
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591, Nov 2005

Community Concerns



This fall has been a really busy and productive time in many Westchester communities in terms of parent programs. There have been five Family University models planned in addition to other workshops and presentations.

If you look at the presentations, ones gets a sense of the issues that are of concern to communities. One of the recurring themes at these events is the worries that parents have about ways to build respect and decrease bullying behaviors.

Student Assistance Services (SAS) is implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, a model program, in six elementary schools and one middle school. The Olweus Program is an effective way to address bullying in a very practical and comprehensive manner.

Andrea Fallick, the Assistant Director for school-based programs at SAS is now a certified Olweus Bullying Prevention Trainer and is a member of the International Bullying Prevention Association. She is available to provide consultation and training on bullying to parent groups and to school staff. Call her at 332-1300 for more information.
Patricia Murphy Warble, Editor

Bullying

There has been an increased concern about the issue of bullying in this country in the past few years. One reason is that when the characteristics of students involved in school shootings was investigated it was discovered that a number of the attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was longstanding and severe.

Most of the research on bullying comes from Scandinavia and it is only recently that researchers in this country have begun to compile data on this topic. In the past few years, several excellent books have been published on the subject, Michael Thompson, Ph.D. wrote *Best Friends, Worst Enemies* and Roselind Weissman documents the bullying phenomenon with girls in her book, *Queen Bees, Wanna Bees*.

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“Bullying” is an English term and the common definition comes from Professor Dan Olweus, a pioneer in bullying research. His definition states that “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students.”

He goes on to say that these actions can consist of physical contact, by words, through facial or obscene gestures or through intentional exclusion from a group. The hallmark of bullying is that there is an imbalance in strength between the people harassing and the person being harassed

Research shows that most bullying occurs within the school environment. Approximately 40 to 70 per cent of bullying takes place during breaks; in the school yard, in the corridors, at recess or in more secluded places, like bathrooms. It can also take place in the classroom unless a teacher is attentive and does not tolerate bullying behavior.

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Students can also be bullied on the Internet. This has become such a common concern that last spring the County sponsored a *Summit on Cyberbullying*. An outcome of this presentation was information about a group of teens who are trained in a comprehensive program about online issues. There is more information about this group at www.TeenAngels.org.



Who Gets Bullied?

According to Professor Olweus, potential victims of bullying can be divided into two main groups; the passive or submissive victim and the provocative victim.

The more common situation is the passive victim who is bullied. Most of these children are not aggressive but reveal through their behavior and attitudes that they are a bit unsure of themselves. Professor Olweus found that sometimes these children were smaller and weaker than their classmates.

The provocative victim accounts for about 10 to 20 percent of victims. These children can be

quick tempered, restless and be considered “difficult.”

Who Bullies?

One of the misconceptions about bullies is that they are anxious, unsure of themselves, and have poor self-esteem. The research indicates the opposite. Bullies have low or about average levels of anxiety and insecurity. In addition, they have an average or even positive self-image.

Studies have considered gender differences in bullying behaviors among adolescents. They found that boys are more likely than girls

to be involved in physical bullying like fighting. Both boys and girls engage in verbal bullying.

Boys are generally bullied by other boys but not by girls. Whereas girls report that they are bullied by both genders. There are still some questions about whether there is more social exclusion and gossip among girls than boys.

Most bullies have similar characteristics. They are usually aggressive, hot-tempered, impulsive and easily frustrated. They are usually very assertive and dominant and often use threats to get their own way.

Bully, Victim, Bystanders

The bullying process not only involves bullies and victims, but also the students who are bystanders and watch the bullying take place. This group can reinforce the actions of the bully by laughing or making comments. Sometimes the bystanders may try to make the aggressor stop the bullying behavior but those students run the risk of being the next victim. It is very difficult for children to stand up to a bully. As a result, one of the key components of bully prevention programs is to encourage children to tell a responsible adult that they are being bullied.

How Do I Know If My Child Is Being Bullied?

Talk with your children about what happens at school and try to get a sense of what your children’s day is like. Asking questions about who they eat lunch with or “hangout” with, which may give you insight into what is going on with their friendships.

If the school contacts you and says that your child is being bullied, take it seriously. It is important that you work with school personnel to deal with the issue. Bullying can seriously impact a child in a negative way and every child has a right to be protected by the adults in the school.

Be vigilant about warning signs that your children might be bullied. Notice if your children comes home with torn or dirty

clothes or books or has bruises or cuts that cannot be explained. If your children do not want to go to school, seem to be unhappy or depressed or show any other problems like loss of appetite or sleep problems, investigate the possibility that things are not going well at school and this could involve a bully.

