

# CLASSROOM



connection

## Sticks and stones will break your bones... but names can hurt forever

### Relational bullying in junior high school

With all the talk about school-age bullying, the focus tends to be on the physical forms of bullying, particularly among boys. Researchers who study the behavior of girls from preschool through the college years have found that girls can be just as aggressive as boys, but often in different ways. Instead of fighting with their fists, girls tend to lash out with words and by excluding others.

Cliques, taunts, rumors and name-calling — often dismissed as rites-of-passage during the pre-teen and teenage years — are in fact bullying that can hurt as much, if not more, than physical blows. Research shows children who are emotionally or relationally bullied can suffer high levels of stress, depression and loneliness. Depending on the extent of the bullying, the emotional scars may stay with them well into adulthood. Victims of bullying may find it hard to form friendships and work well in groups because of a lack of trust. They may also have difficulty controlling their emotions and may turn to drugs, alcohol or experiment early with sex as a way of coping with their pain.

Unlike physical bullying, relational bullying is often subtle and under-the-radar: a nasty look in class, name-calling as students pass in the hall, derogatory instant messaging or e-mail. Teachers and parents can easily miss the signs. By the time most children have the courage to tell a friend or adult what's happening, the emotional bullying has likely been going on for quite some time, along with lots of damage to self-esteem and confidence.

### Helping kids cope with relational bullying

Knowing how to deal with relational bullying can be difficult for families. Many find it hard to believe that the sweet little girls they knew in fourth grade are now junior high school enemies. In her book *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, Rosalind Wiseman writes that competition during the preteen and teenage years about looks, popularity, friends, boys, grades and sports are often what drive girls apart and encourages them to bully each other.

Prevention and early education can go a long way toward helping your children weather relational bullying.

Following are some suggestions collected from parents whose children have been bullied, from counselors and resource officers who work with junior high schoolers and from popular research on the topic:

► **Keep the lines of communication open.** Though junior high school is a time when children begin to pull away from their families and look more to their friends for guidance and approval, you are still a very important part of their lives. Take the time each day to ask your children open ended questions - those that require more than a "yes," "no" or

"nothing" to answer. Ask about friends, school, their likes and dislikes and patiently listen to what they answer. Even if it seems trivial to you, it's what's important to them. These daily conversations about anything and everything will give you insight into their lives and may provide clues about what's troubling them, like bullying.

*How to Say it to Girls* by Nancy Gruver (from *New Moon* publishing or available on-line at [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org)), offers ideas to help you keep the lines of communication open with your growing children.

► **Know your children's friends and their families.** Your child's circle of friends may change or expand once he or she enters junior high school. This is a time when many students begin to learn about themselves. Establishing new friendships is as much a part of self-expression as the clothes they wear or how they style their hair. Knowing who your kids are hanging out with, and what they and their families value, can help as you guide your child toward bully-free relations.

► **Practice what you preach.** Though it may not always seem like it, preteens and teens still look to their parents for guidance on how to navigate their world. By responding calmly to stressful situations and being tolerant of others'

differences, you send a positive message to your children about how adults act.

► **Let your children know, from an early age, that relational bullying can happen.** Ideally, families should begin talking about bullying when children are young — more and more, relational bullying is happening during the elementary years. [See page two of this newsletter for some good resources on how to talk with your children about bullying in its many forms.] Studies by The Ophelia Project ([www.opheliaproject.org](http://www.opheliaproject.org)) show that 50 percent of junior high school students do not report relational aggressive behaviors to teachers or administrators. Let children know it is important to report bullying. Make it safe for your children to tell you about the things they have seen and what bothers them. Parents are also encouraged to call the principal or guidance counselor to report bullying of any kind.



## Knox community is **working together to build character**

From anti-bullying initiatives to a welcoming committee to help students adjust to life at a new school, Knox Junior High's character education program is making a difference.

"When you bring all of the little programs together," said Knox Principal David Carr, "in the end, you have a program with great results."

The character education program helps students deal with a variety of social problems through ideas and strategies that are brainstormed and carried out by students.

