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BULLY ♦ PROOFING Your School

*A Comprehensive Approach
for Middle Schools*

Marla Bonds, Psy.D. ♦ Sally Stoker, M.S.W.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Overview

Violence

There is a form of violence in our schools today that is chronic, pervasive, and harmful to a large number of our students. It is called bullying. Not as easily identified as the overt, violent acts that make headline news, bullying is a more subtle form of violence that, if undetected and untreated, is far more damaging to a greater number of our students. In an environment where bullying has created a climate of fear and anxiety, students pay a terrible price physically, emotionally, and academically.

Bullying behaviors are prevalent in our schools today and include physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual behaviors both overt and covert, direct and indirect. Bullying occurs when "a person is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons" (Olweus, 1991). The bullying dynamic can include boys or girls, individuals or groups, but it always involves an imbalance of power with one individual or group chronically victimizing another individual or group and exhibiting little or no remorse for the victims. And it is not only the direct victims of bullying who feel unsafe. All students who know about and witness these incidents are deeply affected as well. When students observe incidences of bullying behaviors happening daily and conclude that adults either do not notice or choose to ignore these situations, their sense of security in the school environment and in their own well-being is shaken, and their availability for learning is significantly compromised.

There have been numerous studies on the problem of bullying in the schools, both in the United States and in other parts of the world. A summary of the literature supports the alarming fact that from 15–20% of students can expect to experience some form of bullying during their school careers (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). In the United States, one study involved asking students in the rural Midwest about incidences of bullying in their own school careers. The startling results showed that 80% of high school students reported having been bullied in school while 90% of fourth through eighth graders also reported having been bullied during their school years (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Hoover, Oliver, & Thompson, 1993). Students want us to know that bullying is a serious problem that can no longer be ignored.

Adults are as affected by bullying behaviors and the resulting climate of fear as are students. Adults experience incidents of bullying and harassment on the roads, in public places, and in their workplaces. And violence in teachers' workplaces—the schools—is on the increase. For example:

- ◆ Over 6,000 teachers are threatened annually and over 200 are physically injured by students on school grounds. (Walker & Gresham, 1997)
- ◆ In the 1991 school year, 28% of public school teachers were verbally abused, 15% were threatened with injury, and 3% were physically attacked. (Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman, 1993)
- ◆ In a 1993 American Teacher survey one-third of teachers said that both teachers and students were more anxious about going to school because of worries about violence. (Harris & Associates, 1993)

The cases of teachers being physically attacked or threatened are dramatic and rare, but the fear of violence in general and the increase in national school place violence contribute to the perception on the part of teachers that schools are not the safe havens they were once assumed to be. And even though most teachers may not have to deal with direct physical threats to themselves or their students, they do report feeling frustrated and stressed about the increasing amount of valuable time they are required to spend dealing with students' disruptive behaviors.

The consequences of bullying are serious. We can no longer dismiss it as innocent teasing or harmless play. Victims of bullying report both physical and emotional symptoms, and demonstrate an inability to focus on schoolwork as well as lowered school attendance. Twenty-two percent of fourth through eighth graders report having academic difficulties because of peer abuse and bullying (Beane, 1999). When students are asked to describe how they have been affected by school bullying, they report such symptoms as nervousness, worrying, scared feelings in the stomach, headaches, and tiredness (Rigby, 1998). All of these complaints directly interfere with a student's ability to learn effectively. Tragically,

In schools, teachers find themselves spending increasing amounts of time attending to students' disruptive and angry outbursts, interpersonal conflicts, and off-task behavior, or worse. . . . Although teachers are expected to concentrate on teaching academics, they are finding that student behavior prevents them from doing so; eventually it drives many of them from the teaching profession.

(Elliott, 1998, p. 296)

in the most extreme cases, bullying has been named as the cause of both child suicide and homicide, as victims desperately search for a way to end the turmoil.

A Book Specifically Designed for Middle School

The research done on bullying in the United States shows that students report bullying is most serious in middle school and doesn't decline in severity and frequency until the high school years. The outdated belief that bullying behaviors are "just a normal part of adolescence" is both ignorant and dangerous and has resulted in adults looking the other way instead of acknowledging the problem. As a result, bullying patterns can be firmly entrenched by the time students reach middle school with bullies continuing to gain and abuse their power and victims experiencing increased hopelessness. Bullying needs to be addressed head-on in the middle school environment, where so many students are at risk.

