



The WCPA News

12125 Woodcrest Executive Drive, Suite 110 St. Louis, MO 63141
Website: WCPASTL.COM Phone (314) 275-8599 Email: wcpa@sbcglobal.net

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Adults Who Bully By Jennifer Bannister, MSW

Bullying by adults can begin in the most innocent of ways. The scenario may present itself in this way: Mrs. Jones picks up her daughter Emily from school. Emily gets in the car and tells her mom about how a friend was mean to her on the playground. Mrs. Jones calls another mother and shares the story, all with her daughter Emily listening. Emily then goes to school and tells her friends about her mother's conversation and negative talk about the other girl in the class. These friends tell their mothers, and pretty soon these girls and their mothers are all in one big "drama."

Many schools occasionally experience scenarios like these, which sometimes seem to spiral out of control. The spiral can result in family feuds, demands to keep children separated at school, and loud arguments in the drop-off lane. This type of adult behavior can lead to rumors, peer exclusion and bullying within school students and a great deal of administration's time being used.

Children today are faced with bullying in all areas of their lives. There are cyber bullies, school bullies, sports bullies and parental bullies. Bullying is no longer the big kid on the playground, trying to steal another child's lunch money. It is people of any age who intentionally cause harm to others through verbal harassment, physical assault, or other more subtle methods of coercion, termed relational aggression. Examples of relational aggression include manipulation, gossip and exclusion.

Bullying describes a form of harassment perpetrated by an abuser who possesses more physical and/or social power or dominance than the victim. Of course, most adults naturally possess such dominance over children. But, thankfully, most adults want the best for the children in their lives and wish to live in relative peace with their children's schools, sports teams, and organizations. Unfortunately, some other adults simply want their way. Like so many children of today, they have forgotten the need to postpone gratification, to compromise, and to empathize with others' feelings.

Adults who bully can be parents, teachers, coaches, administrators, or others within the school or community. It is assumed that such people are supposed to be role models; people a child could come to for help and support. However, in today's society, we hear so many stories of adults making children feel small, unimportant and insecure. These types of adults can sometimes try to do the same to their children's teachers, coaches, principals, and counselors.

Research indicates that adults who bully have personalities that are authoritarian, combined with a strong need to control or dominate. It has also been suggested that a deficit in social skills and a prejudicial view of subordinates can be particular risk factors. In this case, these adults view children, and even school professionals, as their subordinates.

Being bullied can damage lives. This is true whether the victim is a child or an adult. The effects of ongoing bullying can be long-term, with harm to the health and well-being of the bullied person lasting years. Bullying damages self-

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esteem, increases anxiety and can cause serious depression, sometimes years after the event. As any principal could share, every year schools lose students who choose to go elsewhere due to ongoing bullying from peers. But how many students, families, coaches or teachers do schools lose due to bullying by adults?

One local school recently addressed the issue within its Care Team. A teacher had been bullied by a parent to the point of considering leaving her job. This was a young, talented, energetic teacher – the kind that any school is lucky to have. But she had lost the joy of teaching, and her husband couldn't stand seeing her cry through one more evening. The mother of one of her students had been harassing her. This mother sent daily accusatory and defamatory emails to the young teacher, spread rumors about her in the hallways and pick-up lanes, and said that she was the worst teacher her children had ever experienced. In the end, the private school's principal and pastor had to tell this mother that she was barred from any further contact with the teacher and would have to meet with the two of them should she have any further complaints. The complaints stopped.

As far as the law is concerned, bullying alone is not often legally recognized as a cause for action concerning civil damages or criminal activity. Harassment, stalking and threats are usually recognized. Educators and school districts can be held liable for not properly addressing issues of bullying or harassment. It is a school's legal duty to take reasonable steps to discover and rectify acts of bullying. When discovered or reported, it is very important to document exact incidents of bullying and keep copies of all print materials (e.g. emails, faxes, notes, etc.) Schools must take reasonable steps to insure that victims feel safe from future bullying and that adequate supervision is present to prevent it from happening again.

Of course, when the bully is an adult, it can feel very challenging to adequately respond. However, bullies are likely to continue with their aggressive behavior until they are confronted and experience consequences for their behaviors. Whether it is children bullying children, adults bullying children, or adults bullying adults, **bullies will not stop unless they are held accountable**. Whether the victim is a student, a teacher, a coach or an administrator, that victim of bullying has the right to be treated with respect, to be spoken to respectfully, and to feel safe and valued within their capacity in the school community. There must be a zero tolerance policy toward bullying – whether from peers or from controlling adults. Schools are encouraged to utilize their Care Team, Principals' Consultation Group, and District or Archdiocesan officials to develop appropriate responses to specific incidents. Consistent application of policy is essential. Principals should feel empowered to deal assertively, consistently and directly with any adult who bullies a student or staff member of the school.

