

The content on this page is provided by the Vernonia Prevention Coalition

Be a Piece of the Puzzle: Another Take on Bullying



By Bonnie Harris, M.S.,
Ed. 2011
Reprinted from the
The Monadnock
Ledger-Transcript

Theories abound on why bullying happens and what to do about it, but all experts seem to agree that bullying is about an imbalance of power. One child gains or holds power by diminishing another's. It comes in many forms and today has most destructively reached a new high with the convenience and anonymity of the internet.

Some bullies are children who feel powerless in their own lives and strive to gain power by identifying a weaker victim they can feel superior to by intimidating them in some way. Their tactics insure superiority over the victim and help them to feel powerful in their lives. We also now recognize that many bullies can be the most powerful and popular children in school—those "lucky" kids who happen to be attractive, charismatic and even academically successful.

They are lucky because these qualities are inborn and admired by our society. Learned behaviors turn these kids into bullies. It is important to maintain their perceived power within their peer groups by attracting followers, their worker bees, and to remain superior and "cool" by bullying weaker victims.

Some children are products of broken homes where each parent disciplines in conflicting ways. Some are ignored from lack of time or energy. These children can feel powerless and invisible, lacking control in their lives. They find ways to control others whom they

can. There is no formula to accurately define a bully. No predictive factors for who will become one or who will bully in their youth but rescind their ways with maturity. It is equally difficult to find preventative measures.

Many new bullying programs focus on empowering the bystander to speak up countering the age-old message of "don't be a tattletale." But many children fear later repercussions from the bully. Although there is some success with this approach, it is meant to help and support the child being bullied. But we're still not getting it.

Bullying is thriving—always has; always will. Until we get to the bottom of it. We need to look to the source. What creates the bully? Is it human nature? Will we always have bullies no matter what? Or is there a solution? If there is, the solution must address the motivations of the bully. Why must this child bully? What compels him or her to torment, persecute, intimidate or dominate another? If bullying is about an imbalance of power, it must develop from an imbalance of power. Our children are brought up in fertile territory. We teach them how to survive in a world of bullies every day. They watch how we do it and they learn.

Whenever I advocate respect and empathy as the basis of healthy communication with children, someone always says, "That's well and good, but it's a hard world out there and people aren't going to care how my kid feels!" So

most families go about hardening their children for the world we have rather than creating a microcosm of the world we want. Look at what is being modeled for our children—in our homes, schools, businesses, media—in our world. Don't we all thrive on bullying? Aren't we all out for ourselves?

From yelling at and punishing our kids when they don't do what we want all the way up to threatening other countries when they don't do what we want, we are showing our kids the power of the bully from the bottom up. How many of us live in truly peaceful homes where problems are resolved with talk-

ing and negotiating, where power is balanced within the family so no one's needs are any more or any less important than anyone else's, where punishment is never used as a restrictive device? And how many bullies are products of these kinds of homes? I doubt you'll find one.

But we have the capacity for change. And when parents do change their responses to their children, switch from punishment to problem solving, from screaming to talking, when they learn to defuse their own buttons, the response I hear is overwhelming. They feel good about themselves and their children become the beneficiaries of a new promise.

Are you interested in helping to make change on this issue? The Vernonia Prevention Coalition is dedicated to helping make a safe and healthy community through collaborative planning, community action, policy advocacy and enforcement. Contact DeAnna Pearl @ (503) 369- 7370 or DeAnna@vernonia-or.gov.



We don't want to take a hard, cold look at the way we teach our children because then it might be our fault. It lets us off the hook to blame the child. Let me just say, it is no one's fault but what generation after generation we have slowly become. Society is addicted to punishing, blaming, making another suffer for wrong-doing. Is it in our nature? Is it a natural impulse to punish? Or is it just what we've learned?

Blaming is one of a parent's main teaching tools. Children are blamed and

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Are you feeling desperate, alone or hopeless? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call will be routed to the nearest crisis center to you.

Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline
1-800-273-TALK (8255) Press 1

2012-2013 Vernonia Prevention Coalition Sector Representatives

Position	Name	Sector	Contact	Affiliation
Chair	Josette Mitchell	Government	(503) 429-4232	COV Mayor
Vice Chair	Pete Weisel	School	(503) 429-3521	VHS Councilor
Exec. Board	Dr. Ken Cox	Media	(503) 429-5891	VSD Superintendent
Exec. Board	Shawn Carnahan	Police	(503) 429-4232	COV Police
Board Member	Nic Welch	Faith	(503) 748-9193	Vernonia Comm. Church
Sector Member	Mark Brown	Faith	(503) 961-5281	Vernonia Comm. Church
Board Member	Breanne Mares	Prevention	(503) 396-7637	Col. County Mental Health
Board Member	Heidi Brown	Business	(503) 429-2787	Grey Dawn Gallery
Board Member	Gina Fields	Parent	(503) 429-6306	Parent Teacher Association
Board Member	Kathy Kelly	Youth Serving	(503) 369-7249	Vernonia Head Start
Board Member	Alexis Baska	Youth	(503) 429-3521	O.S.S.O.M.
Sector Member	Michal Bathurst	Youth	(503) 429-3521	O.S.S.O.M.
Board Member	George Tice	Civic Org.	(503) 880-1627	Lions Club
Board Member	Ashley Swanson	Health Serv.	(503) 396-2074	Public Health Foundation of Columbia County
	Heather Lewis	Contractor	(503) 429-4677	Resource Coordinator

VPC Mission:

To develop safe and healthy neighborhoods through collaborative planning, community action, policy advocacy and enforcement.

PACER's
National Bullying Prevention Center
The End of Bullying Begins with You.

**Spencer Health and Wellness
School Based Health Center**
will be open to patients on
Tuesdays and Fridays from 7:30 AM - 1:30 PM

**BECAUSE LIFE ISN'T
WARM &
FUZZY
ALL THE TIME**

youthLine
1-877-968-8491
oregonyouthline.org
Or
Text
teen2teen
to 66746

Teens Talking to
Teens About
Teen Stuff

Safe
Confidential
Live

Oregon
Partnership