



## The WCPA News

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### **The Bully-Proof School**

By Jennifer Gauvain, LCSW, and Brett Newcomb, LPC

The National Association of School Psychologists claims that every single school day in America, over 160,000 children stay home because they are afraid of being bullied. That is an unconscionable figure. The painful reality of bullying seems to be a world wide phenomenon. An internet search reveals papers written, programs established, and governmental concern on every continent. Most of those documents seem to focus on the same issues: what is bullying, who bullies, why do they do it, who are the victims and how do we protect them?

Our concern at West County Psychological Associates is to help schools develop a climate that says bullying will not be tolerated. The research shows pretty conclusively that bullying will only stop when the adults make it stop. That effort requires that a perception among the students and parents exists which says acts of bullying will not be ignored, that consequences for bullying are known and consistently enforced, and that the power imbalances required for bullying will be challenged by the adults. It further requires that the teachers and administrators in school embrace the commitment to stop bullying by more than lip service. Teachers must be alert to the presence of bullying and willing to utilize teachable moments to challenge them whenever they occur.

A climate change is often required for this to happen. Anti-bullying must be a core value of the adults in the system. Anti-bullying is not a program schools can buy and place in the faculty lounge or the library; it is not the thought of the day broadcast over the loud speaker; it is not a series of posters and slogans put on school walls and in school communications and letterheads; it IS a lived value system demonstrated by the adults working within the school.

The information on bullying states that most children are generally neither bullies nor victims. Fully 85% of the students are consistently in this group, which we call the silent majority. These students have knowledge, skills, or traits which they use to avoid being bullies or being bullied. If we can ascertain what these skills are, we can begin to teach them to the other 15% of the students (and their parents) and therefore effect a reduction in the real experience of bullying in the lives of children.

Members of our staff have been giving workshops in schools and communities throughout the Midwest on the topic of bullying. Our workshops are aimed at convincing the adults in the school community to accept that bullying will not stop unless the adults stop it, and then to show them how to begin that journey. We emphasize the skills of the silent majority and we emphasize four specific steps we try to teach all students to use whenever they see a child in trouble or being bullied. We believe that if most children learn these four steps and practice them most of the time, there will be a reduction in the number of bullying incidents and therefore, safer schools.

These four steps are: 1. Walk away (vote with your feet). Do not be a part of the audience when someone is being victimized. 2. Tell an adult (immediately). The adults must take this seriously and be seen to respond consistently and immediately. If not, the program will fail. 3. Invite the victim away from the situation (only if it seems to be reasonably

(Continued, Page 2)

## The Bully-Proof School (Continued)

safe). We advise students not to engage in aggressive or hostile situations involving the bully, merely to approach the victim and ask them to come away. If the situation escalates, resort to steps one and two. 4. Tell the bully to stop. Again this is to be done only when it appears to be safe and not to engage the bully in conflict. Say it and walk away.

Being bullied can create lifetime scars for fragile and vulnerable children. We need to teach those children to be stronger and to develop better social skills (especially the ability to read non-verbal social cues.) But we also need to work to change the climate of our schools to send messages to bullies and their families that we will not look the other way and we will not excuse their behaviors. Bullies need to be held accountable for their actions.

If you are committed to the healthy development of our children and youth, if you understand that every child deserves to feel safe at school, and when you realize that kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care, then you will be on the path to having a bully-proof school. Please call our office if you would like more information.

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## From the Director

Times change, but practices often don't. If you were to ask veteran teachers what has been the greatest change in the classroom in the last twenty or thirty years, they would probably tell you it's the students. A generation ago, educators were unaware of terms such as ADHD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Asperger's Disorder and the strong-willed child. Today, all of these, in addition to bullying, are hot topics even in the popular press. My question is this: who trained teachers to deal with all of this? Times have changed and practices haven't. Methods that teachers would have used in the past aren't necessarily working. Guidance and discipline are not part of the education major's college curriculum, especially in regard to working with difficult children. There are many teachers who may not naturally have the internal fortitude to effectively manage these children. Or, in attempting to discipline in the best way they know how, they just aren't successful.

