

THE THREE FACES OF BULLYING

Helping the Bullied, the Bully and the Bystander

During the last half of eighth grade, Olivia spent many lunch periods in the bathroom of her Portland area public middle school. (Her name has been changed at her request.) She was hiding from a group of former friends. This group had hacked her MySpace page, deleting her goals of traveling to Europe and learning other languages and publishing lewd messages in their place. They had stolen her cell phone and sent text messages to boys asking them for sex. They taunted her, ostracized her and spread rumors that she was promiscuous.

"I stopped caring about anything," says Olivia, now 15 and an honor student at a private high school in the Portland area. Many mornings, she begged her mother to let her stay home from school. Her grades began to slip.

"Bullying is a power imbalance," says Trudy Ludwig, a local child advocate and author of children's books about bullying. A child or group of children will use social or physical advantages to demean another child, she explains, adding, "It's an attempt to harm."

While bullying happens throughout childhood, it seems to peak in middle school. Over 40 percent of Oregon eighth graders who responded to the 2009 Oregon Healthy Teens survey conducted by the Oregon Department of Human Services reported experiencing some type of harassment at school – or on the way to or from school – during the previous 30-day period.

Research tells us bullying is bad for everyone involved.

Children who bully are more likely to run afoul of the law later in life. Targets and witnesses suffer a range of symptoms – from

stomach aches to depression – and can turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse or even suicide.

With the recent spate of news stories about bullying victims who have taken their own lives, many parents are concerned, but few

Bullying doesn't always involve physical violence. Name calling, spreading rumors and social isolation all fall under the "bullying" umbrella.



know what to do. By understanding the dynamics of bullying, parents can learn to help each of the players – the bullied, the bully and the bystander – to end the cycle of bullying for good.

The Bullied

Olivia is slender and pretty with long, shiny brown hair. Contrary to media depictions, victims of bullying do not fit a specific profile. It doesn't matter if a kid is fat or skinny, short or tall, straight or gay (although lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth are at higher risk – see "The Trevor Project" on page 30 for details). Like many targets of bullying, Olivia didn't tell her parents about the abuse she was suffering at school, but she showed some classic signs: social withdrawal, lower grades and mood swings.

"I was kind of mean and grumpy," she says. Other signs include school avoidance, insomnia, appetite problems, stomach aches and headaches. Signs of cyber-bullying – sending or posting hurtful messages or images via the Internet or other digital communication devices – include avoiding the computer or seeming upset after using the computer.

“First and foremost the parent really needs to listen to their child and take that child’s problem seriously.”

– Trudy Ludwig, author



Cyber-bullying – sending or posting hurtful messages or images via the Internet or other digital communication devices – can be especially painful as digital messages spread like wildfire.

If a child shows these signs or reports bullying, Ludwig advises, “first and foremost the parent really needs to listen to their child and take that child’s problem seriously.” Targets of bullying greatly benefit from assurances that they are not to blame, they are valued and what has happened is not fair. Professional counseling was a big help to Olivia, though she initially rejected the idea.

Parents should review the bullying policy at their child’s school – every district in Oregon and Washington is required to have one – to know what to expect when bullying is reported. It’s important to provide as many details of the incident or incidents as possible, including the names of any witnesses, and to work with school officials to address the issue. Confronting parents of bullies directly is not advised.

Parents can also coach children to try not to respond to bullying with cruelty or get upset, if possible, as both reactions can make matters worse. And while there are strategies kids can use to deal with bullies, “these tools aren’t meant to end the bullying problem,” Ludwig says. “They’re tools to help empower a child to stand up with their dignity intact, get away as quickly as possible and then report to an adult they trust.”

Ludwig provides such tools to elementary school students through role playing. She poses as a bully and coaches children to respond using humor, apathy, by changing the subject, agreeing or simply walking away.

“I want to give kids more tools than (saying), ‘Just ignore them!’ That’s really bad advice,” she says. Also unhelpful is simply telling the child, “You’re too sensitive.”

