

Let's End Bullying

by MARCIA J. WEISS

What is bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior generally among school children. It is a distinct pattern of deliberate harm and humiliation. The behavior is often repeated and involves a power imbalance. Bullying involves making threats, spreading rumors and causing physical pain or mental stress through physical or verbal attack, harassment or ridicule.

There are three types of bullying: verbal bullying involving teasing, taunting, name-calling, threats to cause harm or inappropriate sexual comments; social bullying involving social isolation/exclusion, spreading rumors or public embarrassment; and physical bullying involving kicking, hitting, pinching, spitting, pushing, tripping or inappropriate hand gestures.

Bullying can happen in various places: the school building, the playground or the bus, during or after school hours. It can also occur on the Internet (cyberbullying) through nasty text messages and e-mails, rumors, embarrassing pictures and the like. Parents often become involved in efforts to help children stop cyberbullying.

Bullying occurs in cities, towns and rural areas. Victims who are gay, lesbian, transsexual or even disabled are at increased risk of being victimized. People perceived as "different" are often victims: those who are socially isolated, those unwilling to defend themselves, those with low self-esteem, those who are overweight or underweight, and those wearing glasses or different clothes and seen as "uncool." Bullies

often have issues at home and reduced parental involvement, are aggressive and easily frustrated, have few friends and view violence in a positive manner.

Signs of bullying

Victims may experience unexplained injuries, sick feelings, difficulty sleeping and frequent nightmares, lack of appetite, declining grades, loss of friends, desire to inflict bodily harm on themselves, thoughts of suicide and actual suicide attempts. Bullying has been shown to lead to absences and poor performance in the classroom. Students who bully are increasingly aggressive — troublemakers who are often sent to the principal's office or otherwise disciplined — and those who worry about their reputation or popularity.

At the White House Conference on Bullying Prevention in 2011, President Obama reported that one-third of middle school and high school students reported being bullied during the school year. Almost three million students said they were pushed, shoved, tripped and spit on. Bullying is not merely "a rite of passage."

Bullying victims do not generally seek help because they feel overwhelmed, humiliated, embarrassed and out of control. Feeling they can handle the problem on their own, victims fear appearing weak so do not seek help. They also fear backlash from their peers as well as their parents. Sometimes the occurrences of bullying become so severe that victims who feel they have nowhere to turn take their own lives.

The following statistics are alarming. According to the Center for Disease Control, suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, about 4,400 per year. Other studies report: For every suicide among young people, there are at least 100 suicide attempts. More than 14 percent of high school students have considered suicide, and almost 7 percent have attempted it. Victims of bullying are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, and 10- to 14-year-old girls may be at even higher risk for suicide. ABC News reported nearly 30 percent of students are either bullies or victims of bullying, and some 160,000 stay home from school every day because of fear of bullying.

Bullying does not occur solely among school-age children. It also can occur in the workplace due to power struggles and the need to get ahead without regard to others.

What about the law?

While federal laws do not directly address bullying, a school or district may be charged with violation of the First Amendment, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and other laws aimed at protecting an individual's right to equal protection. For example, the Supreme Court ruled that parents may sue a school or district for failing to take action on a sexual harassment claim it knew about but failed to act on (*Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*, 1998).

While there is no federal law against bullying, most states have enacted laws to prevent bullying and to protect children. The aim of these laws is to address intimidation, harassment and bullying in schools. The laws are meant to promote

A Story From the Glickman Center

Twenty-three-year-old M. resides at NA'AMAT's Glickman shelter in Tel Aviv with her year-old twin boys. For the previous four years she lived in her mother-in-law's house. The sick elderly woman is a relative newcomer in Israel and doesn't speak any Hebrew. In her native country, a woman is subjected to her

mother-in-law's authority.

Aware of this tradition, M. respected the wishes of her mother-in-law, taking care of her as well as her own twin boys. After the birth of the twins, the mental and physical health of the mother-in-law started to deteriorate significantly. She thought M. was stealing things from her and

became afraid her food had been poisoned. She requested that the twins be bathed three to four times a day.

