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The Bullying Cycle: Bullies, Victims, and Curriculum Advances

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Abstract

Although bullying occurs in all age groups, and in every situation ranging from prisons to corporate institutions, the scope of this paper is limited to the effects of bullying on children. I have attempted to review and explore the empirical data and evidence as it specifically relates to children, from preschool through adolescence and high school. This paper attempts to define and explore various types of bullying. It reviews empirical evidence linked to the nature and aspects of bullying as well as to present data regarding causes and effects of bullying. Lastly, and perhaps most important, this paper explores legislation, preventative programs, and curricular responses that have been developed in response to this disturbing and dangerous social interaction.

INTRODUCTION

“Bullies come in all different sizes and shapes; some are big, some are small; some bright and some not so bright; some attractive and some not so attractive; some popular and some absolutely disliked by almost everybody” (Coloroso, 2004). Some people will argue that bullying is just a rite of passage for children, but given the increase in violent behavior in today’s society, this assertion is dubious (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

Bullying has been appearing in the news headlines much more than in the past. In 2010 a big story that caught the media’s attention was the Phoebe Prince case. Phoebe was a 15 year old girl who was bullied to her death. She was called an “Irish slut” when she had a brief relationship with a senior boy. Students, besides taunting her, knocked books out of her hands, and sent her threatening text messages day after day. In 2009, Tyler Long was bullied to his death. Tyler was called a “geek and fag” and nobody wanted to play with him. In gym class, he was always the last one to be picked. Newspapers stated that some children told him “to go hang himself because he was worthless”. These two headlines really affected me and I became increasingly interested in learning more about the current state of bullying.

The popular television show “Glee” mixes storylines with music and dance to tackle topics such as bullying. One of the main characters on the show is openly gay and is antagonized by a bully for his sexuality choice. The episode addresses the consequences of Kurt’s decision to stand up to the bully. What is interesting is that Kurt’s bully is actually insecure about his own sexuality; indicating that in some cases, children show bravado on the outside when on the inside they are really feeling unsure of themselves and hence, want to preempt the situation, lining themselves up as the aggressor- someone to be feared, rather than to become victims of bullies

themselves.

Ten to fifteen percent of school aged children reported having been bullied at least once a week (Raskauskas, 2005). According to Selekman and Vessey, (2004) it is estimated that three out of ten students are either bullies or victims of bullies. That thirty percent is comprised of thirteen percent who are bullies and eleven percent who are victims, along with the remaining six percent that are both bullies and victims. 3.7 million children in grades six through ten bully other children each year and 3.2 million are victims of bullying (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

Many states including New York have passed laws requiring schools to develop anti-bullying curricula and to take action against students who taunt others. Bullying in the United States is faced by as many as 60% to 80% of children during their school career (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). There have been many incidents of bullying reported from around the world. In Manchester, England during January of 1999, an eight-year-old girl named Marie Bentham hung herself in a bedroom with her jump rope, because she felt she could no longer face bullies at her school. In April of 1997, in Nanaimo, British Columbia, a student who was in 4th grade pulled a knife on another student who was teasing him. His mother claimed the boy had been tormented by his peers for over a year. She also stated that he gave up all forms of sports, would not do his homework, and would end up leaving school. This boy was known to be angry all the time. He was also picked on and his home was the only place he could go where he could feel safe.

When I was in first grade, one of my schoolmates picked on me at the bus stop. I clearly remember my embarrassment, because I was the only first grader who wore braces on my teeth. He used to tease me and call me “Metal Mouth.” A distinction can be drawn here because I now recognize this as somewhat harmless teasing, as opposed to bullying. I can draw that distinction

because at a later time in my adolescence, I actually was a victim of a more serious incident of bullying. I was around 12 or 13 years old, in middle school, when a girl who I had formerly been friends with turned on me for no reason that I can determine. Although some of the painful details have been blurred over the years, the incident involved her sending an email to many of our classmates suggesting that I was worthless and hated by everyone and that I should just “dig a hole in the ground and jump in”. I remember screaming out loud when I read the email. At my wit’s end, my parents intervened by contacting my bully’s parents with a copy of the email and a request to get together to discuss it. Her father vehemently denied the possibility that his daughter could have been responsible for such a cruel act, and over the next few days, her family concocted a story that a cousin had been using her personal computer and was the real perpetrator. There was never an apology because there was never an admission of guilt.

This incident took its toll on me and left me with a profound sense of sadness for children who suffer similarly and even worse. Almost all of us have been on the receiving end of some sort of bullying, or at one point acted as a bully. Bullying is a huge problem which can no longer be ignored or downplayed. It is a serious and complex worldwide problem. (Coloroso, 2004).

In Part I, I will discuss the definitions and characteristics of bullying. Part II will explore the experiences of the bullied. Part III will continue to delve into the experiences of the bully as well as the bystanders. Lastly, Part IV will include a discussion of legislation, prevention, and curricular responses to bullying.

Part 1: Features of Bullying

Dan Olweus, one of the leading international authorities on bullying, defines bullying as an ‘aggressive behavior of intentional harm-doing that happens over and over again’. (Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou & Didaskalou, 2011). Definitions of bullying can vary widely from state to state. The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) defines bullying as “dynamic and repetitive patterns of verbal and non-verbal behaviors directed by one or more children on another child that are intended to cause physical, verbal, or emotional abuse in the presence of a perceived power differential’. Bullying has also been defined as ‘long-standing violence; physical or psychological, led by an individual or group, and intended to hurt an individual who is not able to defend himself in an actual situation’ (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

Bullying occurs equally among both genders, but boys are said to be more physical while girls resort to more “social toxicity” (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). Offord et al. (1991) believes that it is necessary to take into account gender differences because boys are at higher risk for developing aggressive tendencies than girls (Georgiou & Fanti, 2010). According to peer reports, boys who have been bullied are much more likely to respond with “coercion” or “counter-aggression.” Girls who have been bullied are likely to respond with helplessness (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

