

Back to School. Back to Bullying?

Hazelden Foundation Provides Insight Into Bullying Problems

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Center City, Minn., October 23, 2007 — As students return to school, too often a situation like this occurs: Maria, who just started kindergarten is excited to ride the school bus until some older students take her lunch and call her “baby” when she becomes upset. Now she doesn’t want to ride the bus and complains about going to school.

Unfortunately bullying incidences like this are all too common. Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has difficulty defending himself or herself.

To help teachers, schools, parents and students combat bullying, the Hazelden Foundation has just released an updated version of the most researched and best-known bullying prevention program available today. The *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)*, which is based on more than 35 years of research, has been proven to prevent or reduce bullying throughout a school system by up to 70 percent. *OBPP* takes a comprehensive approach to address the issue on four levels, including the school, classroom, individual, and community level.

Students who are bullied often become depressed, develop low self-esteem and develop health problems such as stomachaches and headaches. They may be afraid to return to school, go to the bathroom, or ride the school bus. They may have trouble concentrating and their schoolwork may suffer.

“The negative effects on the bullied students are so devastating and often quite long-term,” said Dan Olweus, PhD, professor at the Research Center for Health Promotion at the University of Bergen, Norway, and creator of *OBPP*. “It is simply a fundamental human right for a student to have a safe school environment and to be spared the repeated degradation and humiliation that comes from being bullied.”

A national study, which included students in grades 6 to 10, found that 17 percent of students reported having been bullied “sometimes” or more often during the school term. Eight percent of those students reported they had been bullied at least once a week (Nansel, 2001). These bullying acts can include a student or group of students physically hitting, shoving and kicking another student or spreading lies and nasty rumors about another student.

“Clearly this is a big issue for many communities, if not all, across the country,” said Kris Van Hoof-Haines, vice president for content development at Hazelden Publishing. “Schools are looking for a solution to the problem of bullying that really works over the long-term. *OBPP* is that solution.”

“Although the primary responsibility for dealing with bullying should be with the adults in a school, students need to learn how to stand up for bullied students and how to get help when bullying happens,” says Carolyn Latady, family support advocate for Forest Lake Area Schools in Minnesota, which is implementing *OBPP*.

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“If a bullying student’s hurtful behavior is not stopped and moved in a more positive social direction, many of them will continue on an antisocial path involving crime, drug use and destructive personal relationships,” said Susan P. Limber, PhD, a professor of psychology at Clemson University in South Carolina and co-author of *OBPP*.

As school staff and parents prepare for the school year, be aware of these common characteristics of students who are often targets of bullying and students who often bully others. Students who are being bullied often have the following characteristics:

- Are cautious, sensitive, quiet, withdrawn and shy
- Are anxious, insecure, unhappy and have low self-esteem
- Are depressed and engage in suicidal ideation much more often than their peers
- Often do not have a single good friend and relate better to adults than to peers
- Are often physically weaker than their peers (if they are boys) and in particular, weaker than those who bully

These characteristics may also occur as a result of bullying.

Students who bully other students are likely to have several characteristics that teachers and parents can watch for:

- Have a positive attitude toward violence and the use of violent means
- Have strong needs to dominate and subdue other students and to get their own way
- Are impulsive and easily angered
- Show little empathy toward students who are bullied
- Are defiant and aggressive toward adults, including teachers and parents
- Are involved in other antisocial or rule-breaking activities such as vandalism, delinquency and substance abuse

It is also important to know that some students who bully are actually highly skilled socially and are good at winning over their teachers and other adults. For this reason, teachers and other adults need to be diligent in watching for bullying problems and address them consistently when they happen.

The full *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, with Teacher Guide, Schoolwide Guide and Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, is available through Hazelden Publishing. And now through the end of 2007, the Teacher Guide and Schoolwide Guide can be purchased at a 20 percent discount. For more information visit www.hazelden.org/olweus or call 800-328-9000.

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