

Focus on Bullying



Parenting **PERSPECTIVES**



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“Inclusion”	3
What is Bullying?	4
Helping Your Child Avoid Bullies	6
My Child with a Disability is Being Bullied	7
<i>One Students Story</i> : “No One Tried to Help Me”	9
Suggestions for Parents for Dealing with Victims	10
<i>One Parents Perspective...</i>	
“My Son was Attacked at School”	11
“Even the Principal was a Bully...”	13
When the Teacher is the Bully.....	16
A Self-Assessment for Parents	18
<i>Cyberbullying</i> : It’s Not Easy to Know How to Step In	19
Back to School Time is Time to Talk About Substance Abuse	21
“Rachel’s Challenge”	22
“When Parents Bully Teachers...”	23
“Save the Date”	24

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

This newsletter is published by the West Virginia Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities for parents of children and adolescents.

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Parenting Perspectives...

On the Cover: Samuel Knotts, Joshua Poe, and Bria McCallum relax after playing ball at a family picnic. Samuel is the son of Laura and Ted Knotts of Charlottesville, Virginia; Joshua is the son of Tammy and Jan Poe of Fairmont, W.V.; and Bria is the daughter of Cindy and Trevor McCallum of Waldorf, Maryland.



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Parenting PERSPECTIVES

Inclusion.

It's coming. . .

I noticed it yesterday when a silent breeze touched me,
colder somehow despite the hummingbird drinking earnestly from
my trumpet vine
and the sun playing dot to dot with the daisies across my weathered fence.

The days are slipping forward, bumping each other
toward that annual fateful day when children rumbled
from summer slumber wake to the ringing of a different bell.

Where egos, fragile as a newly sharpened pencil dither in pungent hallways,
aroma of crayon, glue and new shoes.

Where little children snivel as mothers wave their own tearful goodbye.
And new cliques gather at water fountains at first recess,
while others wait for a simple smile.

I look out of my window, my son plays in the sunlight, talking to
himself. . . answering.

His eyes grey with innocence, his smile soft as hummingbird's feathers.

Who will protect him as he makes his way to school?

Who will take his hand as he tiptoes through those darkened halls?

He, who has for so many years been sheltered by special teachers,
loved by peers who accept him—for they are such, as he.

Their world not as easy as ours, but gentler by far than the one
he will soon be forced to embrace.

I weep for him.

For I must stand back, and let him go once more
shove him tenderly into reality. . .

but softly.

It's coming. . .

I felt it yesterday when a cold breeze touched my cheek.

by Sally Meyer



What is Bullying?

Each day, 10-year-old Seth asked his mom for more and more lunch money. Yet he seemed skinnier than ever and came home from school hungry. It turned out that Seth was handing his lunch money to a fifth-grader, who was threatening to beat him up if he didn't pay.

Kayla, 13, thought things were going well at her new school, since all the popular girls were being so nice to her. But then she found out that one of them had posted mean rumors about her on a website. Kayla cried herself to sleep that night and started going to the nurse's office complaining of a stomachache to avoid the girls in study hall.

Unfortunately, the kind of bullying that Seth and Kayla experienced is widespread. In national surveys, most kids and teens say that bullying happens at school.

A bully can turn something like going to the bus stop or recess into a nightmare for kids. Bullying can leave deep emotional scars that last for life. And in extreme situations, it can culminate in violent threats, property damage, or someone getting seriously hurt.

If your child is being bullied, there are ways to help him or her cope with it on a day-to-day basis and lessen its lasting impact. And even if bullying isn't an issue right in your house right now, it's important to discuss it your kids will be prepared if it does happen.

What Is Bullying?

Most kids have been teased by a sibling or a friend at some point. And it's not usually harmful when done in a playful, friendly, and mutual way, and both kids find it funny. But when teasing

becomes hurtful, unkind, and constant, it crosses the line into bullying and needs to stop.

Bullying is intentional tormenting in physical, verbal, or psychological ways. It can range from hitting, shoving, name-calling, threats, and mocking to extorting money and treasured possessions. Some kids bully by shunning others and spreading rumors about them. Others use email, chat rooms, instant messages, social networking websites, and text messages to taunt others or hurt their feelings.

It's important to take bullying seriously and not just brush it off as something that kids have to "tough out." The effects can be serious and affect kids' sense of self-worth and future relationships. In severe

cases, bullying has contributed to tragedies, such as school shootings.

Why Do Kids Bully?

Kids bully for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they pick on kids because they need a victim — someone who seems emotionally or physically weaker, or just acts or appears different in some way — to feel more important, popular, or in control. Although some bullies are bigger or stronger than their victims, that's not always the case.

Sometimes kids torment others because that's the way they've been treated. They may think their behavior is normal because they come from families or other settings where everyone regularly gets angry, shouts, or calls names. Some popular TV shows even seem to promote meanness — people are "voted off," shunned, or ridiculed for their appearance or lack of talent.

“Bullying is intentional tormenting in physical, verbal, or psychological ways.”

Continued on page 5

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

What is Bullying?

Continued from page 4

Signs of Bullying

Unless your child tells you about bullying — or has visible bruises or injuries — it can be difficult to figure out if it's happening.

But there are some warning signs. You might notice your child acting differently or seeming anxious, or not eating, sleeping well, or doing the things that he or she usually enjoys. When kids seem moodier or more easily upset than usual, or when they start avoiding certain situations, like taking the bus to school, it may be because of a bully.

If you suspect but your child is reluctant to open up, find opportunities to bring up the issue in a more roundabout way. For instance, you might see a situation on a TV show and use it as a conversation starter, asking "What do you think of this?" or "What do you think that person should have done?" This might lead to questions like: "Have you ever seen this happen?" or "Have you ever experienced this?" You might want to talk about experiences you or another family member had at that age.

Let your child know that if he or she is being bullied — or sees it happening to someone else — it's important to talk to someone about it, whether it's you, another adult (a teacher, school counselor, or family friend), or a sibling.

