary grouping of participants and to monitor the treatment of participants in each group.
- ✓ Take immediate action when bullying is observed. All teachers and school staff must let children know that they care and will not allow anyone to be mistreated. By taking immediate action and dealing directly with the bully, adults support both the victim and the witnesses.
- ✓ Confront bullies in private. Challenging a bully in front of his/her peers may actually enhance his/her status and lead to further aggression.
- ✓ Notify parents of both the victims and bullies when a confrontation occurs, and seek to resolve the problem expeditiously at school.
- ✓ Refer both victims and aggressors to counseling whenever appropriate.
- ✓ Provide protection for bullying victims, whenever necessary. Such protection may include creating a buddy system whereby students have a particular friend or older buddy on whom they can depend and with whom they share class schedule information and plans for the school day.
- ✓ Listen respectfully to parents who report bullying and investigate reported circumstances so that immediate and appropriate school action may be taken.
- ✓ Avoid attempts to mediate a bullying situation. The difference in power between victims and bullies may cause victims to feel further victimized by the process or believe that they are somehow at fault.

## What Parents Can Do

- ✓ The best protection parents can offer their children who are involved in a bully/victim conflict is to foster their child’s confidence and independence and be willing to take action when asked. The following suggestions are offered to help parents identify appropriate responses to conflict experienced from children at school:
- ✓ Be careful not to convey to a child who is being victimized that something is wrong with him/her or that he/she deserves such treatment. Convince your child that he or she is not at fault and the bully’s behavior is a source of the problem.
- ✓ It is appropriate to call the school if your child is involved in a conflict as either a victim or a bully. Work collaboratively with school personnel to address the problem. Keep records of incidents so that you can be specific in your discussion with school personnel about your child’s experiences at school.
- ✓ You may wish to arrange a conference with a teacher, principal, or counselor. School personnel may be able to offer some practical advice to help you and your child; they may also be able to intervene directly with each of the participants. School personnel may have observed the conflict firsthand and may be able to corroborate your child’s version of the incident, making it harder for the bully or the bully’s parents to deny its authenticity.
- ✓ While it is often important to talk with the bully or his/her parents, be careful in your approach. Speaking to the bully directly may signal to the bully that your child is a weakling. Speaking

with the parents may accomplish little; they may be uninvolved or see nothing wrong with bullying, equating it to “standing up for oneself.”

- ✓ Offer support to your child but do not encourage dependence on you. Rescuing your child from challenges or assuming responsibility yourself does not teach independence.
- ✓ Do not encourage your child to be aggressive or to strike back. Rather, teach your child to be assertive. A bully often is looking for an indication that his/her threats and intimidation are working; a child who does not respond as the bully desires (tears or passive acceptance) is not likely to be chosen as a victim. For example, children can be taught to respond to aggression with humor and assertions rather than acquiescence.
- ✓ Be patient. Be prepared to spend time with your child, encouraging new interests or strengthening existing talents and skills. Also support and encourage friendships.

### **What Students Can Do**

Students may not know what to do when they observe a classmate being bullied or experience such victimization themselves. Classroom discussions and activities may help students develop a variety of appropriate actions that they can take. Depending on the situation and their own level of comfort, students can:

- ✓ Seek immediate help from an adult;
- ✓ Report bullying/victimization incidents to school personnel;
- ✓ Speak up and/or offer support to the victim when they see him/her being bullied – for example, picking up the victim’s books and handing them to him or her;
- ✓ Privately support those being hurt with words of kindness or condolence;
- ✓ Express disapproval of bullying behavior by not joining the laughter, teasing or spreading of rumors or gossip; and
- ✓ Attempt to defuse problem situations either single-handedly or in a group, for example, by taking the bully aside and asking him/her to cool it.

# BULLYING BEHAVIORS CHART

MILD	MODERATE			SEVERE	
<b>Physical Aggression</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pushing</li> <li>▪ Shoving</li> <li>▪ Spitting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kicking</li> <li>▪ Hitting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defacing Property</li> <li>▪ Stealing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical acts that are demeaning and humiliating, but not bodily harmful (i.e., de-panting)</li> <li>▪ Locking in a closed or confined space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical violence against family or friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Threatening with a weapon</li> <li>▪ Inflicting bodily harm</li> </ul>
<b>Social Alienation</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gossiping</li> <li>▪ Embarrassing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Setting up to look foolish</li> <li>▪ Spreading rumors about</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ethnic slurs</li> <li>▪ Setting up to take the blame</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Publicly humiliating (e.g., revealing personal information)</li> <li>▪ Excluding from group</li> <li>▪ Social rejection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maliciously excluding</li> <li>▪ Manipulating social order to achieve rejection</li> <li>▪ Malicious rumor mongering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Threatening with total isolation by peer group</li> </ul>
<b>Verbal Aggression</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mocking</li> <li>▪ Name calling</li> <li>▪ Dirty looks</li> <li>▪ Taunting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teasing about clothing or possessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teasing about appearance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intimidating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Verbal threats of aggression against property or possessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Verbal threats of violence or of inflicting bodily harm</li> </ul>
<b>Intimidation</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Threatening to reveal personal information</li> <li>▪ Graffiti</li> <li>▪ Publicly challenging to do something</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defacing property or clothing</li> <li>▪ Playing a dirty trick</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking possessions (e.g., lunch, clothing, toys)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extortion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Threats of using coercion against family or friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coercion</li> <li>▪ Threatening with a weapon</li> </ul>

**Consequences and interventions for bullying and harassment will be implemented according to district policy and as detailed in the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline, summarized in the Student and Parent Handbook. Consequences will be based on the severity of the event and in accordance with progressive discipline.**

Information used in the formulation of these Administrative Regulations and Guidelines is from the *U.S. Department of Education publication, Bullying Prevention: A Manual for Schools and Communities* (1999). Reproduction of the information contained in these guidelines was done with permission from the U.S. Department of Education. If the reader has questions or the need for clarification, please contact the building principal or the Director of Pupil Services at (610) 834-1671, ext. 2111.



**The Pupil Services  
Department of  
Colonial School  
District**