“I believe that our kids do need to toughen up, but it’s up to adults to give them the tools and teach them the skills they need to toughen up,” Ludwig says.

Choosing an approach that’s age appropriate is critical. What works in elementary school can backfire in middle and high school. (See “Learn More” on page 28 for a list of resources that can help you coach your kids to respond to bullying.)

The Bully

A bully is not necessarily the big, menacing kid you picture pounding his fist into his open palm. A bully could be a cheerleader, a choir boy or an honor student. Olivia’s tormentors were a group of popular girls. The one thing all bullies have in common is a lack of empathy.

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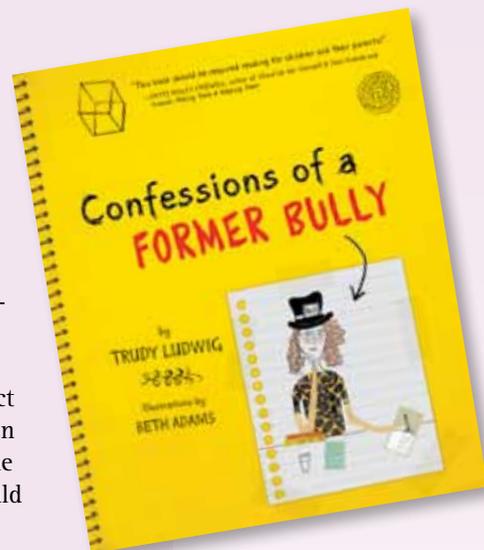
Diane Rowley, pedagogical administrator at Portland Waldorf School in Milwaukie, explains, "Often, the person who's doing the teasing needs to have their consciousness raised about the effect that they're having on the other person." The focus, she adds, should be on helping bullies to "think of that person who's their target as another human being."

Portland Waldorf School uses a "no blame" approach to bullying, holding a series of meetings with the students involved called "social inclusion" meetings. Kids are made to understand that "nobody's in trouble," says Rowley. "It's just that we have to sit down and work this through because it's hurtful." Likewise, Portland Public Schools (PPS) offer a "behavioral support" plan to chronic bullies. This approach helps encourage a culture of compassion and one of reporting - because, often, fear that the bully will get in trouble and retaliate prevents children from telling an adult.

A "no blame" approach doesn't mean no consequences. Children need to understand that if bullying behavior continues, there will be repercussions. Ludwig says consequences should be "predictable and escalating" and designed to "take the 'fun' out of it." In many cases, professional counseling can foster more pro-social behavior.

Parents should define bullying behavior for their kids beyond the physical. Name calling, fake compliments or sarcasm, put-downs, exclusion, hurtful gossip and mocking, whether in person or online, all qualify as bullying. Make it clear these behaviors are unacceptable. One way to do that is through modeling.

"As parents," says PPS Behavior Support Achievement Coordinator Karina Kidd, "it's helpful to consider what our children are learning from watching what we say and do and how we model problem solving and conflict management and respect for individual differences."



Reading age appropriate books about bullying, like local author Trudy Ludwig's latest, can get kids talking about their own experiences with bullying and help them develop tools to stay safe.

"Often, the person who's doing the teasing needs to have their consciousness raised about the effect that they're having on the other person."

- Diane Rowley,
Portland Waldorf School

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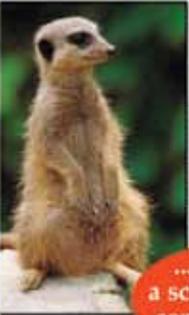
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LEARN MORE

Websites:

bullying.org: Information on bullying for adults and children.

cyberbully.org: Offers resources to help prevent and address cyber-bullying.

stopbullyingnow.com: Research based tools for coping with bullying.

stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov: Webisodes and games to help kids develop tools and strategies to end bullying.

thetrevorproject.org: Resources and suicide hotline for gay and questioning youth.