Helping Kids

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

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

Praise your child for being brave enough to talk about it. Remind your child that he or she isn't

alone — a lot of people get bullied at some point.

Emphasize that it's the bully who is behaving badly — not your child. Reassure your child that you will figure out what to do about it together.

Sometimes an older sibling or friend can help deal with the situation. It may help your

daughter to hear how the older sister she idolizes was teased about her braces and how she dealt with it. An older sibling or friend may also be able to give you some perspective on what's happening at school, or wherever the bullying is happening, and help you figure out the best solution.

Take it seriously if you hear that the bullying will get worse if the bully finds out that your child told. Sometimes it's useful to approach the bully's parents. In other cases, teachers or counselors are the best ones to contact first. If you've tried those methods and still want to speak to the bullying child's parents, it's best to do so in a context where a school official, such as a counselor, can mediate.

“Kids are often reluctant to tell adults about bullying. They feel embarrassed and ashamed that it's happening.”



Helping Your Child Avoid Bullies

Many states have bullying laws and policies (see WV's on page 7). Find out about the laws in your community. In certain cases, if you have serious concerns about your child's safety, you may need to contact legal authorities.

Advice for Kids

The key to helping kids is providing strategies that deal with bullying on an everyday basis and also help restore their self-esteem and a sense of dignity.

It may be tempting to tell a kid fight back. After all, you're angry that your child is suffering and maybe you were told to "stand up for yourself" when you were young. And you may worry that your child will continue to suffer at the hands of the bully.

But it's important to advise kids not to respond to bullying by fighting or bullying back. It can quickly escalate into violence, trouble, and someone getting injured. Instead, it's best to walk away from the situation, hang out with others, and tell an adult. Here are some other strategies to discuss with kids that can help improve the situation and make them feel better:

Avoid the bully and use the buddy system.

Use a different bathroom if a bully is nearby and don't go to your locker when there is nobody around. Make sure you have someone with you so that you're not alone with the bully. Buddy up with a friend on the bus, in the hallways, or at recess — wherever the bully is. Offer to do the same for a friend.

Hold the anger. It's natural to get upset by the bully, but that's what bullies thrive on. It makes them feel more powerful. Practice not reacting by crying or looking red or upset. It takes a lot of practice, but it's a useful skill for keeping off of a bully's radar. Sometimes kids find it useful to practice "cool down" strategies such as counting to

10, writing down their angry words, taking deep breaths or walking away. Sometimes the best thing to do is to teach kids to wear "poker face" until they are clear of any danger (smiling or laughing may provoke the bully).

Act brave, walk away, and ignore the bully.

Firmly and clearly tell the bully to stop, then walk away. Practice ways to ignore the hurtful remarks, like acting uninterested or texting someone on your cell phone. By ignoring the bully, you're showing that you don't care. Eventually, the bully will probably get bored with trying to bother you.

Tell an adult. Teachers, principals, parents, and lunchroom personnel at school can all help stop bullying.

Talk about it. Talk to someone you trust, such as a guidance counselor, teacher, sibling, or friend. They may offer some helpful suggestions, and even if they can't fix the situation, it may help you feel a little less alone.

Remove the incentives. If the bully is demanding your lunch money, start bringing your lunch. If he's trying to get your music player, don't bring it to school.

Reaching Out

At home you can lessen the impact of the bullying. Encourage your kids to get together with friends that help build their confidence. They meet other kids by joining clubs or sports programs. And find activities that can help a child feel confident and strong. Maybe it's a self-defense class like karate or a movement or other gym class.

And just remember: upsetting as bullying can be for you and your family, lots of people and resources are available to help.

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Parenting PERSPECTIVES

What Are My Child's Rights?

My Child with a Disability is Being Bullied at School

by Bridget Remish

Surveys suggest that one-third of students are bullied, bullies, or both, and many studies have shown that children with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than children without disabilities.

Parents often inquire about various options in addressing the harassment of their children. Below are several avenues parents of children with disabilities can pursue if their student is being bullied in school.

Federal Complaint

Certain groups of students are provided more protections if they are harassed or bullied because of certain traits and if the school has done nothing to punish the bullies. These various groups of students are considered "protected classes." There are several federal laws that recognize these protected classes, but in essence, no entity receiving federal funding (e.g. public schools and some private schools) may discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national origin, sex, disability, and the basis of age. For example, if a student is being bullied or harassed because he or she has a learning disability, and the school has done nothing to address the situation, the student may file a federal complaint.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is charged with investigating discrimination complaints in the schools. The field office that serves the state of West Virginia is in Philadelphia. To file a complaint, you may contact the field office directly to have a complaint form mailed to you (215-656-8541), or you may file a complaint online (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complai>

[ntintro.html](#)). A complaint must be filed within 180 days of the date the discrimination occurred. OCR will investigate the complaint, and act as a neutral party. Often, OCR will facilitate a resolution process in which both parties agree to a remedy.

With the exception of a discrimination complaint regarding age, an individual is not required to file a complaint with OCR prior to seeking a remedy in federal court. However, any investigation that has been undertaken by OCR at the time of filing a claim in federal court will cease.

Remember, in order to file a discrimination complaint with OCR, the bullying must have been done because the student is in a protected class and the school has not addressed the issue. An OCR complaint is against the school and not the bully.



State Complaint

Parents may choose to file a complaint with the WV Department of Education (WVDE), rather than OCR, when their child is bullied because of his or her disability and school personnel have not addressed the issue. An individual can file a state complaint with the Office of Special Programs, Extended and Early Learning regarding the bullying problem.

This complaint must be filed within one year of the incident. Complaint forms may be found on the WV Department of Education's website (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/specialeducationcompliance/complaintprocess.html>), or an individual may write a complaint in any format as long as it identifies the

Continued on page 8



My Child with a Disability is Being Bullied at School

Continued from page 7

school, issues, individuals involved, proposed resolution, and contains an original signature.

