

Bullying.

Thank you for being here. Really. I can't believe you came to this.

▶ This was the flyer...

**BULLYING PREVENTION CONFERENCE
FEATURED SPEAKER**



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Registration and Information at AntiBullyingInstitute.org
FREE Parent Classes and Other Programming Information 951.682.2753

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RIVERSIDE MEDICAL CLINIC
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Annual Conference
November 19, 2019
\$100 • 8-3:30
Meals and Parking Included

For the record,
this was the
photo. (They
should have
cropped me out
and left the
dog.)



Our objectives.

- ▶ To clearly define what bullying is – and is not.
- ▶ To understand why bullying behavior occurs (the function of the behavior).
- ▶ To differentiate between the different types of bullying.
- ▶ To look at effective prevention.
- ▶ To look at effective ways to deal with it after it has occurred.

Is this bullying?





So...we all know what bullying is,
right?

- ▶ With your neighbor, discuss what bullying is for about 30 seconds.

Bullying is-

- ▶ Repeated
- ▶ Intentional
- ▶ Over time
- ▶ Causes harm
- ▶ Involves a person/group of greater power over the victim
- ▶ Victim feels helpless to respond

Bullying is not-

- ▶ single episode of social rejection or dislike
- ▶ single episode acts of nastiness or spite
- ▶ random acts of aggression or intimidation
- ▶ mutual arguments, disagreements or fights

The above points are not acceptable!

But they are not “bullying.”

Why not? Why can't it be one of those things?

- ▶ Bullying is a specific behavior.
- ▶ It has a function – there is a reason why people bully.
- ▶ When we understand the function, we also understand why those other things are not bullying. They need to be addressed differently from bullying.

Why do we want to focus on the definition?

- ▶ If we are going to prevent it or apply corrective consequences, we have to know what we're dealing with.
- ▶ If your eye doctor simply determined that everyone who came into the office with blurry vision had glaucoma, would you think that doctor was effective?
- ▶ Some behaviors that look similar have entirely different functions and need to be treated differently.

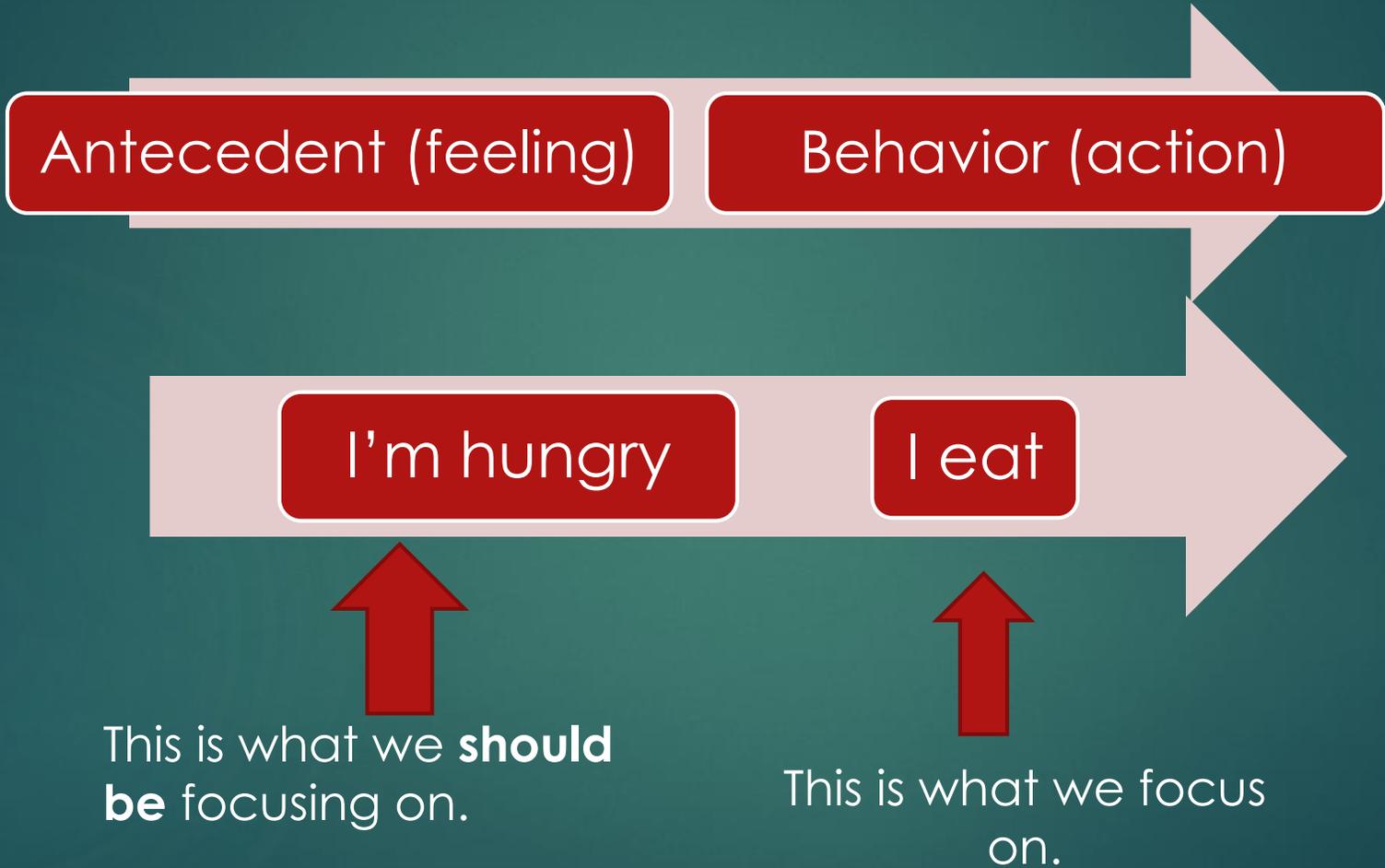
Who bullies and power.