### Welcome to Knox

The new student welcoming committee, headed by Knox Junior High School Guidance Counselor, Sarah Diefendorf, has been a success. The program is designed to help ease the stressful experience of attending a new school. With teacher recommendations, seventh and eighth grade students can volunteer to conduct building tours, provide locker help and sit with new students at lunch.

### Character Counts

Both staff and students are participating in a series of anti-bullying workshops. Laurie Casey, program educator for Catholic Charities, is conducting two workshops for faculty. The workshops focus on identifying various forms of bullying as well as what to do when you see acts of bullying occur. Seventh grade students will learn similar coping strategies in health class through an eight-session program.

Additionally, the Shared Decision Making Committee

(SDM) - comprised of staff, parents, and students - will continue to conduct meetings throughout the school year to discuss ideas that further improve the school environment.

Students proposed a variety of plans to promote character education. Seventh graders suggested creating posters throughout the course of their anti-bullying training, which will educate and remind students of the positive behavior expected in school. In addition, all junior high school students will have the opportunity to express their personal feelings about such topics by writing creative essays.

To further emphasize the importance of these programs, the school will schedule a character education assembly along with a day where students and their parents can watch a movie that focuses on bullying.

SDM committee members encourage students and parents to participate by attending their monthly meetings.

## SDM Meetings

All SDM meetings will be held in the Knox library on the following dates. Please call the Knox main office at 762-3711 for meeting times.

<b>January 10</b>	<b>April 11</b>
<b>February 14</b>	<b>May 9</b>
<b>March 14</b>	<b>June 13</b>

## PTSA Meetings

All PTSA meetings will be held in the Knox library at 6:30 p.m. on the following dates.

<b>January 6</b>	<b>April 7</b>
<b>February 3</b>	<b>May 5</b>
<b>March 3</b>	<b>June 2</b>

## The ugly face of bullying

### Bullying can take several forms:

- ▶ **Physical:** hitting, kicking, stealing or damaging the victim's property.
- ▶ **Verbal:** using words to hurt or humiliate.
- ▶ **Relational:** spreading rumors, excluding a person from the peer group.
- ▶ **Prejudicial:** making racial slurs; making fun of cultural, religious or other differences.
- ▶ **Sexual harassment:** using suggestive words or inappropriate touch.

Bullying usually occurs between individuals who are not friends. The bully may be bigger, tougher or have the power to exclude others from his or her social group.

Lots of students joke around with each other. This may include name-calling or rough housing, but these incidents are not necessarily bullying. Bullying has three characteristics that sets it apart:

- ▶ There is a power difference between the bully and the victim.
- ▶ The bully intends to hurt, embarrass or humiliate the other person.
- ▶ The behavior is repeated, sometimes with others, with the same person, or with the same person over time.

## Books and online resources for families on bullying:

### FOR PARENTS:

- ▶ **Cliques: 8 Steps to Help Your Child Survive the Social Jungle** by Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese
- ▶ **The Safe Child Book: A Commonsense Approach to Protecting Children and Teaching Children to Protect Themselves** by Sherryl K. Kraizer
- ▶ **What to Do...When Kids Are Mean to Your Child (What to Do Parenting Guides, Vol. 1)** by Elin McCoy
- ▶ **Odd Girl Out: The Culture of Hidden Aggression in Girls** by Rachel Simmons
- ▶ **Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence** by Rosalind Wiseman

### FOR STUDENTS:

- ▶ **My Secret Bully** by Tracy Ludwig
- ▶ **Why is Everybody Always Picking on Me? A Guide to Handling Bullies** by Terrence Webster-Doyle
- ▶ **Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid's Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem** by Gershen Kaufman, Pamela Espeland and Lev Raphael
- ▶ **Bullies Are a Pain in the Brain** by Trevor Romain
- ▶ **Cliques, Phonies, and Other Baloney** by Trevor Romain
- ▶ **How to Handle Bullies, Teasers and Other Meanies: A Book That Takes the Nuisance Out of Name Calling and Other Nonsense** by Kate Cohen-Posey
- ▶ **How to Make, Keep, and Grow Your Friendships** by New Moon Books Girls' Editorial Board
- ▶ **www.kidshealth.org:** This Web site, organized into sections for parents, kids and teens, offers practical advice (in both English and Spanish) on a range of topics, including bullying.