There is no way to determine how many children are being bullied at any given time, but it is safe to assume that at every minute of every day, someone somewhere is being tormented by a bully. What makes a child turn into a bully? What factors actually play a significant role in the formation of bullying behavior? Does a bully really feel superior to others or are the behaviors a self defense mechanism? In doing the research for this paper, several interesting things have

come to light. Firstly, bullying affects everyone. The bully, the one who is being bullied, and the bystanders (those who witness bullying) are all affected in one way or another. As mentioned earlier, kids who bully others are statistically more likely to have negative encounters with law enforcement than those who don't. Through adolescence and adulthood, there is a greater incidence of alcohol and drug abuse, physical fighting, dropping out of school, abusive behaviors in relationships, and early sexual activity. All of these troubling features point to the fact that a child who bullies is not happy or comfortable in his own skin. In some way, a bully is trying to fight back and gain control over something in his or her life that caused him to feel badly about himself, or take out his or her anger on others with bullying behaviors. In other words, some bullies are responding to the way they were treated themselves by bigger or more powerful people over the course of time. So develops a vicious cycle of the bullied becoming bullies themselves. This cycle needs to be thoroughly understood, so that it can be dealt with adequately. In the meantime, children are being tormented, killed, and sometimes becoming killers themselves in an attempt to take out their rage on others (Drecktrah & Blaskowski).

Frequent conflicts and disputes between siblings are common, but research has found that three components lead to bullying. The first interaction would show an intentional nature; the bully would deliberately bring damage to the victim. A second component is persistency; the attacks are repeated over time. The third component deals with an imbalance of power. (Menesini, 2008). In general, bullying can be divided into three types, although they may overlap; emotional abuse, physical abuse, and verbal abuse. All of these contain components of coercion and intimidation.

Not all aggressive behavior falls into the category of bullying; it is not considered to be bullying when students who do not like each other engage in playful or nasty teasing. One may confuse bullying with a relatively common physical fight between two students of equal stature and strength that are angry at each other. Thus, anger does not always equal bullying (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). Bullying may, but does not always include normal childhood altercations such as sibling rivalry or one-on-one fighting. Bullying can also be defined as predatory aggression (Coloroso, 2004). It usually occurs on a wide spectrum, which makes it difficult to offer a precise definition. It is said that at one end of the spectrum are children's unintentionally mean acts. Researchers feel that in the course of trying to find themselves or assert their own social power, children can act meanly or make unkind bullying choices. The U.S. National Center for Education Statistics classifies bullying into two main categories- direct bullying and indirect bullying (social aggression). These will be explored in greater detail throughout this paper. At the other end of the spectrum are acts of clear-cut intentional cruelty (Anthony & Lindert, 2010) "Bullying is not about anger or conflict, it is about contempt and a powerful feeling of dislike toward somebody considered to be worthless, inferior and undeserving of respect" (Coloroso, 2004).

Bullying often occurs without apparent provocation, and negative actions likely take place by physical contact, by words or in other ways, such as making faces, unkind or humiliating gestures and/or intentional exclusion from a group (Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou & Didaskalou, 2011). It can be verbal, consisting of name calling, teasing and threats, or physical- hitting, pushing and kicking. All forms of bullying have a psychological impact. Bullying occurs when another child or children are deliberately mean to another over the course of several days, weeks, or months at a time. It includes a more subtle form of bullying, consisting of excluding

someone from social groups or spreading rumors about someone (Drecktrah & Blaskowski).

Bullying is a learned behavior “If it can be learned, it can be examined, and it can be changed” (Coloroso, 2004). Coloroso explains that when a bully is called to account he will deny that he did anything wrong. A bully will also trivialize the event and blame counterattacks on the victim. One who bullies will often accuse the other child of starting it. Bullies are able to master the part of the wronged party and get others to agree with him (Coloroso, 2004).

One of the most difficult aspects of bullying is when the bully is verbally skillful, “popular”, or just charming and convincing. In instances where this is the case, the victim can feel doubly victimized and utterly hopeless. This is yet another reason why bullying needs to be addressed in early childhood, hopefully leading to the establishment of appropriate standards and consequences that will become part of our social norms.

Researchers have found that children with behavioral, emotional, or developmental issues may demonstrate both bullying and victimization behaviors. Bullying is known to be extremely common in the lives of children with autism spectrum disorders. Children with autism spectrum disorders may experience difficulty reading social cues; hence, their bullying is different than those displayed by ‘neurotypical’ children. Children who do not suffer from autism generally use aggression to increase and maintain social status in the peer group. Interestingly, autistic children do not bully to maintain their social status in the peer group. The type of bullying that has been reported stems from a lack of consciousness about appropriate social interaction, so behaviors such as grabbing, pushing, or refusing to share are observed. Reports have also said that children with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities, ADHD, and other disorders are at special risk to be bullied (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012).

Recent studies have found that teasing and harassment can even occur with children who have relatively innocuous differences, such as food allergies. According to a 2012 CNN article that appeared on Time magazine online, “nearly half of kids with food allergies say they’ve been bullied, and a third report that the bullying was food-related”. Children reported that other children would taunt them by stuffing allergens into their mouth or by throwing prohibited food at them (Rochman, 2012). I recently read a case study about a young child who was being bullied because of a severe peanut allergy. The extra attention and accommodations given to him were enough to make some of his classmates resentful, provoking the bullying. His mother took a pro-active stance in helping his classmates understand his condition. On the first day of school, she sent a book called “Allie the Allergic Elephant: A Children’s Story of Peanut Allergies”, to be read to the class by the teacher so that they would better understand what it means to have food allergies (Landau, 2013). The mother’s attempt to create a safe, supportive, and engaging school climate mirrors actions currently being incorporated into the anti bullying curriculums in various school districts by administrators and local legislation.

Research has also uncovered growing evidence that differences in gender identity including lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered individuals are often targets of bullies (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012). A powerful example is that of Kelby, from Oklahoma, who came out to her school community as a lesbian. Teachers and administrators did not take action when she was beaten by several boys between classes which escalated to her being run down by a carful of classmates, resulting in her head shattering the windshield (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012).

Children whose physical appearance differs from the “norm” are also more likely to be bullied. Children who by conventional standards are too fat, too thin, too tall, or too short are all likely targets (Coloroso, 2004). Obese girls are more bullied than obese boys, perhaps because it

is more acceptable for a male to be “big” than for a female. Children with birthmarks, deformities, or other atypical physical characteristics are also targeted, as are children who lisp, stutter, or have other atypical speech patterns. Many young children are facing bullying on a daily basis. A television producer wrote a story about his experience having been bullied and the assertive one liner his father tried to instill in him.