There are many cultural reasons why bullying can become so intense during the middle school years. The average preadolescent and adolescent age child entering middle school today has already witnessed 100,000 acts of simulated violence on TV and in the movies, according to estimates by researchers in the field (Lister, 1995). This repeated witnessing of violent acts can result in a desensitization to violence in general, and a subtle acceptance of a certain mean-spiritedness toward each other that can seem—especially to vulnerable adolescents—like the "popular" way to behave. Also, in an individualistic culture such as ours that embraces the belief of survival of the fittest and rewards the risk-taker, the bully can too easily feel justified in using his or her power to dominate and intimidate others. These factors, in combination with a culture that encourages an individual to solve his own problems without asking for help from others, can combine to create a fertile ground for bullying behaviors.

Complicating these cultural issues are the very specific developmental needs and tasks of the adolescent. Bullying, a harmful dynamic at any stage, takes on even more potential for harm in the middle school environment, where students are experimenting with several important developmental tasks. The adolescent's struggle with identity, the power of the group and "group think," and the task of sorting out issues of adult authority all challenge the adolescent to learn how to use power appropriately and to maintain his or her own identity and beliefs in the context of the group. Without guidance and access to the skills to successfully accomplish these tasks, the adolescent's search for power and identity can take a negative direction and result in antisocial behaviors such as bullying.

The good news is that middle school students are up to the challenge. In fact, just as the developmental stage of adolescence can intensify bullying, it also provides the perfect context for educating students about how to make themselves and their schools safe through anti-bullying efforts. Adolescents are ready and eager to explore the more abstract concepts

of power and influence and are enthusiastic about learning how to manage and direct their own power for the common good. They welcome talking with adults who are sympathetic to their needs and concerns and who understand the very real pressures facing them daily. Including middle school students in the discussion of how to make their schools safe and secure allows them to experiment with their own power in productive ways that benefit everyone.

Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools is a comprehensive school safety program designed specifically for middle school students. It is written for all middle school level professionals who are interested in using our greatest resource—our students—to make the changes necessary in order for our schools to be the safe and nurturing environments they are meant to be.

Basic Concepts of the Program

Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools is a bully prevention program based on four main concepts which are essential to its success:

- ◆ The program is designed as a systemic, comprehensive program
- ◆ The main focus is on climate change
- ◆ The program teaches skills and strategies to avoid victimization
- ◆ The emphasis is on developing the caring majority

1. The program is designed as a systemic, comprehensive program.

Researchers agree that the most effective school safety programs are programs that are comprehensive in nature and which direct attention to all systems in the school that impact the school environment. In their discussion of what makes school safety programs effective, Batsche and Knoff (1994) state: "The environment will change and the climate improve only when school systems choose to develop and implement a *comprehensive* plan designed to teach prosocial behavior, to limit aggressive behavior, and to teach skills that promote positive interactions between students." In the book *Violence in American Schools*, the establishment of a safe school plan is described as a "long-term, systematic, and comprehensive practice." (Elliott, 1998).

Bully-Proofing Your School is designed as a wraparound program which provides the framework for a school-wide safety effort. All members of the school community, adults and students, commit to a nontolerance policy about bullying and to creating a caring community. School rules and expectations are established that are understood and enforced throughout the community. All systems in the school are addressed from administration to transportation, and specific steps for implementing

the school-wide program are included. Implementing the program school-wide is ideal. However, it is important for each school to assess its own needs and resources and to adapt the program accordingly, implementing only certain systems at a time as resources dictate.

2. The main focus is on climate change.

Bully-Proofing Your School is a program designed to create a positive, prosocial school climate that feels safe and secure for all members of the school community. This requires broad efforts to change the overall school culture rather than only focusing on specific skills. The commitment is to the gradual process of cultural change as members of the school community work together to create a safe school environment.

3. The program teaches skills and strategies to avoid victimization.

Included in the program are the specific skills and strategies students need both to avoid victimization and to help others. These are practical tools that are developmentally appropriate for middle school students and which emphasize the important concepts of empathy, taking a stand, and creative problem solving. A common vocabulary is emphasized throughout the curriculum to be used by all members of the school community.

4. Emphasis is on developing the caring majority.

A unique component of this program is that it focuses on the 85% of students in a school who are neither bullies nor victims, but who are in the role of bystanders and make up the silent majority. These are the students who generally have well-developed prosocial skills, but do not know how or are afraid to reclaim the power from the bullies. The *Bully-Proofing* program teaches this silent majority the skills they need to become the caring majority that holds the power and takes responsibility for making the school safe.

Overview of the Contents

Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools offers a complete plan for the implementation of a school-wide safety program for middle schools. The information and materials included have all been written to match the developmental needs and tasks of middle school students.

♦ Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

This chapter discusses bullying as a form of violence that is prevalent in schools today. It includes information about the seriousness of the problem for adolescents in middle schools. The basic concepts of the program are outlined.