Twenty years ago, teachers left education to "make more money," retire, or stay home to raise children. Too often today, they are leaving education because they are tired and burned out. The same holds true for administrators. I've been reading an excellent book entitled *SETTING LIMITS IN THE CLASSROOM*, by Robert J. MacKenzie, ED.D. Dr. MacKenzie gives excellent suggestions and scenarios for dealing with classroom misbehavior. What it requires is creative thinking in regard to discipline. It requires caring enough about the student and yourself to demand behavior that is appropriate. It requires respect owed to yourself and the student in your dealings with them. It requires patience to be consistent even when you're too tired to be consistent. What is evident to me is that teachers and administrators need support and sometimes counsel, especially at those times when the pressures are great. It may demand self-reflection on our part. Is my way of working with students growth-producing for them and for me? Am I doing what I've always done and continuing to feel frustrated? Am I willing to look not only at the student's behavior but at my own in order to create a positive change in my classroom? Times have changed and, perhaps, our practices must change also.

Mary

### Our Philosophy

We believe that individuals and systems:

- Are capable of permanent change
- Function best with clearly defined authority that stems from a family systems hierarchy
- Are accountable for both positive and negative aspects of behavior
- Achieve success by conscious choices that lead to strength and development of personal responsibility
- Control their environment by establishing boundaries that are consistent with their values

WCPA promotes change and growth by:

- Helping to establish order within the environment
- Meeting consistently in a collaborative relationship to achieve identified goals
- Helping to identify and process significant issues
- Aiding in resolving issues as they arise

The result for the system or individual is the development of a strong sense of identity and boundaries that allows for the achievement of goals.

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## Teachers' Consultation Group Starting!

As Mary wrote in “**From the Director**,” student behavior is changing. Truly, this is only one of several significant changes in education within the last generation. How do today’s teachers effectively cope with issues such as classroom discipline, challenging families, conflict resolution and stress management? One solution is to join the new Teachers’ Consultation Group starting at West County Psychological Associates. The group will meet twice monthly in the late afternoon. It will be ongoing, accepting new members at any time. Teachers may self-refer to the group and administrators may refer teachers to the group whom they feel would benefit from it. The cost is \$30 per session and it is expected that self-referred teachers will assume this cost. Administrators may choose to assist with the cost for those teachers they refer, but are not expected to do so.

If you, or a teacher you know, would like to join the group, please contact Amy Maus at the WCPA office.

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## New Consultants Join WCPA

WCPA is delighted to announce the addition of three new therapists. Each therapist has already begun providing services through our office, including therapy, art therapy, psychological testing and school consultation. We are proud to have three such experienced and talented clinicians join our practice.

Welcome, Dr. Breiding, Ms. Danin, and Dr. Poirier!

**Matthew Breiding, Ph.D.** received his masters and doctoral degrees in Counseling Psychology from the University of Notre Dame. He specializes in the testing and diagnosis of Learning Disabilities and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, as well as psychological testing for anxiety, depression, and personality disorders. Dr. Breiding has a strong interest in men’s issues, as well as the treatment of men and boys in therapy. He has presented his research at national conferences on the topic of masculinity and its role in marital relationships. Further, Dr. Breiding has extensive experience treating substance abuse problems in both group and individual therapy settings. Finally, he has worked with children, adolescents, and adults in treating anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems.

**Barbra Danin, MA, LMFC, ATR**, received her Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and Clinical Art Therapy from Loyola Marymount University, in Los Angeles, and is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Missouri. For the past 20 years she has provided individual and group counseling to youth, families, and adults in a variety of settings, including schools, clinics, day treatment programs, hospitals, and the Family Court. Her areas of expertise include treatment of behavior problems, attachment and relationship issues, family conflicts, depression, and communication difficulties, and she has also worked with victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse. When appropriate, Art Therapy is incorporated into treatment in order to facilitate communication and self-expression. Ms. Danin has lectured throughout the United States and internationally on issues of mental health treatment.

**Robert Poirier, Psy.D., L.P.C.** received his doctorate in clinical psychology from George Washington University, and is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Missouri. Before beginning his career in psychology, Dr. Poirier was a teacher for sixteen years and principal for four years in private secondary schools. Dr. Poirier specializes in individual therapy with children and adolescents as well as family therapy. In addition, he conducts psychological evaluations for children, adolescents, and adults. Dr. Poirier treats issues such as depression, anxiety, personality disorders, school phobia, identity issues, bullying, poor academic performance, relationship issues, social adjustment difficulties, anger management, and problems with family or peers. He is a consultant to administrators and teachers as well as parents. Dr. Poirier has a background in issues relating to male growth and development. He is currently working as a therapist and consultant at West County Psychological Associates.

## Don't Forget!

Social skills groups for students of all ages are available at the WCPA office.

For elementary and middle school students, please contact Jennifer Gauvain.

For high school students, please contact Michael Mahon.