Books for Kids:

Confessions of a Former Bully by Trudy Ludwig (Tricycle Press, 2010)

How to Lose All Your Friends by Nancy Carlson (Puffin, 1997)

Stand Up for Yourself and Your Friends by Patti Kelley Criswell (American Girl, 2009)

Books for Adults:

Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do by Dan Olweus (Wiley-Blackwell, 1993)

Easing the Teasing: Helping Your Child Cope with Name-Calling, Ridicule and Verbal Bullying by Judy S. Freeman (McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books, 2002)

Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying by Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin (Corwin Press, 2009)

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The Bystander

Watching somebody get bullied is scary. Studies show that a bystander can endure the same physical and emotional problems as the target. What an onlooker may not understand is how much power he or she has in the situation. A bystander who's willing to say "Hey, knock it off," can help end bullying. In addition, says Kidd, "Students may not realize that, by not intervening, they may be accidentally reinforcing the unkind behavior."



"I want to give kids more tools than (saying), 'Just ignore them!'," says local author and child advocate Trudy Ludwig. "That's really bad advice."

Intervening doesn't necessarily mean confronting a bully directly, especially if the bystander doesn't feel safe doing so. Parents and educators need to help kids understand the difference between tattling and reporting.

Ludwig explains it this way: "Tattling is when you're trying to get someone in trouble and no one is getting hurt. Reporting is when you're trying to get someone out of trouble because someone is getting hurt."

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The Trevor Project

While any child can face bullying, because of unique societal pressures, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth are at higher risk of severe emotional problems as a result of bullying. Nine out of ten LGBT students experience harassment at school. Even more chilling, more than a third of LGBT youth report having attempted suicide.

The Trevor Project (thetrevorproject.org) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing suicide among LGBT youth. In addition to offering a 24-hour suicide prevention hotline (866-488-7386) and online chat options, they provide resources and educational materials for youth, parents and educators about LGBT issues and information about how to help kids who are depressed and at risk of harming themselves.

Children who report bullying need to know they will be safe in doing so – and that their actions are important. Olivia’s mom only found out what was really going on because a bystander let her know.

Bystanders can help in other ways, too. “Often they are the ones that have ideas for solutions,” says Rowley. They can befriend targets of bullying and help create a support network for the targeted child. Targets need to know they are valued, and statements of support can have more impact coming from a peer than an adult.

A Shared Solution

Bullying is a complicated relational issue with no quick fix. Efforts need to include education, prevention and maintenance. Kidd stresses the need to “change the social climate of the school and the social norms of how students treat each other. This requires the efforts of everyone in the school environment: teachers, administrators, counselors, school nurses, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, parents and students.”

Fostering empathy in early childhood can head off problems later on. When issues do occur, they need to be addressed consistently and promptly, with frequent check-ins to make sure bullying does not recur.

“We’re really good as adults giving advice to kids, but how often do we check in with the kids to find out if our advice is actually working for them?” asks Ludwig.

Ultimately, Olivia found relief through counseling and moving to a new school, away from her tormentors. She feels she’s a stronger person now.

“It was a bad experience but ... I have pretty good confidence now,” she says. She has some solid advice for parents, too, whether their child is a bully, a target or a bystander: “Get in their life.”

Sue Campbell is a Portland writer and mom. Read about her adventures raising a preschooler and backyard chickens at mommypen.com.

“Tattling is when you’re trying to get someone in trouble and no one is getting hurt. Reporting is when you’re trying to get someone out of trouble because someone is getting hurt.”