These complaints should be sent to: Compliance Management, WV Dept. of Education, Office of Special Programs, Bldg. 6, Room 330, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305, and a copy must be sent to the special education director for the school district. If you choose to file a complaint through this process, you cannot simultaneously file a complaint with OCR.

Once the WV Department of Education receives the complaint, the school district or parent can initiate a meeting within 15 days of the filing of the complaint to resolve the issues in the complaint. The WVDE has 60 days from the time the complaint is filed to review documents, interview parties, and release findings. Both the school district and the complainant receive letters from the WVDE with these findings. If the WVDE finds that the school district has violated the law, the WVDE will issue corrective actions that the school district must follow in order to come into compliance.

Local Complaint

Finally, any family with a child who is being bullied may seek to file a complaint against particular school personnel who have ignored the bullying or have not handled the bullying situation in a professional manner.

According to WV Department of Education's Policy 7211, each county board of education shall establish a complaint procedure for citizens to file complaints regarding school personnel. Contact your county board if you would like to address the issue in this manner. Your county board office should be able to provide a form to file this type of complaint.

Often, there is a two-step process with filing an employee complaint at the county level. Once the complaint is filed, a meeting is usually scheduled with the employee's direct supervisor. If the complainant is not satisfied with the supervisor's response, an appeal can be made to the superintendent. Usually superintendent decisions are considered final; however, an individual who is not satisfied with the final decision may consider addressing school board members at a school board meeting during the public comment session.

If a parent chooses to file a complaint against a school employee, the aggrieved should cite WV Department of Education's Policy 5902 "Employee Code of Conduct." Policy 5902 requires school personnel to maintain a safe environment free of harassment and bullying.

The above are some examples of how parents can address the issue of their student with a disability being bullied. Certainly, there are situations where the advice of an attorney should be sought.

Bridget Remish is an attorney with Legal Aid of West Virginia's FAST Project.

Parenting **PERSPECTIVES**

One Student's Story

“No One Tried to Help Me”

One Friday in January, I was attacked in the boy's bathroom at school. Two brothers were the attackers. Another boy blocked the door (the only way out). Five other boys witnessed it. I was grabbed from behind and put in a choke hold. I had trouble breathing. I was struggling. At some point I hit my head on the sink and got soap in my eyes. My head hurt. I could hardly see. I tried to kick out and this is when someone held my feet down. No one tried to help me. They just stood and watched.

Two other boys came into the bathroom. They saw what was going on and went to get help. Then everyone took off and I was free.

I went back to my class and told the substitute teacher what happened. She said my neck looked like it was swelling and sent me and one of the boys who grabbed me to the office. At the office the principal took us into the office and wanted to know what happened. The boy who put me in a headlock said he was fooling around. I was afraid to say much in front of my attacker. The principal said he would deal with me later and sent me back to class.

I was able to send a text message to my mom at noon. I said I was beat up and come and get me. She was out of town so she sent my grandpa. I went home.

The following is a description of the daily bullying I have to endure at school.

Names I am called: “queerface,” “faggot,” “pansy,” and others.

Things that have been done to me by the same two brothers:

Throw things such as pencils, erasers, and trash at me. Hit me on the top of the head with their books when they walk by. Kick my desk. They trip me in the hallways. Push me into other kids in the hallways. Kick me in the hallways.

A few days later, one of their friends threatened to kill me and said to “watch my back.”

Two days after that, rumors were spread about me throughout school that: “I got expelled,” “I got knocked out,” “I was put in a trashcan,” and that “I got raped when I was knocked out.”

The next week I was called into the office.

The principal and two officers were there. I showed them how I was put in a choke hold. I said they were calling me names.

I wasn't asked any of the following questions: What kind of names? Any other types of bullying? Was I threatened in any way? Did I feel safe at school?

I don't think my meeting went very well. There was a lot I wanted to say about what was going on but I wasn't asked the

questions. I felt intimidated talking with three adults and me.

About a month later, I was in English class when the teacher stepped out of the room and one of the boys walked by my desk, grabbed my stuff off if it and went over to the trash can and threw it away. I told him to leave me alone. Then the teacher came back into the room. I stayed after class and told her what happened. She said she would write the boy up. I got my stuff out of the trash. It was the end of the day. I went home and told my mom what happened. She said she would call the school.



Continued on page 10



“No One Tried to Help Me”

Continued from page 9

The next day, one of the officers came in and got me. We went to his office and talked about what happened. He said he needs to know immediately if there were any types of incidents. I am to go to the office and have him radioed. I can also talk to him if I need to. He went over my fears of not feeling safe at school. I am afraid to come to school.

The next week I was going downstairs to lunch when a boy blocked my path, He said he was going to fight me. One of the teachers saw this and broke it up. During lunch I had to go to the office. Several teachers were there. I told them what happened. I don't know why this boy is after me.

I do not feel safe at school. I no longer want to go to school. I am afraid I will be killed. Very few teachers stand at their doors during class

changes to see what is going on in the hallways, I started to record what is happening to me for proof. No one seems to care what is happening at this school.

I am not alone. Other kids are being bullied, too. My mom is trying to help, but the principal doesn't seem to care. Some officials won't even call my mom back. The staff act likes it's no big deal to be bullied. The front of my student planner says I am entitled to feel safe at school and bullying has punishments. There are posters all over the school with physical, emotional, and social types of verbal and nonverbal bullying. I fit in all three with the bullying that has been done to me. It doesn't seem that much is being done.

This true account was written by a middle school student in central WV. After these incidents, the bullying has continued. See article on page 11 for his mother's account.

Suggestions for Parents for Dealing with Victims

Watch out for signs of bullying. The symptoms of victims, also referred to as targets, of bullying include avoidance of certain kids or situations, sudden changes in behavior or academic performance, injuries, wanting to stay home, “faking sickness,” damaged self-image and threats of suicide.

It is essential that you believe your child about being bullied. When discussing it, ask questions, listen and respond with caring and reassurance.

