

Bullyproofing Your School

by [Dr. Michael Obsatz](#)

Bullies are angry children who hurt others. They can use physical force (hitting, punching, shooting) or verbal intimidation (name-calling, putdowns). They can steal property, clothing, money from victims. Relational bullying involves shunning, ostracizing, gossiping, spreading rumors. Girls tend to do more relational bullying than boys.

Underneath the anger of bullies is emotional pain and shame. **Bullies need to be one-up by putting someone down.** Bullying occurs in all schools, from kindergarten through high school. Over 85 percent of young people report being bullied, and 10 percent are bullied frequently and severely. One percent of the victims act out in violent ways -- through homicide, suicide, or attempts at suicide. Our children are literally being “bullied to death.”

Adults do not intervene often because bullying takes place in unsupervised places -- playground, bathrooms, hallways, cafeteria, school busses. Many adults are in denial about the extent of bullying that exists. For teachers, intervening means more work and some hassle, reporting, dealing with parents, etc.

Parents of bullies often are angry people who are aggressive and use physical force to discipline their children. They do not want to believe their children are bullies, so they, too live in denial.

There are many “bullyproofing” programs. Carla Garrity has a program that is used in many elementary schools. A “caring majority” of kids intervene when bullying occurs. These kids have learned to use mediational skills, and confront the bully in a group. There are numerous “bullyproofing” websites. Dr. Phil also has a website about bullying, and has done a television program about it.

Bullying can be stopped. It takes an entire school district to stop it. First, a questionnaire is given to all students and parents to discover the extent of the problem. Then, the administration supports a zero-tolerance program. Strict guidelines are spelled out to all students and parents. Students are then taught mediational skills and intervene as a group when bullying occurs. All students take a pledge stating that they will not bully and will stop bullying if it occurs. Frequent discussions about respect, and including others are part of classroom and school programs.

With everyone on board, bullying can be almost eliminated from our schools. It requires that adults “get real” about the problem, and stop living in denial. It also requires the entire school district to participate, with support from the stop on down.

I have done many workshops on “Bullyproofing Your School,” and will be going to Cold Spring, MN in January, 2004, to work with the elementary school, Rocori Middle, and Rocori High School (the place where the most recent school shooting occurred -- resulting in two deaths). I also teach several sections of a course through the University of St. Thomas in the summer for continuing education called “Bullied to Death.”

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