“Every day just before noon, Gorman, a big boy who sat directly behind me, placed his fist in my face and demanded ‘you owe me!’ I would run home for lunch and steal money out of my mother’s purse to turn over to Gorman in the afternoon. After weeks of stealing money, my guilty feelings overrode the fear I had of Gorman. My dad said, ‘Michael, you are going to run into Gormans all your life. You need to stand up to him and let him know it’s over, the game’s up, and that you won’t be intimidated by the likes of his kind.’ The next day Michael practiced what he would say to the bully when the fist came, “It’s over Gorman. There will be no more money” (Coloroso, 2004). For Michael, the bullying ended that day, but that is not always the case. Sometimes standing up to the bully is all that is needed, but, according to Drecktrah & Blaskowski, bullies tend to become more aggressive as they grow up. Approximately 60 percent of boys labeled as bullies in grades six through nine had at least one official registered crime by the age of 24 (Drecktrah & Blaskowski, n.d).

It is not easy to identify bullies by how they look, but one can recognize a bully by how they act. They usually have their lines and actions down. Research indicates that bullies learn these behaviors from among other things, movies, video games, as well as other children they associate with both in and outside of school (Coloroso, 2004).

Bullying relies on factors such as imbalance of power, intent to harm, and threat of further aggression. Bullies can behave in a manner that involves an imbalance of social or physical power. These types of bullies are usually older, bigger, and stronger. Older bullies are typically known to be more verbally abusive. A bully deliberately means to cause emotional or physical pain. He also wants the action to hurt, as he derives personal satisfaction when that happens. The perpetrator will likely threaten repeatedly and the bullying will occur again (Coloroso, 2004). Sometimes a fourth element is added when bullying escalates at full strength or force, terrorizing the victim. "Bullying is systematic violence used to intimidate and maintain dominance. Terror struck in the heart of the child targeted is not only a means to an end; it is an end in itself" (Coloroso, 2004).

It is very common for a bully to refuse to accept responsibility for his own actions, sometimes showing a lack of foresight. However, there are some bullies who know full well going into it that there will be repercussions about which they are not worried. Coloroso believes that there are many reasons why children become bullies, but he believes bullies are not born; they are made. In spite of this, other researchers believe that inborn temperament plays a role, as do environmental influences. Influences from a child's home life, school life, community or culture, including the media that a child is exposed to all play a role where "bullies are taught to bully." Some bullies crave attention, achieving this by bullying others, even if the attention is negative. Bullying can make someone feel temporarily more powerful and important. (Coloroso, 2004).

Children have many reasons for not telling adults about a bullying situation. Some may be ashamed of being bullied precisely because the bully intends to make the target feel this way. Coloroso (2004) says that boys are less likely than girls to tell an adult. Boys have cultural

pressure that they should be strong, not cry, and be tough. Some children are also concerned about retaliation if they told an adult. The victim may feel that no one can help them. They may also believe the misconception that bullying is a necessary part of growing up (Coloroso, 2004). This thought has been reinforced throughout the generations where boys were encouraged by their dads to stand up to bullies, to take it to the schoolyard after school, to fight- win or lose, as a show of strength of character. This is a dangerous and misguided recommendation in today's less innocent age of computers, video recordings, guns, and knives.

Bullying variances by age and school grade

According to an Assistant Professor at North Dakota State University, bullying looks different in different age groups (Page, 2010). Bullying in the preschool years is usually physical rather than verbal, and includes biting, pinching, kicking, and shoving. Some researchers believe that bullying has two peaks. In early elementary school, ages 7-8 years old and again in middle school ages 11-14 years old (Selekman & Vesey, 2004). Laura DeHaan, quoted in Page (2010), says that the peak of bullying occurs in second grade. She states that these attacks are done openly and are also physical in nature (Page, 2010). Research has also shown that preschoolers are capable of becoming bullies. They are capable of playing the role of the bully, the victim, and the bully- victim. A child has to be able to reach a certain level of understanding of the intent to hurt, in order for the behavior to be classified as bullying. In addition, preschoolers are also capable of demonstrating both direct and indirect forms of bullying behavior. Evidence has lead researchers to believe that indirect aggression represents a more sophisticated behavior which replaces physical and verbal aggression, as children develop more advanced socio cognitive and linguistic skills. Researchers feel that the term "unjustified aggression" might be more suitable for describing "bullying" in the early years. Studies show

that children who know how to join a peer group, have a sense of humor, are friendly, cooperative, agreeable, willing to share, and able to control their anger are less likely to be bullied in school (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012).

Selekman and Vessey (2004) feel that children can and do display early signs of bullying, such as that of a child who forcefully takes possessions from another child or hurts another by showing pleasure at the child's reaction. Aggressive behaviors that could be considered bullying and peer-victimization have been identified in children as young as four years in many countries (Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou & Didaskalou, 2011).

In junior high school bullying becomes much more sophisticated and planned out. During these years bullying involves techniques such as gossiping, intentionally not socializing with a victim, and even criticizing the way a person dresses, their race, their disability or other such barbs meant simply to torment or hurt someone. One would attribute this to being a "teenager" but when it keeps happening, that is no longer the case (Page, 2010). Research has shown that an average middle school student is likely to experience one verbal harassment per day. This is also the age group where electronic bullying begins. Electronic bullying is defined as bullying that occurs through text messages, Internet, emails, and even on "Facebook" (Borba, 2010).

High school bullying employs many of the same tactics used in junior high. During these years bullying also involves making degrading comments, social isolation, as well as harassment.

