

northwest

Protecting Oregon's Students

Meet the anti-anti-bully

by Malka Geffen

The state of Oregon takes harassment and bullying very seriously," says Gene Evans, communication director at the Oregon Department of Education. "Many students find their days at school unbearable, and Superintendent Susan Castillo does not think this is OK in any situation."

A national expert on bullying and anger control is coming to town, and he has another message for local mental health professionals and educators. "Getting the government involved won't make it better," says Izzy Kalman, a psychologist and psychotherapist since 1978. Enforcing anti-bullying policies that encourage tattling and punishment does not, in his opinion, make the bullies respect the victim.

In 2001, the Oregon Legislature put into law a statute declaring, "Each school district shall adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying." Districts were encouraged to include in their policies a definition of harassment, intimidation or bullying; a list of consequences and remedial actions; a procedure for reporting incidents; and a procedure for prompt investigation into a report.

This tough stance against bullying could be considered good news for many of Oregon's queer youth. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's 2005 National School Climate Survey released April 26 in Washington, D.C., states that

more than a third (37.8 percent) of the polled students experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and that 75.4 percent of them heard derogatory remarks such as "fag-got" or "dyke" frequently at school.

According to GLSEN founder and executive director Kevin Jennings, the survey reveals that anti-gay bullying remains commonplace in American schools. "On the positive side," he notes, "it also makes clear that inclusive policies, supportive school staff and student clubs, like Gay Straight Alliances, all relate to reduced harassment and higher-achieving students."

Kalman thinks these policies are actually making things worse. As a school psychologist for many years in New York, he tried to teach students how to stop being picked on. Author of the new book *Bullies to Buddies: How to Turn Your Enemies into Friends*, Kalman is coming to Portland on June 14 to present his seminar, "Turning Bullies into Buddies—A Quick, Powerful and Fun Way to Teach Kids How to Stop Being Victims."

According to his Web site, his mission is to end the suffering of victims of teasing and bullying around the world. The only reliable method, the mission states, is empowering victims to solve their problem and turn their bullies into friends.

The solution is not difficult: Do nothing. On his Web site, Kalman explains: "What are all those kids

who don't get teased doing to stop their teasers? Nothing? That's right! Nothing! They are doing nothing! Why? Because they're not getting teased! ...If you are going to become someone who isn't teased, then you have to become someone who isn't doing anything to stop the teasing!"

Joyce Liljeholm of Oregon Safe Schools and Communities Coalition feels strongly about doing something to stop bullying. "There is no hierarchy to suffering, and I don't think any student should be harassed on any basis," she says. The coalition supports community efforts to reduce youth suicide and other risk behaviors in the often hidden and historically underserved sexual minority youth population.

According to Kalman, freedom of speech is the solution to verbal bullying. "The attitude 'You have the right to say whatever you want, and it is perfectly OK' is the simplest secret for preventing victimization." He argues that victims have the right to show the bully that his or her words will not upset them.

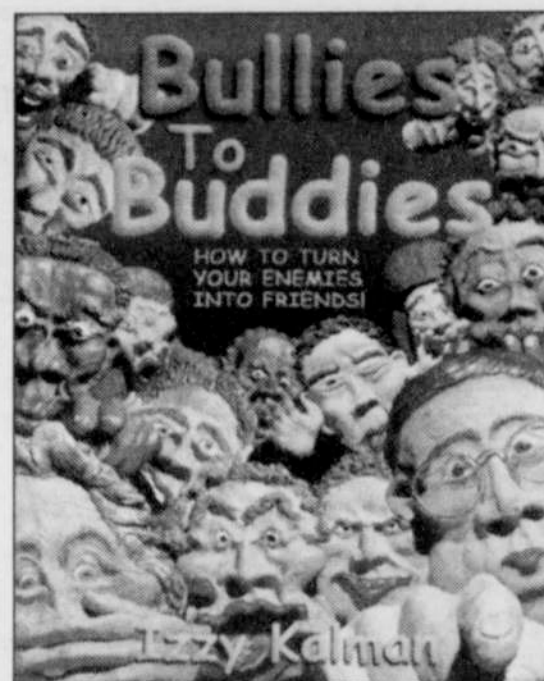
Liljeholm, on the other hand, sees the need for disruption on the victim's behalf. "We believe in interrupting hurtful language and teaching the offending party how it causes harm." According to

Liljeholm, the coalition works to support victims while empowering bystanders to step up for a fellow student. Most importantly, however, is to teach adults that it is their job to keep schools safe.

StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov, a Web site sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, published a tip sheet for adults to help provide support to youth who are bullied. It states: "Youth who are bullied need clear messages of support from adults. Although we want children and youth to be strong and assertive so that they can stand up to kids who bully, adults must realize that many aren't ready to do this."

While critics of anti-bullying policies like Kalman want to empower victims to manage their reactions and make friends of their enemies, the Oregon Department of Education insists on the importance of reporting incidents of harassment, the responsibility of adults in the matter and the fact that kids need to feel safe and welcome at school. "They're kids," says Evans, "and if it's hurtful, it's hurtful." 10

OREGON SAFE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES COALITION holds its annual meeting 10 a.m. June 3 at Q Center, 1028 S.E. Water St. For more information on Izzy Kalman's seminar, visit www.bullies2buddies.com.



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