

Bullying Prevention Theater

Parent Information Packet



Westwood Youth
&
Family Services

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Project Overview

Bullying is an epidemic in our schools. Research shows that between 1 in 4 and 1 in 3 students have experienced bullying, with most bullying incidents occurring during the middle school years. In response to this alarming statistic, Westwood Youth & Family Services, with the support of the Foundation for Westwood Education, developed Bullying Prevention Theater in 2011. This unique program was created by both adult staff and high school students with a primary goal of creating a realistic and powerful way to educate and support the 6th grade students of Westwood on the topic of bullying.

The main focus of the program is to provide guidance to the children who are bystanders in bullying situations. Research shows that bystanders not only make up the majority of individuals involved in bullying scenarios, but they also have the most power to initiate and maintain a positive change. When bystanders intervene on behalf of the victim, over half of the time, bullying stops within 10 seconds (Espalage, Pigott & Polanin, 2012).

Bullying Prevention Theater is a live presentation performed by high school students who are members of the Westwood Youth & Family Services Mentor Program. The presentation is approximately 30 minutes in length and is comprised of five skits, which include realistic solutions to the bullying situations presented with a focus on bystander intervention. Each skit depicts a different form of bullying related to the topics of gender, special needs, the internet, and sexual orientation.

After the presentation, there will be 45-minute breakout groups run by a group of trained high school Mentors and one adult staff member. The purpose of these groups will be to reinforce the information presented in the skits and discuss actual, current bullying situations along with potential solutions. The entire presentation is interactive and intends to both teach and draw solutions from the audience.

In addition to the presentation and discussion groups, all 6th grade students, parents and teachers receive information packets. The student packets provide information to reinforce the behaviors and ideas presented in the skits as well as related tips and resources. The parent and teacher packets provide information about how to support children who are victims, perpetrators, or bystanders of bullying situations.

Massachusetts Definitions of Bullying **M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O**

Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof directed at a target that:

- i. Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property
- ii. Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property
- iii. Creates a hostile environment at school for the target
- iv. Infringes on the rights of the target at school
- v. Materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school

Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant message, text messages, and Internet postings.

A **hostile environment** is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses and has reliable information about bullying. Retaliation shall be prohibited.

Westwood Public Schools Definitions of Bullying

Bullying is defined as the repeated use by one or more individuals of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at the victim that causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property, places the victim in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property, creates a hostile environment at school for the victim, infringes on the rights of the victim at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Cyber-bullying is defined as bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include but is not limited to electronic mail, internet communications, instant messaging, posting on social networking sites, or facsimile communications. Cyber-bullying includes creating a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identify of another person, the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, or the distribution by electronic means or communication of messages that meets the definition of bullying above, whether distributed directly or creating a posting that may be accessing by one or more persons.

A *Hostile Environment* is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

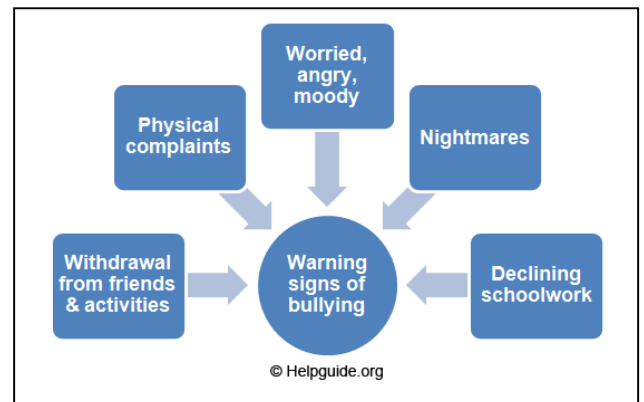
Aggressor is a student or a member of school staff including, but not limited to, an educator, administrator, school nurse, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, athletic coach, advisor to an extracurricular activity or paraprofessional who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

Retaliation against any person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is strictly prohibited.