THE MAKING OF A BULLY

Research has shown that there are multiple factors as to why children and adolescents become bullies. Some of the common factors include family dynamics. The frequency of bullying can be related to the amount of adult supervision that children receive. When children receive physical punishment at home, they have a tendency to develop negative self-concepts and expectations which could lead to attacking before they are attacked. There is evidence that various parental characteristics such as child rearing style influence both bullies and victims. Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou & Didaskalou, 2011). Patterson (1982, 1986) says that children learn to be aggressive towards others who are less powerful by seeing the daily interactions of their family members. Similarly, parenting techniques such as inconsistent punishment tend to lead to child aggression both in and out of the family (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). Perry et al. (1992) feels that children who experience victimization are more likely to come from families with histories of child abuse, poor attachment, and poorly managed conflict (Georgiou & Fanti, 2012). Lamborn et al. (1991) found that children of involved and nurturing parents have fewer adjustment problems in multiple domains including psychosocial competence and psychological and behavioral dysfunction. Children who bully their peers are more likely to come from families where parents use authoritarian and harsh child rearing practices, while children who experience victimization are more likely to come from families where parents display permissive parenting styles (Baldry and Farrington 2000; Espalage et al. 2000; Kaufmann et al 2000). Perry et al. (1990) looked at the ways children respond when bullied. They found that bullies perceived their victims as likely to reward their attackers with tangible rewards and unlikely to punish their attackers by fighting back (Fox & Boulton, 2005).

Coloroso writes about three basic types of families and the distinguishing features that hold them together. She calls them the brick wall family, the jellyfish family, and the backbone family. In the brick wall family, the bricks represent structure, with order, control, obedience, adherence to rules, and a strict hierarchy of power as the foundation. Children in these families are controlled, manipulated, and made to mind. Their feelings are often ignored while parents order and threaten the children to maintain control. She likens this type of family to a dictatorship. "Power in a brick wall family equals control, and all of it comes from the top. It can be a great training ground for the child who would become a bully or the proving ground for the bullied child to affirm her own lack of worth, lack of ability, and lack of personal resources to fend off the bully" (Coloroso, 2004, p.78).

The Jellyfish family is the opposite of the brick wall; this one lacks a firm structure, but allows for an indiscriminate display of feelings and emotions, both positive and negative, without necessary boundaries. In this type of family, a "laissez-faire atmosphere" exists. Children are smothered or abandoned, humiliated or embarrassed, and possibly manipulated with bribes, threats, rewards, and punishments. It can be like a "free for all" where there are few, if any expectations of behavior, thus creating an unpredictable atmosphere. A child who grows up in this type of family can become obnoxious, scared, or vindictive, or a combination of all these traits.

Backbone families do not come from any particular background or social strata. They are not necessarily headed by older parents or by younger parents. Interdependence is celebrated and there is no cycle of violence here, only a circle of caring. Backbone families teach respect. Children from these families can listen and be listened to, and they can learn to love themselves. This type of family provides the consistency, fairness, calm and peaceful structure needed for

them to develop their own moral code. “With the freedom to be themselves, they have no need to control or manipulate others, hold anyone in contempt, or subjugate themselves to a bully” (Coloroso, 2004, p. 91). Parents can help to develop support for their children through six life messages given every day. “I believe in you; I trust you; I know you can handle life situations; You are listened to; You are cared for; You are very important to me”. These life messages help children realize that they are able to protect themselves from the verbal attacks of a bully. They also believe they are capable of responding confidently in a variety of confrontations, and are willing to ask for help when they do not know what to do. “Kids who receive these six critical life messages are able to develop a healthy, secure attachment with a parent” (Coloroso, 2004, p. 92). Even more importantly, they have the tools to deal with bullying when and if it occurs, because of their strong sense of self, and knowledge that they are worthy of respect. Children possessing these positive self images are not likely to be silent bystanders when others are bullied. They inherently know that there are “no innocent bystanders” (Coloroso, 2004). Hopefully, some of these children will prove to be “defenders of the target” as Dan Olweus outlines.

Research demonstrates that bullies attack others to gain a sense of power and importance. In February 1997, a boy named Evan walked into a high school with a twelve- gauge shotgun and killed his schoolmate and the principal. From his cell in the correctional center in Alaska he admitted, “I felt a sense of power with a gun, It was the only way to get rid of the anger” (Coloroso, 2004). Experts agree that bullying behaviors are rooted in perceived differences in power. Bullies crave power and control, and this underlies much of what they do or say or fail to do and say (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). Bullying further thrives in a school setting because many school personnel are not aware that the behavior is occurring. Or they are not equipped to

handle it even when they do recognize it. Overworked teachers with crowded classrooms often do not have the time or manpower needed to address bullying issues as they arise.

Part II. The Experience of the Bullied

Children who are bullied experience a whole range of negative emotions that can often impact their lives forever. They are more likely to suffer from sadness, loneliness, and isolation. They can lose their joy for life, no longer engaging in activities that they once enjoyed. They can lose trust and faith in the ability of adults to protect them. They can have problems with eating, sleeping, concentration, and school performance. They can develop actual health problems due to the ongoing stress in their lives. They can resort to drugs or alcohol to help them cope with these issues. They can have difficulties forming strong personal bonds with others due to a lack of trust. The effects of having been bullied are far reaching and serious. (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012). So how often does bullying take place?

Researchers tend to believe that the average bullying episode lasts only thirty-seven seconds. School administrators are reported to notice only one in twenty-five incidents (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012). Boys tend to bully boys through the use of derogatory terms and by making them feel “less than a boy” (Coloroso, 2004). The words used to bully girls tend to objectify their bodies, demean their sexuality, and make them feel infantilized (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). In the book, *Little Girls Can Be Mean* the authors (Michelle Anthony and Reyna Lindert, 2010) talk about how girl aggression manifests itself by “girl meanness.” She states that girl cliques begin to form in fourth grade, but precursors to cliques begin to develop as early as kindergarten.

As a preschool teacher, it is common to see cliques forming throughout the year and I have observed “girl meanness” in children as young as 3 and 4 years old. Every school year, in every class, we have girls who exclude and betray other girls by not inviting one or two to a birthday party or play date, or by specifically singling out a child and telling others not to play with or ‘like’ her. It is disturbing that an apparent social hierarchy exists even in preschool. There are the “popular girls” who all the children want to play with, the “average girls,” the “children who fly below the radar,” and the “girls that no one wants to play with” (Anthony & Lindert, 2010). The authors write about a case study in which a girl in kindergarten declares: “Rebecca is not my friend.” When asked why, she responded: “Well, when I went up to her on the playground, she threw her arms in the air and shouted, ‘get away! Get away from me! I don’t want to play with you! I’m playing with Lily!’”