Jennifer Bannister, MSW, has extensive experience working with families in crisis and children who have survived crisis, trauma and/or abuse. She often works with families and/or attorneys who desire a therapist who is prepared to go to court and share findings and recommendations. She also has experience in working with families seeking adoption and in doing pre-adoption home studies. She specializes in working with children and adolescents and their families on issues surrounding school concerns, family dysfunction, crisis management, abuse and mental health.

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.

From the Director

We, in this office, have addressed the issue of bullying numerous times in our newsletters, through student, parent and teacher presentations, and in therapy. However, it has been limited to children bullying other children. Unfortunately, there appears to be a phenomenon that is becoming more common – adults bullying children. I wonder whether, in their zeal to be the “good” parent, these adults (often other parents) have gone beyond the pale, stepped massively over the line, and crossed serious boundaries in order to advocate for their children. Our schools are now being put in the position of becoming referees, not just with their students, but with parents. Unfortunately, we also see this poor behavior being played out in other arenas: the soccer field, cheerleading, the Science Fair.

It is more critical today than ever that schools create a climate that allows for no intimidating, no harassment, no bullying. The school’s climate cannot tolerate students, parents and other adults, including educators, acting in ways that are inconsistent with its philosophy or mission. If there are policies in place that address these issues, they must be consistently enforced. If not, schools must adopt viable and effective methods of handling these situations. For example, an offending parent would not be allowed to be on the school premises without a staff person with them; or asking the parent to take his/her child home until there is a meeting with the administrator. There have been leagues where student athletes are benched until the behavior of their parents improves. While these may seem like harsh consequences, they may be in order until everyone in the system knows that this behavior cannot be tolerated. As children learn from consequences, so do adults. To ignore this behavior only allows it to increase.

~ Mary

Did You Know? **Career Counseling and Assessment is Available**

WCPA offers assessment and counseling services for individuals who desire assistance in choosing or changing their career path. The career counseling program combines psychological testing, using interest and personality inventories, with face-to-face career counseling. This process helps identify patterns of interest, behavior, and preferences that one can translate into a successful and rewarding career.

Career counseling is beneficial for high school students who are considering their post-graduation options and are unsure of which path or college major to follow. Additionally, career counseling can be beneficial for adults who are considering a career change or who are unsatisfied with their current vocational status. Each individual is provided an in-depth, personalized approach to meet his or her specific needs and goals.

Contact Brandon Whittington at the office for more information.

Educational and Psychological Testing Services

The psychologists at WCPA provide a wide range of evaluation services, designed to help parents and teachers maximize each student’s potential. Dr. Susan Rosse received her doctorate from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Dr. Darla Swann is a former fellow from Johns Hopkins Medical Center. Drs. Rosse and Swann both provide educational and psychological evaluations for clients of all ages and provide consultation services to parents and schools.

Evaluations may focus on:

ADD/ADHD
Specific learning disabilities, including dyslexia
Language difficulties
Information processing difficulties
Social-Emotional issues

Each evaluation identifies:

Individual learning strengths & areas of difficulty
Recommendations for remediation approaches & study skills
Recommendations for accommodations in school & college
Recommendations for accommodations for testing services (i.e., ACT, SAT)

**Weekday and Saturday appointments are available.
Wait times are usually brief.**

Would you prefer to receive this newsletter electronically?

Electronic communication saves trees, time, and money!
Simply let us know the email address to which to send this newsletter, and we will begin with the next edition.



For Parents Only:
Coping with Adults Who Bully
By Jennifer Bannister, MSW

When one performs a Google search on the computer of the word “bully,” many synonyms pop onto the screen. These synonyms include: adult, belittle, bullying, childhood, confidence, gossip, intimidate, kids, parents, social, victim, and work, among others. One of the most shocking words is “adult.” Sadly, many of us have heard of or even experienced adults bullying other adults in the workplace. We have seen parents and coaches behaving inappropriately towards one another during children’s sports. Some people have even experienced an adult or group of adults who are trying to intimidate a school teacher or administrator. Unfortunately, there are also too many instances of adults who bully children.

We now live in a society where some adults feel free to intimidate, belittle and harm the confidence of children. In one example, a young father was witnessed screaming at the top of his lungs at his 6-year-old daughter during her soccer game. He was barking – go right!, go left!, kick it!, (expletive!), kick! – during the game. He would jump up and down, displaying angry histrionics.