The situation worsened to the point that M. felt threatened and was even afraid of falling asleep. She was worried that the grandmother would hurt the twins. The husband believed incontrovertibly in his mother's words,

accusing M. of not taking care of her.

In the evening before coming to the shelter, the mother-in-law attacked M. and yelled at her. Her husband took the twins from his wife's hands and handed them over to his mother. He prevented M. from coming near the twins for several hours, despite their incessant crying.

school safety and reduce truancy and school violence. They specifically require schools to create certain policies for prevention, training and enforcement of certain behaviors. Students who violate anti-bullying provisions face suspension and expulsion.

According to the think tank Education Commission of the States, bullying is handled differently around the country. New Hampshire's law specifies that an act need occur only once to be bullying. Nebraska's law requires local districts to create bullying policies. Several states recently added provisions to cover cyberbullying. Laws in Massachusetts and New Jersey detail how educators are to prevent, report and investigate bullying. The website stopbullying.gov provides information on how individual states refer to bullying in its laws and what is required on the part of schools and districts. Bullying, cyberbullying and related behaviors may be addressed in a single law or may be addressed in multiple laws. In some states, bullying appears in the criminal code that may apply to juveniles

Can we stop bullying?

Teachers, coaches, community groups and open forums that address bullying with parents, community leaders, businesses and religious groups can develop a shared strategy on how to handle bullying. Raising awareness is the first step in preventing bullying. Let children know they are not alone. Develop a dialogue. Take action!

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Take Action for Women's Right to Birth Control

Following the national board meeting in September 2014, held in Chicago, this letter was sent to the President of the United States. All board members signed it.

Dear President Obama,

We, the undersigned officers and board members of NA'AMAT USA, a national and international organization promoting the welfare and rights of women, children and families in Israel and around the world, strongly oppose the Supreme Court's recent decision in the Hobby Lobby case allowing employers to refuse to pay for birth control coverage. Numerous other insurance services are covered; why not birth control? This is selective discrimination that should be outlawed.

We stand firmly with the Obama administration and its proposed policy preventing billion-dollar corporations from following Hobby Lobby by refusing to provide coverage for birth control. We strongly support the administration's efforts to ensure universal access to no-copay birth control for every woman regardless of her place of employment or the religious views of her employer. Personal beliefs have no place in corporate policy. Corporations of any size should be unable to block a woman's access to birth control.

In pending HHS regulations in response to the harmful Hobby Lobby decision, we suggest inclusion of the following:

*Billion-dollar corporations must be prohibited from refusing to pay for birth control coverage. Birth control is basic health care that should be covered by employers regardless of a company's size.

*All employees and prospective employees must be made aware of their employer's refusal to pay for birth control coverage.

In conclusion, we strongly support the Obama administration's efforts to protect women's access to birth control and prevent CEOs from deciding unilaterally whether or not women are entitled to no-copay birth control.

Eventually, the kids' screaming and wrenching crying prompted neighbors to call the police. The police officers brought M. and her twins to the Glickman shelter.

During her stay, M. has been trying to recover and get stronger. She is learning a profession — fingernail design, an occupation that could

help her eventually become economically independent.

The shelter's lawyer, who is also a certified family mediator, concluded that M. is not interested in divorcing her husband, but she has firmly decided to separate from her mother-in-law. A decision was taken not to file a complaint but to

initiate a mediation process during which the couple would eventually live apart from the mother-in-law. M. and her husband also have to undergo couples therapy, while the local social services do whatever is necessary to place the mother-in-law in appropriate housing.

Through the mediation of the

social worker at the shelter, a social worker near the husband has been contacted. He has started psychotherapy to help him fulfill his commitment to his mother as well as his wife and children. There is still a long way to go until M. returns home, but now she has hope that their lives will be better.