Recently, one of my colleagues described an incident of bullying in her classroom. A child was picking on another child for having a big nose. The bully would call him “pig face” and try to pinch his nose. Being singled out in this way has a powerful impact on children (Anthony & Lindert, 2010), and as an early childhood educator I witness this all too often.

A more recent, dangerous, and far reaching form of bullying consists of “online” or “cyber bullying,” and it can be extremely harsh. Cyber bullying is done through the use of technology, thus there is virtually no escape. It can go undetected because there are often no witnesses and it is nearly impossible to prevent because the bully can remain anonymous. Accordingly, it has become a serious problem. Bullies utilizing this medium often feel as though they cannot be blamed or held accountable. Cyber bullying allows a bully to write things that he or she would never say to a victim's face, and then to share it with the entire world to see. This type of bullying includes email, texting, instant messaging, posting of photos or statements on

social networking sites, and more. Online bullying can occur 24 hours a day and can be shared with many more people than traditional bullying (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). In *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, Peggy Orenstein (2011) chronicles the first high profile case of cyber bullying. She details an account of a girl in Missouri who hung herself in her bedroom after a romance with a boy she had met on MySpace, but had never spoken to nor seen in person, went sour.

A 2009 poll conducted by the Associated Press, MTV and described in Orenstein's book found that half of young people aged fourteen to twenty-four reported experiencing cyber bullying. Girls were significantly more likely to be victimized than boys (Orenstein, 2011). According to Coloroso (2004), "bullying can be a seriously destructive element in relationships among children at school, among adults in the workplace, and within families."

It is said that those who have been bullied may suffer psychological complications such as nightmares or sleep disturbances, psycho-somatic complaints, irritability, frequently becoming ill, and even diseases related to chronic stress. (Coloroso, 2004). In the school environment, the victim may suffer from poor concentration, poor academic performance, and even missing special school activities (Coloroso, 2004). Victims of bullying may fear rejection, being excluded, ignored and betrayed. In addition, they may feel lonely and isolated from their friends and classmates. Research has found that young people who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed than those who were not. Boys who have been bullied are four times more likely to be suicidal and bullied girls are eight times more likely to be suicidal (Vlachou, Andreou, Botsoglou & Didaskalou, 2011). Research also indicates that people who were bullied as children are more likely to suffer depression as adults. The link between bullying and depression can lead to other problems such as low self esteem and anxiety. High rates of school absence and physical illness is also observed. According to a 2009 Associated Press survey, 60 percent of

young people who have been bullied displayed destructive behavior such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using illegal drugs, and shoplifting.

Research has found that certain bullied children might feel the urge to retaliate through extremely violent measures. “In twelve of fifteen school shooting cases in the 1990’s, the shooters had a history of being bullied”. (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli,2004). The two students involved in the 1999 Columbine massacre were described as gifted students who had been bullied for years. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold took out their rage by randomly shooting dozens of students at the high school they attended. There are many reports of serial killers and psychopaths who were abused, neglected, or otherwise left emotionally scarred during their childhoods. Charles Manson, Henry Lee Lucas, and Kenneth Bianchi are some of these infamous figures. Interestingly, only a very small percentage of children who were bullied grow up to be vicious killers or psychopaths. It is not yet known why some people respond to having been bullied by becoming violent, aggressive adults, and why others are able to put the episodes behind them and go on to lead normal, productive lives. What is known is that people rarely forget incidents of bullying, and decades later, are able to recount their painful stories.

There are various warning signs to determine if your child is being bullied. Showing an abrupt lack of interest in school is the biggest red flag. “According to a National Association of School Psychologists they report that 160,000 children in the United States miss school every day for fear of being bullied” (Prince, 2005). Withdrawing from family and school activities as well as wanting to be left alone is another warning sign.

Another very telling sign is when a child experiences stomachaches, headaches, panic attacks or is unable to sleep or sleeps too much. Our bodies respond to the stress of being

targeted by turning on its chemical defense system (Coloroso, 2004). Bullying is usually not a one-time event, and the victim knows that the bullying can and likely will happen again (Coloroso, 2004). Anticipating the next attack by the bully can be as stressful as the actual incident. Although this is not a new problem, people are becoming more and more aware of its negative impact on children, yet we are still in the baby stages of forming policies and procedures for dealing with the problem effectively.

It is a life and death issue that many ignore. Bullying must not be taken lightly, brushed off, or denied. Thousands of children go to school every day with fear and apprehension; others pretend to have an illness to avoid being teased or attacked on the way to school or in the school yard, hallways, and bathrooms (Coloroso, 2004). Bullies can be everywhere, but it is very common to find bullies in schools, the very same place that our children spend most of their developing years.

According to a CNN study (2011), a junior in high school said, "No matter what high school you go to, what age you are, what social group you're in, you've been bullied and you are a bully." Once you start realizing that you can have ... higher social power by putting other people down ... that's, like, how people are moving up and that's how they're gaining respect" (Hadad, 2011). The bully self validates by putting someone else down.

Researchers have found that rural students experience bullying more frequently than students in urban or suburban areas (Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, and Blackburn, 2004). A study by Bowman (2001) found that approximately 30% of students in the Midwest either bullied other students or have experienced bullying between the sixth and tenth grades. In Texas a rural school study by Schroth and Fishbaugh (2000) found that more than half of the boys and at least one-

fifth of the girls had been involved in a fight that included the use of weapons. Sadly, there are many stories that involve gun violence.

A disturbing trend seen in some communities is that of adolescents and teens requesting plastic surgery to avoid being picked on or bullied. Samantha Shaw, a first grader, went national after undergoing surgery to have her protruding ears pinned back. Her mom felt she should get plastic surgery in order to preempt future bullying. A 13-year-old boy committed suicide after being severely bullied because of his large ears. His father was against it and told him that “his face would catch up to his ears... if you decide you want to alter a nose or ears, that’s a quick fix, but these bullies are going to find other things to pick on” (Kane, 2011). Not all children respond to being picked on by working harder and developing a tough exterior. For some children, the experience is simply unbearable; the loss of self-esteem, depression, thoughts of suicide, and even post traumatic stress disorder are all possible effects.