Talk to your child's teacher and school counselor and principal. Ask them to investigate the bullying complaint. Try to steer away from blaming, try letting go of feelings of anger or the desire for retribution. Make your priority to emphasize your expectation that the school be a safe and caring environment.

Make sure your child has a friend. Children with friends are less likely to be bullied.

Teach your child how to be assertive and to seek help from an adult immediately, when confronted by a bully. Role play situations and rehearse responses to teasing to help children feel more confident. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.

NEVER, never encourage your child to fight back or retaliate. This is precisely what the bully wants. It rarely helps the situation and almost always makes it worse.

Encourage your child to join sports teams, music groups or extracurricular clubs according to his or her interests. Involvement in these activities cultivates self-confidence by sharpening social skills and allowing children to develop new abilities.

Submitted by Renee Verbanic. Verbanic is a certified prevention specialist and educational consultant and can be reached at www.ReneeVerbanic.com

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

A WV Mother Offers Her Account...

“My Son Was Attacked At School”

In January, 2010, my son was attacked at school. Not one person in the school notified me about what happened. The school nurse did not look at him. He had a headache and his neck was swollen. Later that afternoon, I called the school three times to speak to the administrators and the officers and left my name and phone number with the secretary and on their voice mails. No one returned my calls.

The next day, I called the school four times to speak to the officer and three times to talk to an administrator, Again, I left my contact information. No one called me.

The day after, I called the board of education and spoke with the secretary to the superintendent. She wrote down my information about the attack on my son and how no one from the school would return my call. This information was given to the superintendent. He went to the school and spoke to the principal who said the incident was being looked into. The secretary called me back and told me what the superintendent found out. He could not answer why no one at the school would return my calls.

The next day, I again tried several times to contact the school only now no one answers the phone. It rang over 20 times each call. They apparently have caller ID. I contacted a state policeman at his office. I reported the incident of my son and how no one at the school would return my calls. He offered to contact the school on my behalf to see if he could get them to contact me. No one returned his calls. He advised me to contact the chief of police to press assault against the brothers.

The next day the state policeman was able to reach the officer at the school and asked him to contact me. Meanwhile, I called the city building at 7:30 a.m. to speak with the chief of police.

Unbeknownst to me, I reached a 911 dispatcher to report the incident of my son, and explained that no one at school would return my calls. The 911 dispatcher told me to have my son keep his cell phone on vibrate and put 911 on speed dial and say the word “school” so they would know where he

was and that he was injured. This call should be on record at 911. The school officer finally contacted me. I told him I wanted to file charges and ask him to open an investigation. He says it was a miscommunication as to why no one would return my phone calls. He said he would pull my son’s schedule and alert the teachers to be on the lookout for any problems. He will speak to the boys involved.

He says he was not alerted to the attack. My son was absent so he said he would talk to him the next day.

The next day, the officer does not talk to my son.

On Monday the officer called and said he just wanted to update me. He took statements from all the boys in English class and was calling several of them back to be re-interviewed. He also said he would be talking to my son today and apologized for not being able to talk to him on Friday.

One month later, I called and spoke with the officer about the incident (when boys threw his books into the trash—see previous story) the day before. The officer said he needed to know the day something happens, not the next day. My son



Continued on page 12



“My Son Was Attacked At School”

Continued from page 11

needed to talk to him, but we didn't know that. He was going to get my son out of class and talk to him.

The officer called me back after speaking with my son. He told my son to go to the office immediately and have the officer radioed. He would be available to see my son then. He also addressed my son's fear of attending school. He doesn't feel safe there.

The next week, my son was going downstairs at school when another student blocked his path. This student said he was going to fight my son. A teacher saw this and broke it up. During lunch my son had to go to the office where he told several administrators what happened. He doesn't know why this boy threatened him. I was not contacted about this incident in any way from the school.

Why was I not notified? Why did no one return my calls? Why wasn't I contacted after the superintendent talked with the principal? Was the school hoping that if they ignored me long enough I would give up?

If the administration and staff of this school treats parents this way, how are the kids supposed to know who is there to help them? Why did I have to contact the Superintendent, a state policeman, and 911 to get someone to call me back?

Why is there ZERO tolerance on bullying but nothing is being done? Does a tragedy have to happen before there is a wake up call at this school? What is the school system doing to keep our kids safe? What options do a parent or a child have to feel secure? Is fighting back the answer? What happens when a child fights back to protect himself? Why aren't the bystanders being punished?

The administration of the school failed me and my son. My son is now afraid to go to school. He is worried about being killed. As a parent, how

do I respond? How can he concentrate on schoolwork if he's always looking over his shoulder? The law says he has to go to school. I pray every day he is there for God to keep him safe. If he is attacked again, the principal, school, superintendent, and board of education will have a civil lawsuit on their hands...and possibly my son's blood. I hope and pray this does not happen.

Name withheld to protect the child's privacy.

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

One Parent's Perspective

“Even the Principal Was a Bully”

By *Tonya Barnett*

In 2005, my oldest son started getting bullied in middle school. At first I thought it was just kids picking on him. I told him to just ignore them and they will stop. The problem is it didn't stop them; they were actually more determined to get to him. I told him to go to the principal.

My son went to the principal several times, and each time the principal would say he believe the problem was solved.

The first year, one bully attacked my son as my son was coming out of the bathroom and my son fought back. Since my son also threw a punch, he got suspended. It was his word against the other child's word. The fact my son got suspended hurt him worse than anything.

The next year we were hoping everything calmed down after the summer months and maturity had set in. But it didn't— it all started right back up again, even worse.

My son was getting paid as a helper in the cafeteria of the school. The bullies would try to get him fired from his job. The bullies would involve my son's friends until his friends would avoid my son because of fear of what the bullies would do to them. The bullies would tell the principal that my son was sending his friends over to bother them during lunch. My son filed report after report but it did no good. It got to the point my son didn't want to be around anyone but adults. He didn't want to go to school, his grades dropped, he was tired, he was hardly eating, and he didn't want to get involved in anything. He was isolating himself from everything

and everyone. He was getting very angry at home easily, taking everything out on the family.