Regrettably, athletic events seem to bring out the worst in some parents. They can seem to live vicariously through their children’s wins, losses, scores, and honors. This behavior trickles down, creating children who are more competitive and disrespectful with other children on the playing field. This competitiveness breeds all types of bullying behaviors, both by children and by adults.

These types of adults often do not stop with their own children; they may bully others’ children also. Today, it is not uncommon to hear of mothers who work the lunch room and watch their child’s table to see if the “popular” children are mingling with theirs. They may make comments about who is in the “in crowd” and who is not, comments about the designer brands, or lack of, that children wear. They ask for details about arguments between children, and then get involved themselves. These types of behaviors and comments are inappropriate for adults. They show children that it is acceptable to belittle and to classify children on popularity levels. These behaviors actually encourage children to be bullies, too.

Eventually, bullying can make children feel afraid, lonely, angry, distressed or physically ill. This is especially true when the child is being bullied by an adult. Children who are always “on guard” are always checking and wondering when it will happen again. When children are on alert like this, they are less able to concentrate and learn. Their friendships may suffer, as they are often worried and not ready to have fun. They may begin to feel they deserve their treatment and become withdrawn, isolated, and feel less able to fit into their world. The effects of ongoing bullying can be long-term, with the harm to the health and well-being of the bullied person lasting into adult life. It is therefore so important that children who are bullied get help to feel safe and valued, and to have the bullying stop.

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Of course, when the bully is an adult, it can feel very challenging to adequately respond. However, bullies of all ages are likely to continue with their aggressive behavior until they experience consequences for their behaviors. Whether it is children bullying children, adults bullying children, or adults bullying adults, **bullies will not stop unless they are held accountable**. Victims of bullying have the right to be treated with respect, to be spoken to respectfully, and to feel safe and valued. Parents can encourage their children's schools, teams, and other organizations to develop zero tolerance policies toward bullying – whether from peers or from controlling adults.

What should you do if you feel your child is a victim of adult bullying?

- Talk to your child and listen without judgment. Listen, listen, listen. Don't try to fix things the second you hear about them. Listen, ask questions, and clarify. Focus on your child, not on yourself, the school, or the adult bully.
- Empathize with your child. Tell them that bullying is wrong, not their fault, and that you are glad they had the courage to tell you about it. Ask your child what they think can be done to help.
- Assure him or her that you will think about what needs to be done and you will let him or her know.
- Check your emotions and **go slow**. A parent's protective instincts stir strong emotions. Although it is difficult, a parent is wise to step back and consider the next steps carefully. An angry letter or phone call in the heat of the moment is far less likely to truly help the situation than a more thoughtful response later on. Be careful and thoughtful about calls to other parents. Remember to keep supporting your child. Be prepared that your child may feel "done" with the situation before you do.
- Jot down some notes about the bullying incidents, so that your memories of the events are clear.
- Depending upon the circumstances, you may choose to address the adult who is allegedly bullying your child. When doing so, you should explain the incidents and how your child perceived them, then ask that the other adult make a specific change.
- Home is where the heart is. Make sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where he or she can take shelter, both physically and emotionally.

As parents, the best thing that we can do for our children is to lead by example. Use kind words when speaking with others. Speak kindly and appropriately about other children and encourage equality with your children. Speak respectfully about your child's teacher, school, and other parent in front of your child. Handle conflict with dignity. If at anytime you feel that further help is needed for your child, seek professional help. If you worry that perhaps you are the adult who bullies or you have a child who bullies other children, please seek help as well. It is time that we, as the adults, model appropriate conflict resolution, anger management, and empathy for others.

Jennifer Bannister, MSW, has extensive experience working with families in crisis and children who have survived crisis, trauma and/or abuse. She often works with families and/or attorneys who desire a therapist who is prepared to go to court and share findings and recommendations. She also has experience in working with families seeking adoption and in doing pre-adoption home studies. She specializes in working with children, adolescents and families on issues surrounding school concerns, family dysfunction, crisis management, abuse and mental health.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES: Spring Seminars

WCPA is pleased to announce our spring Professional Development Series. Your school will receive a fax about individual seminars, with seminar details and directions for registration. Feel free to register immediately for those that interest you – attempted registrations often exceed seminar capacity. Each seminar is geared toward education professionals: teachers, administrators, counselors, learning consultants, nurses, social workers, and others. They are brief, and held first thing in the morning to be convenient. Each will be held at the WCPA conference room, near the intersection of I-270 and Olive. **PLEASE NOTE: The cost is \$25 per attendee, per seminar. Continental breakfast will be served.**

MOTIVATING THE UNMOTIVATED STUDENT Thursday, January 18, 2008 8:30 - 10:30 a.m.

