

## **Bullying: An Interactive PTO/School Council Community Conversation**

### **Cyber-bullying Scenario**

A group of six fifth grade girls (from the same class) had a slumber party at one of the girl's houses. They listened to music and downloaded songs, played games, called friends on their cell phones, and sent emails back and forth to other acquaintances from their class and from the other classes at school. Throughout the evening the parents poked their heads into their daughter's bedroom to ask if the kids needed anything. Otherwise, their daughter's door was closed all evening while the kids took part in their activities.

At some point one of the girls suggested that they choose a boy from their class and make a list of the "Ten Things They Hate" about him. A couple of the girls seemed a bit hesitant, but the stronger personalities prevailed and the next hour was spent with this group sharing their "hate" list with the other girls during email chats. A variety of lists were circulated and by the time they were done probably twenty girls throughout the fifth grade had seen at least one version of the list.

One of the girls in another class printed out a version of the email that had some very hurtful language ("he's fat, he's ugly, he has pimples, etc."), and brought it into school on Monday. She passed it around for several of the girls to look at. When the classroom teacher saw these girls giggling, she came over and asked to see the piece of paper. After reading what was on the page, the teacher tried to figure out the best way to approach the situation.

Questions to discuss:

- What are some thoughts and feelings that you had while reading this scenario?
- How do you think the teacher should respond to this situation?
- What responsibility does the parent who hosted the slumber party have in this situation?
- Who are the bullies in this scenario? The bystanders? The victim?
- What other adults do you think should get involved to help out in this situation? Why?
- What do you think would be the best approach for helping these girls to understand the severity of their actions?
- What could have been done to prevent this situation?

### **Playground Scenario**

The second graders are outside at recess. A group of three boys is off playing by themselves. Another boy, Carl, approaches them and asks if he can play with them. One of the three boys says that they have formed a club and since Carl is not a member he cannot play. Carl asks about the club and the boy says that Carl can not join the club. The boy says it is the "cool" club and Carl is not cool enough to be in the club.

Carl keeps persisting, saying he wants to play and asking how he can get into the club. Finally, the same boy says that if Carl smears dirt on his face they will let him in the club. Carl points out that none of the other boys have dirt on their faces. The boys reply that it does not matter – if Carl wants to be in the club that is what he needs to do.

Questions to discuss:

- What are some thoughts and feelings that you had while reading this scenario?
- At which point in the scenario do you think bullying has occurred?
- How should a teaching assistant (or other adult outside at recess) respond to this situation?
- Who are the bullies in this scenario? The bystanders? The victim?
- What could have been done to prevent this situation?
- If you were Carl's parent and he told you what happened, what would you have advised him to do?

After our break-out sessions with the scenarios, we came together to talk about our reactions and how to help children, parents and teachers and where to go as a community on this issue.

People in each group had different reactions to each scenario. It was noted the amount of time the parents and school need to have to deal with bullying problems. People expressed help for the bully instead of just punishment.

**What will help the Children? Opinions from parents and teachers shared as a group.**

- Scenarios like these done in classrooms.
- Scenarios go home to parents.
- Students should be comfortable to tell an adult about bullying.
- Build self-esteem with children at home and school.
- Communicate expectation of good behavior and interaction with all children.
- Develop empathy.
- Resolution for everyone.

**What Will Help Parents & Teachers? Opinions from parents and teachers shared as a group.**

- Parents are not alone in bullying situations and it can happen to anyone.
- There needs to be a cooperative element: parents with parents and teachers with parents to deal with the situation.
- Educate parents that the attitude of “some element of teasing will always happen” is the wrong attitude.
- Educate the educators.
- Collaborative material to go home to encourage parents to have needed discussions.
- Develop an anti-bullying policy and pledge for all students and parents to sign.

**Unanswered Questions and Where to Go? Opinions from parents and teachers shared as a group.**

- There is not one specific answer as to how to report bullying and follow-up, each situation is different.
- Does Merriam have a catch phase for making sure everyone is included in play?
- How to get the rest of the community involved in the issue?
- There needs to be responsibility and consequences.
- Theoretical discussions need to be put into application.
- Resources and written guidelines available as we go home this evening.