I ended up quitting my job because my son was calling me all the time saying he couldn't take it anymore. I would run and get him and talk to the principal. At one point the principal threatened to have me arrested because he only gave me five minutes to talk but he was doing all the talking. I told him he needed to listen.

Even the principal was a bully at that school. He still never took care of the problem. I

took my son to the doctor and my son's blood pressure was so high they said he could have a heart attack. They excused him from school for three days and put him on sleeping pills. They said he was going to have a nervous breakdown. That broke my heart, as a mother I was not able to protect my child from a bully. I finally found out I could have the school investigated and the investigators found that my son was being harassed and bullied. They said steps will be taken to make sure

there would be no more incidents, but the children were all going to high school the next year.

I went to the high school before school even started with the letter from the county board of education. I talked with the vice principal there. He looked at the boys' schedules and rerouted them so there would be no reason they should meet. If one boy was in the other one's area, he knew who was bullying who. It didn't take long.

During that summer my son and I were asked to be on national television (Mike & Julia



Tonya Barnett

Continued on page 14



One Parent's Perspective

Continued from page 13

Morning Show, August 2007). After being on the show it stirred up the two parents of the bullies; one sent me a threatening letter and the other came to my house to threaten me. I ended up in court with the one over the threat and he claimed he was going to get me for slander. I simply told him to go right ahead. Nothing was ever done. Bullies try to use fear to control a person.

Three years later... After having a principal that faced the issue head on and took care of the problem, my son has enjoyed his high school years as a typical teenager.

I also put my son in anger management counseling to learn how to deal with the anger that he had built up inside of him. I feel any child who is a victim will benefit from anger management counseling so he or she can deal with the pain. Some children who are bullied tend to become bullies themselves, because they have so much anger built up inside themselves.

Step By Step

Now I am a Bully Awareness and Prevention AmeriCorps* VISTA (Volunteers In service To America) at Step By Step. Step By Step started working on bullying issues in November 2007, and I joined in their efforts after becoming involved by another person committed to reducing bullying. At the time I was looking for employment and Step by Step was looking for someone interested on working on the issue.

We spent that first year researching information nationally and locally. We got involved in local conferences in the state such as Family

Leadership First Conference, National Social Worker conference, Share the Vision Conference and Faces of Leadership Conference to present workshops about bullying.

The first year I shared my story about my son getting bullied and how it affected our whole family, friends, neighbors, teachers and bystanders. People would come up to me and tell me they wished they could have done something but they didn't know what to do.

That first year I would also put workshop on for teens, including my own daughters. I would ask my daughter what they thought about the

workshop. They told me something was missing. They said "you want kids to go out here and take a stand but you are not giving them anything to take a stand with."

That though ran through my head—my

girls were right. It was like telling a cop to go stop crime but not giving him/her a badge.

Thanks to Family Leadership First support we received funding for 210 shirts that read on the front "These Hands are Not for Bullying." The young people take fabric paint and put it on their hands and then put their hand print on the shirt. The back of the shirt reads "Bully-Free West Virginia." We have done several workshops with these t-shirts and they have been a big hit with the youth. We are looking for funding ideas to get more shirts to do more workshops.

We also did a certificate "These Hands are Not for Bullying" for the younger kids to take hand paint and put their print on their very own certificates. We have developed a poster with all the

"When a school does nothing for a child, it leaves a painful memory of feeling lost and hopeless, with the child wanting to give up on everything because the system won't help."

Continued on page 15

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

One Parent's Perspective

Continued from page 14

mouths missing from the faces of the people in the poster, with the words "It Is Time to Find Our Voices and Speak Out against Bullying!" This was a collaborative effort between several VISTAs.

This Year's Focus

This year one of our goals is to educate parents on the school policies (Policies 2421, 4373, and 7211) which help parents advocate for their child on the problem of bullying. We have requested that October 10-16, 2010, be named West Virginia Bully Awareness Week (our third year).

What I See

I saw the difference between two schools—one that took a stand and one that did not. The one that took a stand gave all the children the same opportunity at an education and a happy school life. When a school does nothing for a child it leaves a painful memory of feeling lost and hopeless, and leaves the child at risk for giving up on everything because the system won't help.

It is important for employees in the schools to take a stand against bullying just as it is important for other students to take that stand, but how can you expect the student to if the school does not back them?

I heard children say that they tried to tell the teacher that another child was picking on someone and the teacher told the reporting child to mind their own business. Kids have been told not to tattle, but reporting bullying is not tattling. Teachers and principals, as well as students, need to

learn that Bullying is not "kids being kids" and is not a "normal part of growing up." Why would we accept violence and harassment as a normal part of growing up? And when parents tell their children to fight back against the bully, who gets punished? These are questions parents need to ask themselves.

There are severe side effects to bullying and I have seen some of these in my own son and my family. My whole family dealt with anxiety issues during those two years. My son became isolated from others, didn't want to get involved in anything. He was becoming depressed and started

having physical problems.

Bullying can and has led to school shootings and suicide, because the child felt so hopeless and helpless.

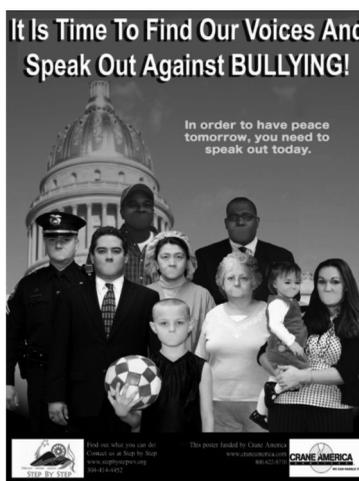
Bullying can leave emotional scars for everyone involved—including the bystanders. Bystanders can feel hopeless and helpless also, wishing there was something they could do.