- ▶ This is not just a student – student issue.
- ▶ Teachers can bully students.
- ▶ Sometimes, (think substitutes or first year teachers) students can bully the adult.
- ▶ Where there is a perception of relative power, a bully will find it, regardless of age.
 - ▶ Administrator -> Teacher
 - ▶ Teacher -> Teacher

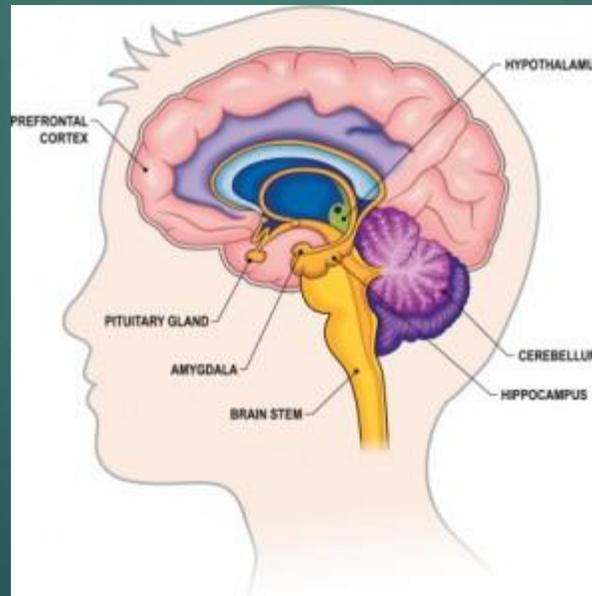
Behavior.

- ▶ Behavior is the act of attempting to get something or get away from something.
- ▶ All behavior is driven by something (an antecedent).

Behavior - The act of getting something, or getting away from something.

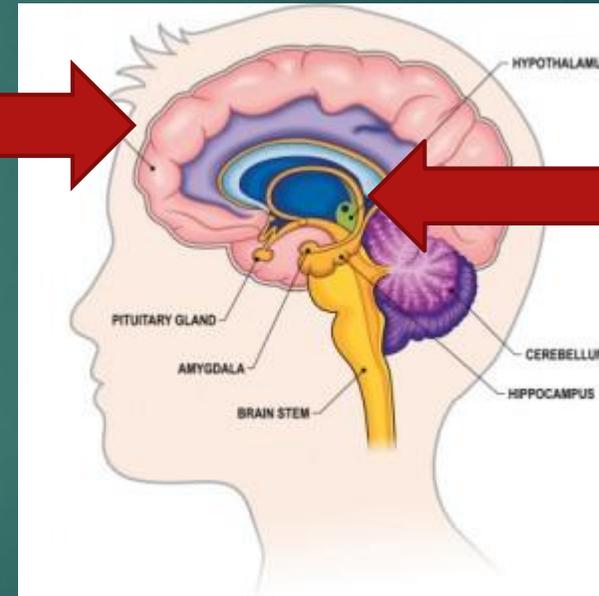


To understand behavior, we have to take a look at the part of the body that drives behavior.



We are only going to look at two areas of the brain.

- ▶ The limbic system (contains the amygdalae)
 - ▶ All about survival
 - ▶ Triggers fight, flight or freeze
 - ▶ Non-verbal
 - ▶ Emotional response
- ▶ The prefrontal cortex
 - ▶ Logic, predictive thinking
 - ▶ Higher-order thinking
 - ▶ Regulatory part



For the visual learners:

Limbic system



Prefrontal cortex



A simple 15 second activity.