◆ **Chapter Two: Developmental Issues of Adolescence**

The physical, cognitive, social, and emotional developmental issues of the adolescent years are discussed in the context of their impact on the bullying dynamic in middle school. The differences between bullying in elementary and secondary schools are described.

◆ **Chapter Three: The Basics of Bullying**

In Chapter Three the dynamic of bullying is explained and the roles and characteristics of the three main groups—bullies, victims, and bystanders—are described in detail. Specific discussions about sexual and racial harassment are included.

◆ **Chapter Four: Establishing a School-Wide Program**

This chapter outlines the information necessary to successfully implement the school-wide *Bully-Proofing* program. The basic concepts and elements of the program are described in detail with specific planning suggestions and a step-by-step plan for implementation is outlined.

◆ **Chapter Five: Faculty Training**

A detailed description of a full day faculty training workshop is included along with materials and worksheets. A section on important issues to be addressed with the staff is also included.

◆ **Chapter Six: Sixth Grade Curriculum**

This chapter includes the sixth grade curriculum for the *Bully-Proofing* program which consists of five classroom lessons and additional classwork and homework assignments. The lessons focus on the basics of bullying. Important information about the facilitation and scheduling of classroom groups is included at the beginning of the chapter.

◆ **Chapter Seven: Seventh Grade Curriculum**

The complete seventh grade curriculum is outlined and includes lessons which address the concepts of caring behaviors, empathy, inclusion, groups, taking a stand, sexual harassment, creative problem solving, and levels of risk taking. Refer to Chapter Six for information on facilitation and scheduling.

◆ **Chapter Eight: Eighth Grade Curriculum**

This chapter includes the five lessons of the eighth grade curriculum as well as additional classwork and homework assignments. The theme of the eighth grade curriculum is leadership, and the lessons focus on the characteristics and styles of positive leadership in a caring community. Refer to Chapter Six for information on facilitation and scheduling.

◆ **Chapter Nine: Interventions**

Chapter Nine provides strategies for working with bullies, victims, and parents and includes practical and workable ideas for

interventions. Interventions for working with bus drivers and with new students are also included.

◆ **Chapter Ten: Maintaining the Caring Community**

This chapter summarizes the most important points about how to maintain the caring community once the rules, expectations, and skills have been taught.

◆ **Resource Guide**

Recommended resources about bullying are listed for teachers, students, and parents.

food all over him, and then encourages everyone at the lunch table to laugh at the spectacle. Oftentimes these bullying “rites” include giving the victim a humiliating nickname, such as “Jiggle Butt Jalissa,” which can later be used by other peers in collusion with the bully.

The Severity of Bullying

Bullying behaviors can be mild, moderate, or severe, depending on the power differences between the bully and victim, the chronicity of aggressive behaviors, the emotional stability of the victim, and environmental supports available to the victim. Significantly, it is the victim who determines if the behaviors are threatening or bullying and judges their severity. Table 3-1: *Bullying Behaviors*, outlines the types of bullying and attempts to categorize them by severity. Remember, any bullying behavior can be severe. Teens will always need adult help with moderate and severe bullying. Keeping these categories in mind can help adults decide when it is necessary to intervene, regardless of the desires of the teen.

TABLE 3-1 Bullying Behaviors					
MILD	MODERATE				SEVERE
PHYSICAL AGGRESSION					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Pushing ◆ Shoving ◆ Spitting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Kicking ◆ Hitting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Defacing property ◆ Stealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Physical acts that are demeaning and humiliating, but not bodily harmful (e.g., de-panting) ◆ Locking in a closed or confined space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Physical violence against family or friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Threatening with a weapon ◆ Inflicting bodily harm
SOCIAL ALIENATION					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Gossiping ◆ Embarrassing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Setting up to look foolish ◆ Spreading rumors about 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ethnic slurs ◆ Setting up to take the blame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Publicly humiliating (e.g., revealing personal information) ◆ Excluding from group ◆ Social rejection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Maliciously excluding ◆ Manipulating social order to achieve rejection ◆ Malicious rumor-mongering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Threatening with total isolation by peer group

Adapted from *Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Elementary Schools (Second Edition)*, © Garrity et al, 2000.