In this seminar, we will look at the numerous causes as to why so many of today's children seem academically unmotivated. There will be a discussion of how Locus of Control determines success for a student and the factors necessary to develop an Internal Locus of Control that insures future success. We will address the teacher's, parent's and student's responsibilities in student motivation. A specific step-by-step Model to Motivate Students will be presented.

CHILDHOOD ANXIETY Tuesday, March 4, 2008 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Schools now regularly serve students who have been diagnosed with anxiety disorders, in numbers and severity that simply weren't seen a generation ago. School professionals today must become prepared to understand and respond to students suffering from wide array of anxiety-related problems. Topics covered will include: Generalized Anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Panic Attacks, Social Anxiety and Selective Mutism, Separation Anxiety, and Trichotillomania.

INTERNET SAFETY Monday, March 10, 2008 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Today's schools, parents, and law officials are only beginning to grapple with the myriad implications of youth internet use. This program is geared toward school officials who want to learn more about what our kids are actually doing online, how to encourage them to be safe and responsible while online, and what schools can do to protect themselves, their reputations, their computer servers and their students from online harm.

OPEN FORUM ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE Thursday, April 10, 2008 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.

This topic is one that we often avoid because of our discomfort with it. The session will begin with statistics, information on indicators of sexual abuse and the intergenerational nature of abuse. It will assist participants in knowing what to do and what not to do when talking to a suspected abuse victim and relating to the student who has been sexually abused. The format will be conversational and informal – so please come with questions.

Current Groups at WCPA

High School Substance Abuse group

This treatment group is geared toward adolescents who have begun using alcohol or illegal drugs and those who are considered at-risk for use. It meets each Wednesday from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., on an eight week rotation, with six meetings for adolescents and two for parents. Cost is \$25 per session, with an 8 week commitment. Call Michael Mahon at the office for information.

ADHD Parent Support Group

Meets two Tuesdays per month, from 6:00-7:30 p.m. This group is for parents, grandparents, caregivers and anyone else interested in learning more about the challenges and joys of living with a child with ADHD. This group is facilitated by Darla Swann, Ph.D., 314-740-5112. Fee: \$30 per session with a six week commitment. Call Dr. Swann to register.

Social Skills Group

A group for children grades 1 to 6 who are currently experiencing difficulty in social situations with peers, will run eight consecutive Thursday evenings, from 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm, beginning January 24, 2008. The cost for participation will be \$30.00 per session, with an eight week commitment. A parent interview is mandatory, prior to the start of the group. Class size is limited. Please contact Jennifer Bannister at 314-275-8599 ext. 90 for more information or to register.

“Children in Transition” support group

For children who are in grades 1 to 6, who have parents that are separated, divorcing or already divorced. Group will run ten consecutive evenings beginning late January. The cost is \$30.00 per session, with a ten week commitment. A parent interview is mandatory, prior to joining group. Class size is limited. Contact Jennifer Bannister for information/to register.



Schools, feel free to post or distribute as appropriate.

MOTHER – DAUGHTER COMMUNICATION SEMINAR FOR MOMS WITH DAUGHTERS IN 6th, 7th, AND 8th GRADES

WEEK 1 - ACTIVE LISTENING

Learn how to really listen to each other. Find out what to do and what NOT to do! We'll talk about listening for feelings instead of content. Get a chance to practice with other mothers and daughters.

WEEK 2 – CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict is a normal part of life, but we often think there's a problem merely because there is conflict. We'll learn about the different approaches to conflict and will go through a brief questionnaire designed to identify your usual method of dealing with conflict.

WEEK 3 – FOCUS ON FEELINGS

What role do feelings play? How do they help guide our behavior? When does focusing on feelings just get us in trouble? Learn a 5-step formula to help you deal with difficult situations.

WEEK 4 – DAUGHTERS' ISSUES / MOTHERS' ISSUES

The facilitator will lead the daughters in a discussion of the challenges of pre-teen/early teen life. (Moms, no comment!) This will be followed by a discussion of the mom's side of the story. (Daughters listen in.)

Facilitator: Mary Saggau, MSW Mary currently serves as a school consultant, professional speaker, school counselor and therapist for adolescents and their families.

MOTHER – DAUGHTER COMMUNICATION SEMINAR
To register, Fax form to 314-275-8299 or Call Mary Saggau at (314) 275-8599

Mom's name _____
Daughter's name _____ Grade _____
Phone: _____ Email _____

PLEASE SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

(Respond early, as registration in each section is limited to allow maximum participation.)

_____ Saturday afternoons from 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.; February 2, 9, 16 & 23

_____ Monday nights from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.; February 4, 11, 18 & 25

Cost is \$150. This includes a one-time brief meeting with mom and the four group sessions.