Bullying Prevention

Every day children attending Georgia schools, participating in after school, or other school or community based activities experience the ugliness of bullying. Studies have shown that 30% of youth in the United States are either bullies or victims of bullies, or both.

Unfortunately, bullying behavior as a social norm has become far too accepting by both youth and adults.

Research has shown that bullying on the part of the perpetrator and the victim leads to more bullying, retaliation, violence and serves as a precursor to the onset of mental disorders and substance use. The earlier the bullying behavior or victimization, the earlier the onset of disorders and attempts to medicate the anxieties and trauma caused by bullying.

Bullying Defined

Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus, creator of an evidence-based bullying prevention program know as Olweus Bullying Prevention, defines bullying as "when a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons." He further defines "negative action" as "when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contact, through words or in other ways."

Bullying may take many forms including physical, verbal, emotional or sexual behaviors. Bullying can be considered as intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words or other behaviors such as name calling, threatening and even shunning or demeaning that is committed by one or more children or persons against another. It is important to note that bullying is not provocated by the behavior of the victim as bullying connotes an imbalance or perceived imbalance of power between the bully and the victim.

Forms of Bullying

Physical Bullying: punching, hitting, poking, beating, kicking, pinching, shoving, choking, strangling, pulling or mangling of the hair, biting, tying up and excessive tickling. Physical bullying also includes making someone swallow, inhale or otherwise ingest a substance, item or food; taking money, clothing or other personal items; being made to carry heavy loads or standing in awkward positions for long periods of time upon threat of beating or some other form of humiliation.

Verbal Bullying: name calling, teasing, gossiping, taunting, verbal threats, public chastising and cajoling; spreading rumors and sending threatening and intimidating messages via email or text messaging.

Emotional Bullying: extortion/blackmailing, defaming, manipulation, isolation and rejection; hazing; terrorizing with threats or the threat of terrorizing; and rating or ranking of personal characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, disability, perceived or actual sexual orientation, and overall peer pressure to engage in activities with which the victim is unknowledgeable or uncomfortable.

Sexual Bullying: sexual positioning and harassment and abuse that include actual physical contact and sexual assault; voyeurism; and exhibitionism in combination with many of the emotional, verbal, and physical behaviors listed above.

Cyber Bullying: kids are using the Internet and mobile phones to extend the reach of bullying behavior. According to a recent study, one in ten kids is affected by cyber bullying. Girls are more likely to be victims of cyber bullies and boys are more likely to be cyber bullies. Parents should be aware of what their children are doing when they are online and using their mobile phones.

It is essential to note that bullying also occurs under the guise of other terms and behaviors accompanying some social activities such as sports and recreation. These are more subtle and characterized as team building and "toughening up." Included here are initiation rites, hazing, and some rites of gang passage.

Why Bullying?

At the core of bullying behaviors is some need, issue or anxiety or anger that fuels bad, disrespectful, hurtful or violent treatment of others. This is not limited to the way children sometimes treat each other but is pervasive throughout our society. From school yards and hallways to corporate corridors and board rooms to team rooms in government agencies, bullying takes place. Those who are bullied as kids bully as adults and it takes the same forms; e.g. Ridicule, public demeaning, name smearing or blacklisting, ostracizing, exclusion and dismissal, humiliation, passing over for promotion based on personal and subjective rather than objective performance criteria.

There is also the issue of the perception of mistreatment;

being treated unfairly, being left out or excluded. One of the primary catalysts for gang involvement and gang violence is the perception of being disrespected…or "dissed." In retaliation, violence takes the form of beatings, drive bys, property damage, encroaching on one's "opponents" territory and other forms of retaliation. In the workplace, the perception of being "dissed" results in such "coping" behaviors as sabotage, work slow downs or stoppages; challenging of authority, spying, leaking of confidential information to competitors, the press or the public in an attempt to muster support for one's contentions or beliefs.

Consequences of Bullying

At one level bullying interferes with learning and productivity. This is true not only for children but for adults as well. Since bullying behavior by definition is not done under the eyes of higher authorities such as teachers, administrators, other adults of senior hierarchy (as in corporate and government environments), a climate of fear and intimidation pervades the school, work, or other social environment.

Victims of bullying often suffer any number of effects including:

For children:

a) Poor grades and academic achievement
b) Increased absenteeism, truancy and ultimately dropping out of school
c) Loss of a sense of self, ability to perform or accomplish tasks, goals
d) Engaging in violent behaviors such as weapon-carrying
e) Experience feeling of isolation
f) Become withdrawn and display symptoms of depression with long term emotional and/or behavioral problems including anxiety
g) Suicide ideation and attempts and other forms of self-harm such as cutting, eating disorders, etc.
h) Initiation of substance use and abuse

For adults:
a) Development in later life of social anxiety disorders, insecurities and display symptoms of depression
b) Engaging in violent behaviors such as weapon-carrying, domestic violence, and homicide
c) Suicide ideation and attempts
d) Initiation of substance use and abuse

Recommendations

Curbing and eliminating bullying is everyone's responsibility.

Preventing bullying involves changing norms. Much of our understanding of normative changes is derived from substance use and abuse prevention. Normative change includes education, activities and reinforcement of positive behaviors designed to reveal to youth as well as adults that bullying like substance use is not the typical behavior of most children, youth or adults and that most children, youth or adults do not participate in such behaviors nor condone them.