The home and family should be a safe haven for all children. Home is the place where parents have the opportunity and responsibility to help their children learn the skills to manage bullies. An open dialogue is key; children should feel comfortable talking with their parents without fear of judgment or criticism. Modeling respectful behavior towards one another, being able to express emotions appropriately, being an active listener, and being aware of subtle changes in a child’s behavior are all things parents can and should do to make the home a safe haven. Research consistently shows that observing violence or abusive behavior in the home is directly correlated with bullying behavior outside of the home.

Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli (2012) teach that in order to maintain a bully free zone in a family, classroom, and group, one must employ the “Crucial C’s” to meet children’s basic needs. The first C is “connected.” In order to do this, help each child feel like she belongs, fits in, and is secure. The second C is “capable.” Give children opportunities to take responsibility and allow them to demonstrate competence. “Count” is another crucial C, ensuring that every child feels significant and impactful. Lastly, “Courage.” help children handle difficult situations and overcome fear (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012). Researchers feel that there are other ways to boost a child’s safety and reduce the possibility of victimization. The biggest mistake a parent can make is not taking a child seriously when they are part of a bullying episode. 49 percent of kids say they have been bullied at least once or twice during the school term, but only 32 percent of their parents acted on their behalf. To help children avoid the bullying altogether Hirsch discusses four safety tips for bullying. He calls it “Plan”. The P stands for “Pal Up. “ Children should hang out in a large group or stay with at least one companion at all times. The “L” is for LETTING adults know. A child should seek out a trusted adult if they do not feel safe. The “A” is for AVOIDING the bullying hot spots which include bathrooms, back of a bus, etc. The last letter is “N”; warn children they should NOTICE their surroundings. If they think there could be trouble, they should leave that spot.

Part III: The Experiences of the Bully and the Bystander

Coloroso (2004) describes several kinds of bullies. She includes the confident bully, the social bully, the fully armored bully, the hyperactive bully, the bullied bully, the bunch of bullies, and the gang of bullies. According to Coloroso, the confident bully has a big ego and an inflated sense of self. He may also feel a sense of entitlement with a strong affinity for violence.

A confident bully does not have empathy for his targets and feels a sense of superiority over others. He is admired by his peers and teachers because he has a powerful personality. A confident bully may or may not have a lot of friends.

A social bully uses rumor, gossip, and verbal threats to isolate his targets and exclude them from social activities. A social bully might be jealous of other's positive attributes and thus, possess poor self-esteem. Social bullies are able to hide their feelings and insecurities to exaggerate confidence and charm. They are also known to be devious and manipulative by selectively acting caring and compassionate. This type of bully lacks empathy and would not ordinarily be a person children would look up to. They might even be considered "popular", but would not generally be someone other children would naturally confide in. Coloroso describes the type of bully that is cool and detached. This bully is known as fully armored. A fully armored bully shows minimal emotion and has a strong determination to continue bullying. This type of bully acts when no one will see him or stop him. They are known to be vicious and vindictive toward their target but charming in front of others, especially adults. This bully is often recognized as having a flat affect.

The hyperactive bully may struggle with academics and/or social skills. This type is inclusive of those who may suffer from various learning differences, causing him to struggle with processing cues accurately. He may read harsh intent into other kids innocent actions, reacting aggressively and placing blame outside of himself: "he hit me first". This bully frequently has trouble making friends. The bullied bully is both a target and a bully. She bullies others to get some relief from her own feelings of powerlessness. This bully typically has been abused and bullied by adults or older children. She is least popular of all the bullies and strikes out at those who hurt her or are weaker or smaller targets.

The bunch of bullies is a group of friends who collectively do something they would never do individually to someone they want to exclude. This type of bullying is done by children who recognize that what they are doing is wrong, but are powerless against the group. The last type of bullying is known as a gang of bullies. This is a group drawn together not as friends, but as a strategic alliance in pursuit of power, control and domination. They join together to feel a part of a family of sorts, to be respected and protected, and they can become so devoted to their group that they disregard their own lives.

This bears great resemblance to a gang mentality. Additionally they may lack empathy and remorse. Gangs of bullies are common in prisons, where many of the people held inside are there because of aggressive crimes. The hierarchy in prison means that the stronger, more aggressive, powerful prisoners are easily able to bully the younger, smaller, less powerful inmates. Prison staff is often ineffective in stopping these conflicts due to the sheer numbers they are up against.

Other types of bullying that occur outside of schools are in the military, where higher ranked officers are expected to enforce discipline with newer recruits; workplace bullying, where behaviors including verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and sabotage that interferes with work are not uncommon; sexual bullying, which is more commonly directed at females and can be carried out directly, through technology, or behind their backs.

Hazing, in high schools or colleges, is a serious and sometimes deadly form of bullying. It is natural to want to belong to a group, but hazing is a social dynamic that can strip the person of their dignity, self respect, and morals. This type of bullying is three- pronged: the group is headed up by the bully, who makes demands (hazes) the person wanting to be accepted into the

group, while the members become bystanders who tolerate the behavior in order to stay in favor with the group. In recent years, hazing has been taken more seriously, and many schools have instituted policies banning it. It is troubling to hear reports of students dying from being hazed. The hazing can be physical or emotional in nature; examples are being forced to stand in the cold without adequate clothing for long periods of time, being confined in a space such as the trunk of a car, being forced to consume vast quantities of alcohol or spicy foods or being subjected to cruel acts that can wreak terror on an individual.

When a young child displays bullying behaviors it could be an early warning that they may be headed toward more serious and antisocial behaviors. Statistics show that bullies were found to be seven times more likely to carry a weapon to school than non-bullies. Sixty percent of boys who were classified as bullies in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime and forty percent of them had three or more convictions by the age of twenty-four. Children who are bullies are more likely to engage in criminal activities during adulthood, ranging from simple assault to rape and even murder (Selekman & Vessey, 2004).

Part IV: Preventing and Responding to Bullying

The Friendly Schools Intervention Program was designed using a whole-school approach. The goals are to help build students' social competence and ability to navigate relationships in order to reduce the likelihood of bullying, as well as to prevent the distress students may experience from having been bullied. Four or five key staff members were selected to form a whole-school team approach to the problem of bullying. Built on the principles of successful practice for bullying reduction, it was developed in 1999. These principles were developed in accordance with the World Health Organization- Health Promoting School Model, and were

developed using theoretical, empirical and practical evidence of effective strategies which help the whole school to address bullying. The validity of the principles was tested in 1999 using a DELPHI process with an expert panel of international bullying researchers. The validated principles show how a school's social environment can impact bullying behavior and that successful bullying intervention requires a multi-component, systems based approach (Cross, Monks, Hall, Shaw, Pintabona, Erceg, Hamilton & Roberts, 2011).