Being the object of a bully can also put a child at risk for alcohol, drug use, and other risky behaviors as a way to cope with the pain of being tormented. It can also be a way to try to fit into a group.

How Do I Know If My Child Is A Bully

It can be hard to find out, much less acknowledge that your child is a bully. However, if your child has the characteristics mentioned in "Who Bullies," then it is something that should be taken seriously.

According to a pamphlet entitled *Bullying Is Not A Fact of Life*, that is published by the US Department of Health and Human Services, if children are bullies, they are at much higher risk of using alcohol, drugs and becoming involved in crime. It is important for a child who is a bully to get help to break the cycle of this behavior.

What Can Parents Do?

Parents who have a child who is being bullied should not regard it as part of growing up. The school needs to be involved in any intervention to deal with an aggressive bully. Most schools

are becoming more involved in ways to deal with this ongoing issue.

Do not try to intervene directly with the bully or the bully's family. This action could make matters worse for the victim.

Look for ways to help your children expand their interests so they are not dependent on one group of friends. Help them develop social skills and role-play situations so that they may be better able to handle difficult situations. However, the reality is that most children are unable to deal with a bully without the intervention of an adult.

Bullying, 2005

The issue of bullying has become more sophisticated today with the use of new technology available to students. The use of "IMing," computers, video cameras and cell phones has provided bullies and other adolescents with additional ways to hurt victims, often in more public ways.

There are many anecdotal stories about teens posting pictures and videos on the Internet of other teens in compromising positions. Students report that they have been unknowingly photographed in locker rooms and other private places by cell phones capable of taking pictures. These photos are then sent to other students and sometimes are put on the Internet as well.

There are other issues involved with using cell phones and IM messages as a way to spread gossip and rumors about an indi-

vidual. Sometimes a rumor is started which quickly spreads through a group of teens who are "IMing" each other. Great damage can be done to someone's reputation in a very short period of time.

Teens do not always understand the power of these technological tools and how the misuse of this technology can significantly harm another child. Once the information is out in cyberspace there is no going back. In some cases, information that has been put on the Internet has been so devastating to families that they have moved to other communities. Sometimes the actions result in criminal charges against the bully.

Bully Prevention

Professor Olweus says in his book, *Bullying at School*, that bullying is different than a fight between two equal peers. Bullying is an abuse of power which will only end if adults routinely step in and stop it.

Oleus' bully prevention program is built on the assumption that adults must be willing to intervene actively and unequivocally when they see children being bullied, and teach children the skills they need to protect each other from bullies. In addition, his research shows that in order for a bullying prevention program to be successful the entire community needs to be involved; teachers, parents, and all staff.

The following is an overview of this excellent, effective program.



How does the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program Work?

School wide Interventions

- Administration of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire
- Formation of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee
- Staff Training
- School-wide rules against bullying
- Coordinated system of supervision during lunch and recess

Classroom Level

- Establishing and enforcing rules against bullying
- Classroom meetings about peer relations and bullying
- Class parent meetings

Individual Level

- Meetings with children who bully
- Meetings with children who are bullied

- Meetings with parents of children

How is the OBPP Implemented?

- The Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee participates in a two day training with a certified trainer and attends a monthly meeting
- All school staff participate in a half day training

What are the staffing requirements?

- Staff time assigned to coordinating the school's bullying prevention efforts

Is Technical Assistance provided?

- Telephone or in person consultation, once a month for the first year of implementation

For more information call Andrea Fallick at 914-332-1300.

Upcoming Events

November 15 5:45pm
Byram Hills High School
Byram Hills Family Symposium
New Rules How To Get Your Kids To Listen, Ron Taffel
Healthy Workout, Eric Small, MD
Rye Town Players
Contact: 273-5363

November 16 6:00pm
Horace Greeley High School
Chappaqua Family Forum
Risky Behavior and the Human Brain, Marilyn Brockwood
Contact: 238-5778

November 16 7:00pm
White Plains High School
Risky Business-Alcohol and Drug Use
Creative Arts Theatre
Contact: 422-2339

November 19 8:00am
Pelham Middle School Library
Pelham University
Rob Spear
Part I: For Fathers Only
Smooth Sailing at the Office-Uncharted Waters at Home
Part II: For All Parents and Community Members
10:00am
How To Give Up Control While Staying in Charge, Contact: 738-6941

November 30 7:00pm
Croton-Harmon HS Auditorium
Yes, Your Teen Is Crazy
Dr. Michael Bradley
Contact: 271-3285