On the West Virginia State Board of Education web site you can find a Safe School Hot line number. This is an important number for all parents to keep by their phone or in their personal phonebooks. Parents

can call this number to report bullying incidents for any child, not just their own, whether between children or a teacher bullying a child. It is confidential; they do not need to give a name or anything else. That number is

1-866-SAFEWVA (1-866-723-3982).

Tonya Burnett is the mother of five children and lives near Charleston.





When the Teacher is the Bully: What Parents Should Know

We've all heard about kids being bullied by peers. Kids taunt, tease, pull hair, shove and push each other on a daily basis. In recent years, schools have taken steps to stop bullying and many have a zero tolerance level for any type of peer harassment. But what if your child's teacher is the bully?

New research shows that 2 percent of children are bullied by a teacher sometime in their elementary or middle school years.

Most teachers are caring and compassionate. They became teachers in order to make a difference in the lives of their pupils. However, some teachers, for one reason or another, take a dislike to a child in their class and pick on them on a daily basis. Such an occurrence can have a long-lasting effect on your child's academic experience and turn his school year into a nightmare. The effects of teacher bullying don't usually end when your child leaves the teacher's class. It's something that can stay with him his entire life.

Student Abuse

Teachers who are bullies treat their victims much the same as a schoolyard bully. They humiliate the child in front of his classmates, abuse him verbally and make threats of physical harm or of giving low academic grades. The teacher may single your child out by "making an example" of him and insisting he stand in a corner. Possibly the teacher heaps homework on your child for "punishment" of some minor infraction. There are many different ways that a teacher can bully students.

Suffering in Silence

Chances are if your child is being bullied by a teacher he won't say anything. Boys are more

apt to suffer in silence than girls. Boys feel they should be able to "take it" and fear being teased by their peers if they tell. Your child may also fear retaliation by the teacher if he says anything about what is happening. Remember, a teacher is a figure of authority and kids think that there's nothing that can be done if their teacher acts inappropriately.

Signs of Teacher Bullying

When a teacher bullies kids, it is a very traumatic experience for them to go through. They are embarrassed and humiliated and have no idea what steps they can or should take to stop it. They often say nothing, but there are signs that you can watch for:

- Headaches, stomachaches and nightmares that occur frequently.
- Loss of interest in school.
- Negative behavior.
- A resistance to attending school.
- Self-Deprecating remarks.
- Complaints of being picked on by the teacher.
- Complaints of being constantly yelled at.
- Complaints of being humiliated by the teacher.
- Complaints of a teacher being rude, making sarcastic remarks or being disrespectful.

Solutions

If you feel your child's teacher may be bullying him, don't stoop to that level. Stay calm and keep an open mind. Approach the situation in a manner that will result in a peaceful but appropriate solution.

- Call a meeting between the teacher, the principal and yourself.
- State the problem in a calm and courteous voice.

Continued on page 17

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

When the Teacher is the Bully

Continued from page 16

Listen to the teacher's side of the story. Possibly your child has misinterpreted the teacher's actions. Give him/her the benefit of the doubt and keep a sharp eye to see if the problem reoccurs.

- Leave a paper trail. Record the dates of all meetings and the results. Write out your concerns and make copies for the teacher and principal. This lets all parties know that you are serious about resolving the issue. Keep all correspondence in a file that is easily accessible.

- Go higher. If the situation isn't resolved after the meeting, take it a step higher. At this point a copy of all meetings and correspondence should be sent to the school board or the Superintendent of Schools. Call in advance to find out his/her name and address the issue directly to them. Contacting the school board or the Superintendent of Schools is well within the rights of both you and your child.

- Never ignore an instance of teacher bullying. It won't stop unless you make the teacher aware that you know what is happening and make a commitment to ascertain that it stops. Ignoring a teacher who bullies students allows the practice to continue, which places your child under a great deal of stress. This can inadvertently cause your child to become a bully on the playground or in the community. It is his way of releasing some of

the stress that he's under.

- Show your child that bullying of any kind, even if by a teacher, is wrong. This lets your child know that you listen to his concerns and take his well-being seriously. Giving your child the support that he needs, will have enormous benefits to both you and your child.



Prevent Teacher Bullying

One way to prevent teacher bullying is to visit your child's school often and start a relationship with your child's teacher early in the school year. Volunteer in your child's classroom. If you notice that your child's teacher has a tendency to bully students, meet the challenge head-on and report the incident to the principal. Remember, a teacher's rights end when your child's rights, or any other child's rights, are being infringed upon.

If you suspect a teacher at your child's school is bullying students, step up to the plate and put an end to it immediately. You can make a difference in yours or another child's life by teaching them that bullying of any kind or by any one is an act of cowardice and is not to be tolerated.

From <http://www.localschooldirectory.com/k-12-articles/52>



A Self-Assessment for Parents Regarding CyberSafety

by Anne Martin, MA

Answer yes or no to the following questions:

- I understand what a firewall is and have it installed in all computers.
- I know the difference between anti-virus and anti-spyware software.
- I have updated the firewall, anti-spyware and anti-virus software in my computer this week.
- All computers in my household are in a visible, common area and can be viewed by parents at any time.
- I know how to use social networking sites, such as Facebook, and have full access to content on my child's profile.
- I know the abbreviations used in Instant Messaging and what they mean.
- I have open discussions with my children about their online experiences.
- No one in the household uses the computer late in the night without anyone knowing about it.
- I am aware that parenting filters can be bypassed on a computer without anyone knowing about it.
- I am confident that the passwords I use are safe, composed of a random combination of numbers, letters and symbols in each.