Warning Signs Regarding Bullying

Possible warning signs that a child *is being bullied* include:

- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches
- Has few, if any friends, with whom he or she spends time
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, or taking part in organized activities with peers (such as clubs or sports)
- Takes a long, "illogical" route when walking to or from school
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Experiences a loss of appetite
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem
- May think about suicide



Possible warning signs that your child *is a bully* include:

- Positive views towards violence
- Often aggressive towards adults even parents and teachers
- Marked need to control and dominate others
- Hot tempered, impulsive, easily frustrated
- Often tests limits and breaks rules
- Good at talking their way out of difficult situations
- Show little sympathy towards those who get bullied
- Quick to blame others and unwilling to accept responsibility for their own actions
- Lacks empathy, compassion, and understanding for others' feelings
- Are bullied themselves
- Have immature social and interpersonal skills

- Finds themselves trying to fit in with a peer group that encourages bullying
- Have parents that do not provide consistent limits, discipline, or supervision

What to Do If You Suspect Your Child *Is Being Bullied*

Children do not always tell their parents that they are being bullied. Often, they are ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid of both the bullies and being seen as a tattler. If your child comes to you and tells you they are being bullied, it has taken a lot of courage for them to do so. It is also an obvious sign that they need your help.

The first thing you must do is be supportive to your child and gather any information that you can about what is going on:

1. Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. If they could ignore it, they would. Sometimes ignoring the bullying can cause it to get more serious. Let them know that telling you was the right thing to do.
2. Do not blame your child or ask what they have done to cause the bullying. Let them know that having feelings of anger, sadness, or fear are normal in these situations.
3. Do not criticize your child if you disagree with how they may have handled the situation so far. Help your child to make a plan of other ways they can handle these situations.
4. Ask your child to describe the bullying incidents and listen carefully. Gather information such as who was involved and when and where the incidents happened.
5. Empathize with your child. Make sure that they know that bullying is wrong, and it's not their fault. Ask your child what they think might help the situation. Let your child know what you are going to do about the problem.
6. Do not encourage your child to solve the problem with violence. If your child hits another student, this can cause them to get suspended or expelled.

The second step is to contact school staff about the problem:

1. Make an appointment to speak with your child's teacher.
2. Do not go into the school angry assuming the school staff knows what is going on and is doing nothing about it. Often, bullies will do things out of ear shot and eye sight of adults.
3. Remain calm and give the teacher as many facts about what is going on as possible.
4. Ask the teacher to keep a watch on what is going on. Make it clear to the teacher that you are trying to help your child and the other students in the class from being hurt.
5. Emphasize that you would like to work with the school to help solve the problem. Ask what the teacher feels you might be able to do to help the situation and your child. Make a plan with the school to help your child.
6. Do not contact the parents of the student who is doing the bullying. Allow the school to do that if it needs to be done.
7. Expect the bullying to stop. Check in with your child regularly about what is going on. If the bullying does not stop, contact the school again. The next time, you may want to contact the school principal.

The third step is to work with your child:

1. Do things that will help raise your child's self-esteem and confidence. Offer your child lots of praise and compliments. Encourage your child to develop talents and participate in activities where they can learn, grow, and have fun.
2. Encourage your child to make contact with friendly peers in their school. Positive peer interactions will help the situation.
3. Help your child to make friends out of the school environment.
4. Teach your child how to advocate for themselves and ask for help when they need it from both you and their teachers.
5. Try and determine if your child lacks social skills that are appropriate for their age. If you feel your child may be behind in this area, take them to a counselor to help improve those skills.
6. Maintain open lines of communication with your child.

It is important to be aware of your child and their social interactions. If your child has not been able to tell you about being bullied, but he or she is showing signs of being bullied, the first step is to start a discussion with your child about the topic.

Talk with your child. Tell your child that you are concerned and that you'd like to help. Here are some questions that can get the discussion going:

Some direct questions:

“I'm worried about you. Are there any kids at school who may be picking on you or bullying you?”

“Are there any kids at school who tease you or are mean to you?”

“Are there any kids at school who leave you out or exclude you on purpose?”

Some less direct questions:

“Who are your friends at school this year? Who do you hang out with?”

“Who do you sit with at lunch?”

“Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why don't you like them?”

Please keep in mind that any kind bullying can have serious effects on a child. If you determine that your child has been bullied and is struggling with the effects from that, they may need to see a counselor for help. If you are not aware of local resources consult school staff for some suggestions.