In 2012, a new campaign was started to help defuse bullying called The "Be More than a Bystander." This campaign was started by a coalition of organizations whose goal was to eliminate bullying. The "Be More than a Bystander" campaign orchestrated by the nonprofit Advertising Council, underscored the problem by making use of a series of television, print, and online ads as well as a web site encouraging the idea that if witnesses know what to do, they can take steps such as removing the victim from the situation and reporting the abuse to an adult who is trained and experienced to defuse the bullying (Olson, 2012).

Another bullying program developed by the Committee for Children is known as Steps to Respect (Coloroso, 2004). This program teaches elementary school children to recognize, refuse, and report bullying. (Coloroso,2004). It is used in elementary schools in the United States and in Canada, and is based on Dr. Olweus's model. This prevention program is designed not only to decrease bullying, but also to help students build caring relationships with one another. It is known to be one of the few programs that addresses the significant role of the bystander, and emphasizes the responsibility of all members of the school community to recognize and address bullying.

Dr. Olweus has developed a successful intervention program in Norway that has been proven to help reduce bullying in the schools that have adopted it. His program is built on the following four key principles to create a positive school environment. The first principle revolves around the creation of warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults. The second principle involves the creation of firm limits for unacceptable behavior. The third principle deals with the violations of limits and rules and the consistent application of non-hostile and non-physical discipline as opposed to punishment. The final principle is based on behavior by adults at home and at school, which creates an authoritative adult-child interaction and child-rearing model (Coloroso, 2004).

In 2010, New York State's Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) was signed into law on September 13th and went into effect on July 1st, 2012. This act seeks to help New York State's public elementary and secondary school students by providing a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, and harassment and bullying on school property, school buses and at school functions (Cummings, 2012).

A December 2011 Department of Education study concluded that some state laws are intended to focus on specific actions including those of a physical, verbal, or written nature, while others focus on the intent of the bully as well as addressing multiple factors. Minor nuances in language can alter the way in which behaviors and circumstances are legally defined (Weigel, 2012). In 2011 Federal partners joined together for the second annual Bullying Prevention Summit. This is a 2-day event hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and eight other federal agencies that make up the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Steering Committee. This event allows representatives from federal agencies, national organizations, parents, teachers, and students to come together to discuss and share initiatives on anti-bullying

efforts across the country. The first year the goal of the conference was to inform the participants of federal guidelines and to encourage public engagement and participation. Since then, leaders and advocates have made significant progress in promoting bullying prevention programs, including an outreach initiative by the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that schools, districts, and states are aware of their responsibility to prevent bullying (Education Department Documents, 2011).

Enacting legislation is amongst the most crucial elements in combating bullying. (Weigel, 2012). There are those that argue that passing laws to prevent school children from bullying other children is useless because of the difficulty in defining what constitutes bullying. But at least 15 states have passed laws addressing this problem, and others are considering following this legislation. Many schools in the nation already operate under legislative mandates to create safety plans to protect children from violence and disruptive behavior, of which bullying is just one. Additionally, more and more schools are requiring the development of bullying policies which emphasize the responsibility for their development coming from the school board. Some have even included statutory provisions directed to employee training on bullying prevention and recognition.

Michael Mulgrew, president of the teacher's union in New York City, launched a campaign in 2011 to combat bullying. The campaign was called, "Be BRAVE Against Bullying". This campaign provided educators with resources to become proactive in confronting and stopping bullying. He established an after-school hotline for students to call Mondays through Fridays; posters and stickers for teachers to use so students can identify allies in their school and workshops for teachers and parents throughout the school year to learn more about this issue (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012).

According to Hirsch, an effective bullying prevention program for schools should include SEL (Social-Emotional-Learning) components. SEL is an educational movement gaining ground throughout the world. SEL programs are implemented in a coordinated manner throughout a school district, from preschool through high school. It stresses the systematic development of a core set of social and emotional skills that help children handle life challenges and thrive in both their learning and their social environment.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as the processes through which children and adults develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions. Demonstrating caring and concern for others, creating positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging social situations effectively are the goals of this program (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012). Schools using an SEL framework to teach students skills in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These are the 5 core SEL skills that students need to begin to deal with bullying.

Additionally, schools need to provide students with instruction and practice in applying their SEL skills to different bullying situations. An SEL framework provides a supportive foundation for these efforts. Children who are better able to recognize and understand their emotions are better able to deal with conflicts effectively. This SEL skill is called self awareness. Children taught these skills become better able to assess one's feelings, interests, values, and abilities, while trying to maintain a sense of self confidence. It is also crucial that children learn to recognize when they are getting angry and learn how to calm themselves down before reacting. Regulating one's emotions during times of stress is a form of self-management. Children who have not developed this awareness tend to have trouble managing anger and are

more likely to bully others. Social awareness includes being tolerant and appreciative of differences. It also focuses on learning to be empathetic.

Social Awareness encourages one to be accepting of individual and group similarities and differences. SEL also focuses on relationship skills, which teach children to interact effectively with others, learning to initiate and sustain friendships and other personal relationships. The values of maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation, resisting social pressures, preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict and seeking help when needed are stressed. Hirsh (2012) believes that “having high-quality friendships, or at least one best friend, can help prevent children from being victims”. There are multiple ways to help children who lack confidence and skill in effectively socializing with their peers. Asking questions, showing support, and making suggestions can help one be more accepted by peers if targeted by a bully. Lastly, Responsible Decision Making is also part of the framework for SEL skills. This requires one to think through and resolve social problems effectively in an ethical manner. Making decisions based on safety concerns and appropriate standards of conduct is another goal of this program. Being able to solve social problems requires one to view the situation from different perspectives. Hirsh, Lowen, and Santorelli (2012) explain, “Research indicates that children who frequently bully tend to misinterpret social interactions as being more hostile, adversarial, or provocative than their peers do” (Hirsch, Lowen & Santorelli, 2012).