*If you answered "No" to any of these questions, please educate yourself and your family—
for safety's sake!*

**Cyber Safety Statistics: Parents if you don't know about the need to protect your kids online,
keep reading...**



- 95 percent of parents don't recognize the lingo that kids use to let people know that their parents are watching
- 76 percent of parents don't have rules about what their kids can do on the computer
- 4,000,000 children are posting content to the web everyday
- 15,000,000 youth use Instant Messaging
- 1 out of 17 kids have been harassed, threatened, or bullied online

*Anne Martin is a consultant on cybersafety
who is available for trainings statewide.
She can be contacted at AnneMartin.WV@gmail.com*

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

Cyberbullying: It's Not Easy to Know How to Step In

Bullies and mean girls have been around forever, but technology has given them a whole new platform for their actions. As adults, we're becoming more aware that the "sticks and stones" adage no longer holds true; virtual name-calling can have real-world effects on the well being of kids and teens.

It's not always easy to know how and when to step in as a parent. For starters, our kids tend to use technology differently than we do. Many spend a lot of time on social networking sites, send text messages and instant messages (IMs) by the hundreds, and are likely to roll their eyes at the mention of email — that's "so old-school" to them. Their knowledge and habits can be intimidating, but they still need us as parents.

Fortunately, our growing awareness of **cyberbullying** has helped us learn a lot more about how to prevent it. Here are some suggestions on what to do if online bullying has become part of your child's life.

What Is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. By definition, it occurs among young people. When an adult is involved, it may meet the definition of **cyber-harassment** or **cyber-stalking**, a crime that can have legal consequences and involve jail time.

Sometimes cyberbullying can be clear-cut. For example, leaving overtly cruel cell phone text messages or mean notes posted to Web sites. Other acts are less obvious, such as impersonating a victim online or posting personal information or videos

designed to hurt or embarrass another child.

Cyberbullying also can happen accidentally. The impersonal nature of text messages, IMs, and emails make it very hard to detect the sender's tone — one teen's joke or sense of humor could be another's devastating insult. Nevertheless, a repeated pattern of emails, text messages, and online posts is rarely accidental.

A 2006 poll from the national organization to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids found that 1 in 3 teens and 1 in 6 preteens have been the victims of cyberbullying. As more and more youths have

access to computers and cell phones, the incidence of cyberbullying is likely to rise.

Effects of Cyberbullying

No longer limited to schoolyards or street corners, modern-day bullying can happen at home as well as at school — essentially 24 hours a day. And, for kids who are being cyberbullied, it can feel like there's no escape.

Severe cyberbullying can leave victims at greater risk for anxiety, depression, and other

stress-related disorders. In very rare cases, some kids have turned to suicide.

The punishment for cyberbullies can include being suspended from school or kicked off of sports teams. Certain types of cyberbullying also may violate school codes or even anti-discrimination or sexual harassment laws.

Signs of Cyberbullying

Many kids and teens who are cyberbullied are reluctant to tell a teacher or parent, often because they feel ashamed of the social stigma, or





Cyberbullying

Continued from page 19

because they fear their computer privileges will be taken away at home.

The signs that a child is being cyberbullied vary, but a few things to look for are:

- signs of emotional distress during or after using the Internet
- withdrawal from friends and activities
- avoidance of school or group gatherings
- slipping grades and "acting out" in anger at home
- changes in mood, behavior, sleep, or appetite

How Parents Can Help

If you discover that your child is being cyberbullied, be sure to discuss how it feels. Offer assurance that it's not your child's fault. Talking to teachers or school administrators also may help.

Many schools, school districts, and after-school clubs have established protocols for responding to cyberbullying; these vary by district and state. But before reporting the problem, let your child know that you plan to do so, as he or she could have concerns about "tattling" and might prefer that the problem be handled at home.

Other measures to try:

- **Block the bully.** Most devices have settings that allow you to electronically block emails, IMs, or text messages from specific people.
- **Limit access to technology.** Although it's hurtful, many kids who are bullied can't resist the temptation to check Web sites or phones to see if there are new messages. Keep the computer in a public place in the house (no laptops in children's bedrooms, for example) and limit the use of cell phones and games. Some companies allow you to turn off text messaging services during certain hours, which can give bullied kids a break.

Know your kids' online world. Check their postings and the sites they visit, and be aware of how they spend their time online. Talk to them

about the importance of privacy and why it's a bad idea to share personal information online, even with friends. Encourage them to safeguard their password.

When Your Child Is the Bully

Finding out that your child is the one who is behaving inappropriately can be upsetting and heartbreaking. It's important to address the problem head on and not wait for it to go away.

Talk to your child firmly about his or her actions and explain the negative impact it has on others. Joking and teasing might seem OK, but it can hurt people's feelings and lead to getting in trouble. Bullying — in any form — is unacceptable; there can be serious (and sometimes irrevocable) consequences at home, school, and in the community if it continues.

Remind your child that the use of cell phones and computers is a privilege. Sometimes it helps to restrict the use of these devices until behavior improves. If you feel your child should have a cell phone for safety reasons, make sure it is a phone that can only be used for emergency purposes.

To get to the heart of the matter, sometimes talking to teachers, guidance counselors, and other school officials can help identify situations that lead your child to bully others. If mismanaged anger is a problem, talk to a doctor about helping your child learn to cope with anger, hurt, frustration, and other strong emotions in a healthy way.

Professional counseling often helps kids learn to deal with their feelings and improve their social skills, which in turn can curb bullying.

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

Back to School Time is Time to Talk About Substance Abuse

Going back to school signifies a time of exciting, new beginnings. But it can also be a challenging time, with added peer pressure when it comes to drug and alcohol use.

Add into the mix new research (www.timetotalk.org/Newsroom/PressReleases/aug102010.aspx) showing that many teens are consuming up to eight hours of entertainment media and technology daily – up to 53 hours a week – it's prime time for parents to break through the media noise and make their voices heard.

Did you know that:

(1) Parents have tremendous influence on teens' decisions to not drink and use drugs.

(2) You can educate yourself about the dangers of teen substance abuse and communicate those risks to your kids through frequent conversations.

(3) As your teens prepare to go back to school, you can help them make the grade by letting them know you're there to help them handle new, challenging situations.