Some Guiding Principles:

1. Kids know who is bullying and who is being bullied. Listen to them.
2. Parents need to become aware and involved.
3. Teachers, Principals, Counselors, other school staff including maintenance workers, school safety officers, and clerical support staff need to be trained to recognize and intervene in bullying situations.
4. School systems need to be held accountable and measured by adherence to laws and polices regarding bullying as they are for educational achievement, preparation and graduation rates.

5. Children and youth need to be afforded the opportunity to learn alternative ways of managing frustration, anger resentments and victimization other than resorting to bullying; retaliation or violence.
6. Children and youth need to be afforded the opportunity to access "safe zones or harbors" without feeling ostracized.
7. Bullies need to be held accountable for their behaviors and the consequences of their behavior. Since in most instances, bullies are 'acting out' on some unaddressed mental health issue, bullies need to be afforded the opportunity to access mental health services that promote resilience skill building activities and services that help to reduce risk factors.

What You Can Do!

A. What Schools Can Do. Teachers, Administrators and Students:

- Bullying awareness should be an integral part of a schools overall school safety program. Schools typically focus on preventing violence that is obvious such as fights,

weaponry, gang wars, etc. Yet, schools can play a significant role in preventing bullying as a form of violence.

- Create a safe zone and policy in every school building that destigmatizes victims who report bullying.

B. What Parents Need to Know and Do:

Kids are good at hiding feelings and problems, but not to an astute parent or caregiver.

Is your child being bullied?

If you're not sure, consider talking with your kids about school and other social activities such as youth groups, after school and other recreational experiences.

Some questions to guide you:

For children ages 5-10
- What did you do at school today?
- What did you like most about what you did at school today?
- What didn't you like about what you did at school today?
- What kinds of games did you play? Did you like it/them? Was it fun?
- Who did you play with? Who else would you like to play with?

- What did you eat for lunch today? Who did you eat lunch with today? Who would you like to eat lunch with? Why?
- Are you looking forward to going to school tomorrow? Why?...or Why Not?

For children ages 11- 15
- Same as above
- Is there any friend they'd like to invite to come home with them after school or on the weekend?
- Is there anyone at school, they do not particularly like to be around? Why not?
- Do you feel safe at school; at school events such as games; at other recreational or social events in the community?
- Do you know what to do when you do not feel safe?

For children ages 16-18
- Variations on same as above
- Who's the most likeable guy /girl in the class/grade/school? Why?
- Who are you most/least comfortable studying with; hanging out with; sharing a room on school trips with?
- What is the best description of the atmosphere at your school?

- How would you describe the relationship among your football, basketball, hockey, soccer, track, baseball, volleyball team members? Who stands out on the team? Why, what makes them stand out?
- Do you feel safe at school; at school events such as games; at other recreational or social events in the community?
- What do you do when and if you don't feel safe?

C. What Youth Serving Organizations Can Do:

Bullying Prevention Programming In Georgia

A number of Office of Prevention Services Programs provide bullying prevention education.

Olweus Bullying Prevention

"The Olweus [pronounced Ol-VEY-us] Bullying Prevention Program is a comprehensive, school-wide program designed for use in elementary, middle, or junior high schools. Its goals are to reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children and to improve peer relations at school. The program has been found to reduce bullying among children, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviors, such as vandalism and truancy. The

Olweus Program has been implemented in more than one dozen countries around the world."

Program Providers:

Evidence-Based program serves children between the ages of 5 and 14.

Forsyth County Board of Education
Housing Authority, City of Newnan
Cobb County School District

Too Good For Violence

"*Too Good for Violence™ K-8* is a school-based prevention program that uses the same research, theories, strategies and format that propelled Too Good for Drugs to national prominence, including Model Program designation from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). *Too Good for Violence™ K-8* addresses the most significant risk and protective factors at each developmental level to help students learn the skills and attitudes they need to get along peacefully with others."

Program Providers:

City of Lakeland
Emanuel County Board of Education

Georgia Pines Community Service Board
GRN Community Service Board
Quality of Life Association
Satilla Community Service Board
Turner County Health Coalition

Second Step *Program*

"The award-winning SECOND STEP violence prevention program integrates social and emotional learning with academics. Kids from preschool through Grade 8 learn and practice vital social skills, such as empathy, emotion management, problem solving, and cooperation. These essential life skills help students in the classroom, on the playground, and at home."

Program Providers:

Brantley County Board of Commissioners
Bulloch County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council
Charlton County Board of Commissioners
Emanuel County Board of Education
Girls Inc., of Columbus and Phenix City-Russell County, Alabama
Hazlehurst Housing Authority
Mary Hayes Center or Social Change
Pierce County Board of Commissioners
Pineland Community Service Board
Sam's memorial Community Economic Development
Sumter County Board of Education
Tattnall County Board of Commissioners
Toombs County Board of Commissioners

Helpful Links

The Department of Health and Human Services: *Stop Bullying Now!* Campaign
- For kids:
  http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/
- For adults:
  http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults

Comprehensive Information from The National Institutes of Health:
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/bullying.html

PBS Kids Special Feature on Bullying:
http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/bullies/index.html