The worst thing one can do is to do nothing or assume that bullying behaviors are harmless. Teachers and parents should never instruct youths to fight back. Children have reported that some adults in whom they had confided had advised them to “just ignore them,” “stand up and fight back,” or to believe that “kids will be kids.” These comments are not helpful or supportive to the victim and indeed, might actually encourage the bullying behavior to continue. According to Selekman and Vessey, the best intervention is communication. Schools can do many things to help stop bullying. Selekman and Vessey suggest that schools incorporate discussions of bullying behaviors in classes that discuss history and laws. Group discussions can be incorporated regarding how to stop bullying as well as the moral problems faced when encountering bullying behavior. All school officials should consistently promote trust so that children will realize the teachers will be there for them to protect them and trust that they will help rectify the situation. It would also be helpful if environments outside of school properties were consistent in refusing to tolerate bullying behaviors. Adults and teachers need to promote being positive role models in managing relationships.

Emphasis should be placed on sharing, helping, and caring. Teachers can demonstrate that they respect others and others property. They can incorporate the golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” All schools should adopt “codes of behavior” for all members of the school community (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). These are starting points that educators can do to show students that bullying is an unacceptable behavior and will not be tolerated. A good place to start is to come up with a formal definition of what bullying is. The definition might use different words for different populations, but the end result should confirm that “bullying occurs when a stronger, more powerful person hurts or frightens another person intentionally and repeatedly.” The concepts of “stronger” and “more powerful” are not limited to

physical stature, of course, and children need to be taught that those words encompass behavioral traits as well as descriptions of size. From a very young age, children can be taught these concepts using simple vocabulary which builds upon itself, becoming more sophisticated and abstract as the child's development allows.

Educators can also help students work on their conflict- resolution skills. Everyone benefits from learning and practicing these skills. Teachers can teach their students the 8 basic steps to conflict resolution. They should discuss each step with their class and can reinforce the ideas with practice, role-plays and skits. It is important for one to remember that conflict resolution takes time and is not taught in one day. Teachers can also conduct classroom activities around bullying. Educators can play an important role by incorporating activities to help students identify bullying in books, on television shows and in movies.

These can lead to a discussion regarding the impact of bullying and ways it can be managed and curbed. Children's literature can be an effective tool for addressing the growing concerns about bullying in schools. Utilizing age appropriate books can benefit students by improving their ability to understand and deal with problems. There are specific books written with the goal of teaching children how to think about acceptable societal norms and to increase their understanding of sensitivity, empathy, and respect for others. This is not to say that bullying will cease to exist if our society takes certain measures to increase awareness. Unfortunately, bullies are here to stay; it is the response to bullying that should be addressed.

Abraham Lincoln said, "he will have to learn, I know; that all people are not just- that all men and women are not true. Teach him that for every scoundrel there is a hero; that for every enemy there is a friend. Let him learn early that the bullies are the easiest people to lick".

(Selekman & Vessey, 2004) But exactly how does one go about reducing these destructive behaviors even while they seem to grow larger and more defiant each year?

Adopting an anti-bullying curriculum in the earliest grades might set the path towards developing a consistent strategy throughout an entire academic career and beyond. A good place to start is to figure out the differences between teasing and bullying. Teasing is generally not mean spirited and the teaser will quit once he sees the person being teased become upset. Another characteristic of teasing is that it involves both parties, where the teaser and the person being good-naturedly teased switch back and forth with innocent, lighthearted comments. This is important as a starting point, because it eliminates the excuse that a bully will often use “I was only kidding around.”

When everyone is clear on whether the incident is teasing or actual bullying, the next step is to create an environment where all children can feel safe in school, because the majority of bullying takes place in schools. Some of the issues needing to be addressed are clarifying the difference between “tattling” and “telling,” requiring onlookers to report the incidents or to do something to stop the victimization, giving victims a clear cut way to go to administration -to report the activity, defined repercussions for the bully when found out, and very important- to plan frequent evaluations of these policies to encourage adaptations and changes when needed.

“Groark Learns about Bullying” is an excellent video to show to a class of younger students because it is formatted as a puppet show and a discussion about what bullying is, along with ways to help children become more aware of bullying behaviors. Following this video, the children can collectively write letters to an “imaginary bully” telling this person what he or she is doing that you do not like, and why you do not like it. Suggestions for more appropriate and acceptable behaviors can also be included in the letter.

Another possible technique against bullying in the classroom is the development of an anti-bullying contract that can be signed and sent home to be reviewed with caregivers during the first weeks of school. This will encourage parents/caregivers to discuss bullying with their children. Making sure the child knows the difference between bullying and kidding around or teasing is critical. Discouraging tattling is an ineffective choice because you never want your students to feel there will be negative repercussions for reporting the behaviors.

As a teacher, my role besides my academic responsibilities is to show my students that I am here for them and my job is to protect them. My students know if they are bullied by another student or anyone for that matter, that they can talk to me. It is important to be observant in your classroom, and pay attention to all students, especially those who might appear to be socially awkward, shy, less confident, or who demonstrate unusual bravado. These children could be the targets or the perpetrators of bullying behaviors.

Conclusion

Some people will argue that bullying is just a rite of passage for children, but in today's society bullying is a serious problem. One has only to open a newspaper or tune in to local news to be reminded of the brutal consequences that are the aftermath of bullying. Although bullying in some form has existed for centuries, the advent of technology has provided a painfully surefire method for fast and lasting effects on its victims. In addition, the anonymity of the Internet makes finding the perpetrators a very difficult task. Bullying occurs in subtle and frighteningly harsh scenarios, with everything in between. From snide remarks on the playground to senseless mass school shootings, bullying has a way of leaving its mark.

As usual, there is no one answer to this problem. We have to rely on educating people from the ground up; teaching young children respect and tolerance, providing middle schoolers with the means to report bullying as well as guidelines for acceptable behavior; incorporating anti bullying lessons into the high school curriculum; training teachers and administrators to recognize and take action against bullying; and as always, keeping the lines of communication between parents, children, and the schools open and effective. Education and communication are the first lines of defense if we ever hope to one day open a newspaper that is void of horrific details of yet another incidence of bullying.

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