– Trudy Ludwig, author

SCHOOL OPEN HOUSES

The following schools have open houses scheduled in March; contact schools for more information – some require RSVP: (all addresses are in Portland unless indicated)

Call to schedule a tour at the following schools:

Arco Iris Spanish Immersion School, 1500 NW 185th Ave., Beaverton; March 10, 6-8pm (Informational Night), March 12, 10am-12pm (Open house); arcoirisschool.org; 503-473-0416

Barnes Miller Child Development, 7345 SW Barnes Rd.; March 12, 11 am-1 pm; barnes-millercdc.com; 503-292-7847

Clackamas Day School, 16640 SE 82nd Dr., Clackamas; March 10, 6-7:30pm; clackamasdayschool.net; 503-655-7826

Creative Children’s Center, 2515 SW 185th, Beaverton; March 14, 1-4 pm; creativechildrenscenter.com; 503-591-0604

Faithful Savior Community School, 11100 NE Skidmore; March 31, 6:30-7:30 pm; faithfulsaviorschool.com; 503-257-9409

Franciscan Montessori Earth School and St. Francis Academy, 14750 SE Clinton; March 28, 6 pm; fmes.org; 503-760-8220

French American International School, 8500 NW Johnson St.; PreK-5: April 7, 9-11 am; faispdx.org; 503-292-7776

German American School, 3900 SW Murray Blvd., Beaverton; Preschool: March 16, 9 am; gspdx.org; 503-626-9089

The International School, 025 SW Sherman Ave.; April 15, 9 am-noon; intlschool.org; 503-226-2496

Micha-el School, 5239 SE Woodstock Blvd.; Mar. 26, 9 am-noon; 503-774-4946; micha-elschool.org

Multisensory Learning Academy, 22565 NE Halsey St., Fairview; March 10, 6:30 pm; mla.k12.or.us; 503-405-7868

Northwest Academy, 1130 SW Main St.; March 3, April 7, May 5, 11 am-12:30 pm; nwacademy.org; 503-223-3367 #104

Northwest Chinese Academy, 8565 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy.; March 4, 6-8 pm; nwchineseacademy.org; 503-954-6277

Odyssey – Hayhurst School, 5037 SW Iowa St.; March 16, 6-7:30 pm; odysseyprogram.org; 503-916-6300

Opal Museum School of Portland Children’s Museum, 4015 SW Canyon Rd.; March 3, 3:30-4:30 pm & April 2, 8:30-9:30 am, portlandcm.org; 503-223-6500

Oregon Hope Chinese School, at Stoller Middle School, 14141 NW Laidlaw Rd.; April 3, 1-3 pm; oregonhopechineseschool.org; 971-226-7240

Portland Adventist Elementary School, 3990 NW 1st, Gresham; March 17, 6-7:30 pm; paes.com; 503-665-4102

The Portland French School, 6318 SW Corbett Ave.; (Pre-K & Elementary) April 6, 6:30 pm; portlandfrenchschool.org; 503-452-4160

Rowanberry School, 6846 NE Mallory Ave.; March 26, 10am-noon, rowanberryschool.com; 503-750-7607

Village Home: Beaverton Campus, 5150 SW Watson, Beaverton; Monday, April 25, 6:30-8 pm; NE Portland Campus, 5310 NE 42nd Ave, Portland; Wednesday, April 27, 6:30-8 pm; villagehome.org; 503-597-9100

The Wonder Years Learning Center, 9975 SW Denney Road, Beaverton; March 5 & 12, 10 am-2 pm; thewonderyearslearningcenter.com; 503-975-9217; 971-219-0643

Bodhi Tree Language Center, SE Portland and Lake Oswego (2 Locations); BodhiTreeChineseSchool.org; 503-788-0336; 503-997-2999

Childsworld Learning Center, 4235 SE Salmon; childsworld.org; 503-234-3611

Class Academy, 2730 NW Vaughn; classacademy.com; 503-223-9099

Healthy Starts Children’s Center at OHSU (CCLC); 3325 SW Moody Ave; cclc.com/ohsu; 971-230-2342

Our World Learning Center, 9063 SE Janssen Road, Clackamas; ourworldlearning.com; 503-723-3601

Portland School Project; portlandschoolproject.org; 503-683-2226

Sweet PEAS Kidzone, 15320 NW Central Drive, Suite D-12; sweetpeaskidzone.com; 503-533-5252

Tucker-Maxon School, 2860 SE Holgate Blvd.; tmos.org; 503-235-6551