Harness the power of media and technology to reach your kids – Take Time to Text your teens today! The Partnership for A Drug Free America's Time To Text information (www.timetotalk.org/downloads/Time_To_Text_08_10_10.pdf) highlights how and what to text.

The Lingo

Teen text lingo is its own language—one with no punctuation and lots of abbreviations! When you text your teen, it helps to show you know the ropes.

Gr8, But What do I Say?

Talking to teens—even in shorthand—is never easy, and it can be tough to find the right words.

A parents guide to text talk:

- **Shorten, abbreviate, condense:** Drop vowels and replace words with numbers whenever possible to keep your message short. **Check out our list at the right for some common terms.**
- **Numbers count too:** "I love you" is 143, "information" is 411, "Anyone" is NE1
- **Don't use all capital letters unless you're mad—** it means you're yelling!

143 I love you	JK just kidding
411 information	L8R later
BCUZ because	LOL laugh out loud
BTW by the way	NE1 anyone
CU L8R see you later	NP no problem
F2T free to talk	OMG oh my god
H&K hugs & kisses	Thx thanks
GUDLUK good luck	TTYL talk to you later
IDK I don't know	UR you're

We've done some of the homework for you. Send one of the messages above to your teen while at school, or create your own message.

-If you wanna get together and talk, pizza's on me.

-You stressing about school? Let's talk.

-Let me know how things go 2day.

-Just wanted 2 say hello.Hope ur having a gr8 day!

-I'm always here if you need to talk more at://www.timetotalk.org/

Source:Partnership for A Drug Free America(www.drugfree.org/)



“Rachel’s Challenge” Presented to Students in Randolph County

Randolph County Middle and High School Students participated in a program on September 23rd and 24th called Rachel’s Challenge. Rachel’s Challenge is a bullying and violence prevention program which was developed after the Columbine Shootings in April of 1999.

Rachel was the first student killed on April 20th, 1999 by her fellow students as they attacked Columbine High School with an arsenal of weapons. Although many other lives were lost that day, Rachel’s family wanted to tell their daughters’ story with the hope of inspiring compassion in schools, businesses and communities.

Ironically, compassion was already Rachel’s mission in life. She had written an essay stating she had a theory; if one person goes out of their way to show compassion for another human being, it would start a chain reaction.”

Rachel lived her theory by reaching out to new students, those who were bullied or students without friends. The program students of Randolph County saw were true stories of not only the events of April 20, 1999, but also accounts from those whose lives Rachel touched before she was killed.

The Rachel’s Challenge Program is an impactful one presented to schools, professional organizations and businesses around the globe. It is our hope here in Randolph County, that by exposing all of our middle and high students to the theory that we are capable of making positive change one person at a time, we will start our own chain reaction among students, school staffs and the community. Our goal is to work toward the prevention of bullying and violence.

Program funding has been made available from Gear-Up, Randolph County Schools/ Superintendent, Dr. James Phares and The Randolph County Family Resource Network.

Upcoming programs will be presented at Elkins High School, Tygarts Valley Middle/ High School and Elkins Middle School with Pickens and Harman attending. This program is available for elementary schools as well and will be considered.

*Submitted by
Randolph County School Counselors
9/2010*

Parenting PERSPECTIVES

When Parents Bully Teachers...

Some parents have been given the title of "helicopter parents" because they hover over the school and supervise every detail of their child's life. Some teachers report daily e-mails from parents filled with questions, complaints, and threats.

While schools have always encouraged communication between home and school, it is reaching a level that is unmanageable by teachers. The school day is hardly long enough to respond to all the emails teachers receive. The problem is getting so large that teachers are actually leaving the school system to get away from demanding parents. This is especially true with affluent parents who see their children as a reflection on them as parents.

The idea of the helicopter parent is not new. Cornell University has been tracking this behavior since the 1980s when baby boomer parents began following their children to college. Parents were coming to college interviews and many suspected that they filled out the application forms and wrote the essays.

"My Child Is Special"

There is a mindset with some parents that the teacher has only one child in the classroom – theirs. Each student is important. And, when the child is not performing at a level that the parents feel is appropriate, the teacher is to blame. It seems to be forgotten that there could be up to 28 other students in the same room. And, perhaps it is the student that is not working up to potential. Some parents are badgering teachers with so many emails that it would be impossible to respond to each and every email.

On-Line Monitoring

Many schools are offering homework assignments and grading online. This leads to even more questions by parents. Very involved parents that help their children with their homework may take a low grade very personally and become overly assertive with the teacher. If grades do not appear instantly, parents e-mail asking why there has been a delay. It is also very tempting to become more aggressive in an e-mail than a face to face meeting with the teacher. It is very easy to be too emotional and push "send" only to regret what was stated.

Communication is great in moderation. Sending e-mails regarding only more serious concerns would be more appropriate.



*Read more at Suite101: Teachers Harassed By Parents: Parents Can Be Bullies, Too
<http://www.suite101.com/content/teachers-harassed-by-parents-a47159#ixzz0zFGxUDzm>*

Parenting **PERSPECTIVES**

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Save the Date!
“Bullying in Our Schools.”

October 25, 2010
Charleston, West Virginia
Holiday Inn Express

The West Virginia Council for the Prevention of Suicide, Adolescent Suicide Prevention and Early Intervention (ASPEN), and the West Virginia Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities (BHBF) is extremely proud to announce a one day workshop on “Bullying in Our Schools.”

We have been able to contract with Ms. Jodee Blanco, noted author and lecturer on the subject of Bullying. . Blanco has written several books on this subject and we are very excited about the opportunity in bringing her to West Virginia to speak.

NO REGISTRATION FEE!
LIMITED TO 80 PARTICIPANTS!

CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS:

CEU'S have been applied for the conference for Social Workers, School Counselors, Nurses, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Certified Addiction Counselors. For more information, please contact Barri Faucett at Barri.Faucett@prestera.org or 304-415-5787.