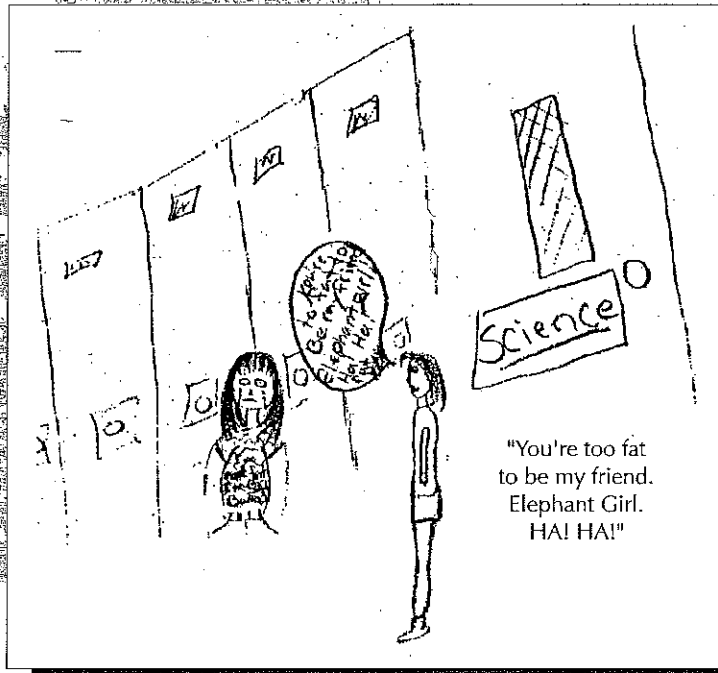
TABLE 3-1 (continued)

MILD		MODERATE		SEVERE	
VERBAL AGGRESSION					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Mocking ◆ Name calling ◆ Dirty looks ◆ Taunting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Teasing about clothing or possessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Teasing about appearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Intimidating telephone calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Verbal threats of aggression against property or possessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Verbal threats of violence or of inflicting bodily harm
INTIMIDATION					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Threatening to reveal personal information ◆ Graffiti ◆ Publicly challenging to do something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Defacing property or clothing ◆ Playing a dirty trick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Taking possessions (e.g., lunch, clothing, toys) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Extortion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Threats of using coercion against family or friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Coercion ◆ Threatening with a weapon
RACIAL AND ETHNIC HARASSMENT					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Joke telling with racial or ethnic targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exclusion due to ethnic or cultural group membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Racial or ethnic slurs, put-downs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Verbal accusations, insults ◆ Public humiliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Destroying or defacing property due to ethnic or cultural group membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Physical or verbal attacks due to group membership
SEXUAL HARASSMENT					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Sexual or "dirty" jokes ◆ Conversations that are too personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Howling, catcalls, whistles ◆ Leers and stares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ "Snuggies" (pulling underwear up at the waist) ◆ Repeatedly asking someone out when he or she isn't interested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Spreading sexual rumors ◆ Pressure for sexual activity ◆ De-panting ◆ Bra snapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cornering, blocking, standing too close, following 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Sexual assault and attempted sexual assault ◆ Rape

These different forms of bullying usually occur together. For example, verbal abuse will accompany and follow physical intimidation. One reinforces the other. As middle school-aged teens hone their expanding cognitive abilities, their methods become more subtle and less easily detected by onlookers.

Not “Fitting In”

Drawn by
Heather Michaels



four important dynamics that particularly influence the bully-victim pattern in middle school. These dynamics can influence the victims' responses in ways that keep the bullying in place.

1. Code of Silence

Bullying has been described as “the silent nightmare” (P.K. Smith, 1991, p. 243). Victims find themselves trapped in a “code of silence” that prevents them from getting the help they need. One reason they are silent is because they have given up hope that others will help them. They have been told by parents that bullying is “part of growing up,” by teachers to “figure it out yourself,” and by unfriendly and silent peers that they are alone and unworthy of support. All this is complicated by the very strong ethic of middle school culture: to inform is the ultimate disgrace, and handling problems oneself is the ideal and mature solution. Asking others for help with problems is “uncool,” and for the victim who has been suffering in silence this leads to a strong sense of embarrassment and self-blame that compounds the problem. This code of silence is the bully's greatest source of protection (Ross, 1996).

2. Downward Spiral

Victims who are caught in the web of bullying get trapped in a downward spiral of lowered self-worth and confidence. The more they get bullied, the worse they feel; and the worse they feel about themselves

Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools

By Marla Bonds, Psy.D. and Sally Stoker, M.S.W.

This highly acclaimed program will help you and your staff create an environment where students feel safe and secure. *Bully-Proofing Your School* tells you how to:

- ◆ Create a positive "caring community" where students support one another
- ◆ Distinguish "bullying" from "disagreements"
- ◆ End the silence of fear in your school
- ◆ Support victims and decrease the power of bullies
- ◆ Avoid power struggles during discipline

Inside you'll find valuable information about developmental issues unique to middle school students and how those issues affect the bully-victim dynamic in the middle school environment. *Bully-Proofing Your School* is a complete curriculum for grades 6-8, containing appropriate lessons and reproducible handouts for the classroom as well as programs for parents, faculty, bus drivers, etc.

For grades 6-8



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