What To Do If You Suspect Your Child *Is A Bully*

1. Talk with your child about what is happening. Ask your child questions about why he or she may be bullying. Try and get information from them about how they feel about themselves, whether or not they are being bullied by someone, or if the friends they spend time with are bullies.
2. Be sure that your child does not have some type of disability. Sometimes kids who have behavior that looks like traditional bullying actually have some kind of disability.
3. Teach your child the concepts of empathy and compassion. Trying to help your child understand the perspective of a child who is bullied might be helpful.
4. Make your house rules clear on bullying. Your child should always know that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated. Have clear consistent consequences for your child if they bully someone and take immediate action on them.
5. Be a positive role model at all times with your child. Demonstrate appropriate conflict resolution skills and empathetic behavior.
6. Give your child positive feedback when they do something right. Always show them love and support even when needing to deliver consequences to them.
7. Seek help if bullying becomes a pattern for your child. Asking for help from the school, your child's doctor, or a counselor are all good places to start.

If Your Child Is a Bystander

Research has shown that bystanders make up the largest group and can have the greatest impact on bullying situations. Odds are your child is a bystander. Despite the fact that they are not a bully or a victim, they still need your help and encouragement.

- Encourage your child to stand up to bullies in a safe way. Remind them that victims may not be able or know how to stand up for themselves, and that they need your child's help.
 - Help your child to come up with a plan of how they can help victims when they are being bullied. They may need concrete things they can do or say in bully situations.
 - Listen to your child's fears about standing up to a bully and help them problem solve.
 - Encourage your child to find other friends that are bystanders that are also willing to speak up and help.
 - Make sure your child has a list of adults at school that they trust and can confidentially speak to if they see bullying that persists.
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Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can involve sending mean or threatening messages or images, posting private information or lies, and pretending to be someone else to make people look bad or hurt others. It is done through emails, instant messaging, texting, social networking sites, blogs, or chat rooms. It can occur any time of the day or night. It can happen quickly and can be seen by a wide audience. It is often done anonymously.

Tips for Dealing with Cyberbullying

- Remind your child that cyberbullying is wrong and has serious legal consequences.
- Tell your child that if he/she is being bullied over their phone or on the Internet to save the messages.
- Help your child to block people who are sending hurtful messages.
- Remind your child to not give their passwords out, so that their online accounts cannot get broken into.
- Remind your child to not share personal information online.
- Keep home computers in a shared space in the house.
- Make sure that you have access to your child's accounts.
- If your child is a cyberbully victim, please keep in mind that they may need counseling.
- Contact your child's school about the issue.
- If it is a serious case, call the police.

Parent Resources

Books

Understanding School Bullying: A Guide for Parents and Teachers

Mona O'Moore, 2011.

Queen Bees and Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World

Rosalind Wiseman, 2009.

Dealing With Bullying in Schools: A Training Manual for Teachers, Parents, and Other Professionals

Mona O'Moore/ Stephen James Minton, 2004.

Odd Girl Out Revised and Updated: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls

Rachel Simmons, 2002.

Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding To Cyber Bullying

Sameer Hinduja/Justin Patchin 2009.

The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle

Barbara Coloroso, 2003.

Why Good Kids Act Cruel: The Hidden Truth About the Preteen Years

Carl E. Pickhardt, 2010.

The Parent's Guide to Texting, Facebook, and Social Media: Understanding the Benefits and Dangers of Parenting in a Digital World

Shawn Marie Edgington, 2011.

Parent's Guide to Preventing and Responding to Bullying: Presented by School Bullying Council (Volume 1)

Dr. Jason Thomas, 2011.

Websites

General Topic

Stop Bullying (Federal Level)

www.stopbullying.gov/

Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater College

<http://vc.bridgew.edu/marc/>

Wired Safety

www.wiredsafety.org/

Parent Further

www.parentfurther.com/high-risk-behaviors/bullying

Cyberbullying

Stop Cyberbullying

stopcyberbullying.org/

LGBTQ

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network

www.glsen.org/

For more information about local resources, please contact
Westwood Youth & Family Services at 781-320-1006 or at youth@townhall.westwood.ma.us