- ▶ Look at your neighbor and say: “It’s nice to see you!” “I’m glad you’re here!”
- ▶ Shake their hand.
- ▶ If it’s not weird, give them a hug.
- ▶ What just happened?

We are going to talk about one hormone: Oxytocin.

- ▶ Oxytocin is sometimes called “the love hormone”
- ▶ When we feel bonded with an individual or group, oxytocin is released
- ▶ It feels good to be part of a community
- ▶ This good feeling serves functions...of course
- ▶ By being part of a group, we are protected
- ▶ By being bonded to an individual, we have the opportunity to pass on our genes

Oxytocin: the dark side.

- ▶ Where there is an “us,” by necessity there must be a “them.”
- ▶ We like insiders.
- ▶ We naturally are wary of outsiders.
- ▶ If you doubt the power of Oxytocin, look at national politics – we have such a clearly defined “us” and “them” and an immediate prejudgment of the “them.”

The primary function of the brain is survival.

- ▶ Survival is tricky because what allows us to survive and thrive in modern times is not necessarily what allowed our ancestors to survive.
- ▶ We have the genes of our ancestors.
- ▶ Our brains are not much different from when we (humanity) were living as hunter/gatherer tribes following herds – prior to farming/permanent settlements.
- ▶ Society has changed dramatically in the past couple thousand years – our brains have not kept pace with the changes.

We are the survivors.

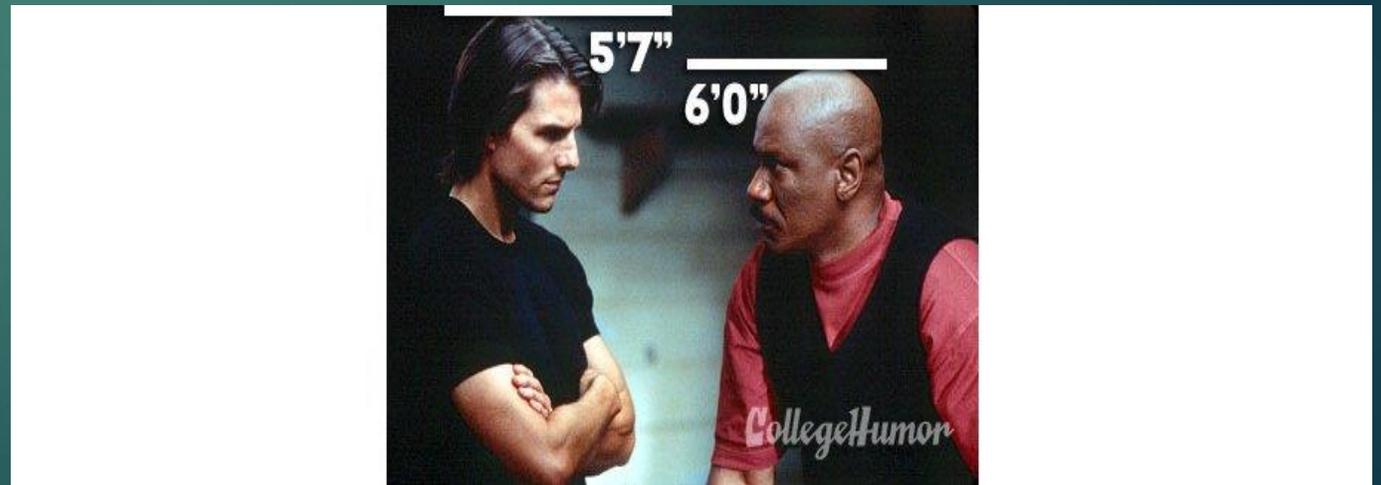
- ▶ We are the product of an unbroken line of genes that go back to the earliest ancestors.
- ▶ This means each of our ancestors made decisions – “behaved” – in such a way that allowed them to procreate before they died.
- ▶ **Behavior that did not encourage survival did not get passed on.**



#WINNING

If you think we left our hunter-gatherers behind...

- ▶ Kids are innately afraid of the dark – with good reason.
- ▶ Tall people are considered more attractive.
- ▶ We worry. A lot.



Let's start at the beginning: a child in a hunter/gatherer tribe.

- ▶ The child is kept near the dwelling.
- ▶ The child is protected.
- ▶ The child is fed.
- ▶ The child is nurtured.
- ▶ When it's cold or dark, the child is near the fire.
- ▶ Mom is always there.

- ▶ This seems pretty nice.

But the child grows up and changes have to happen.

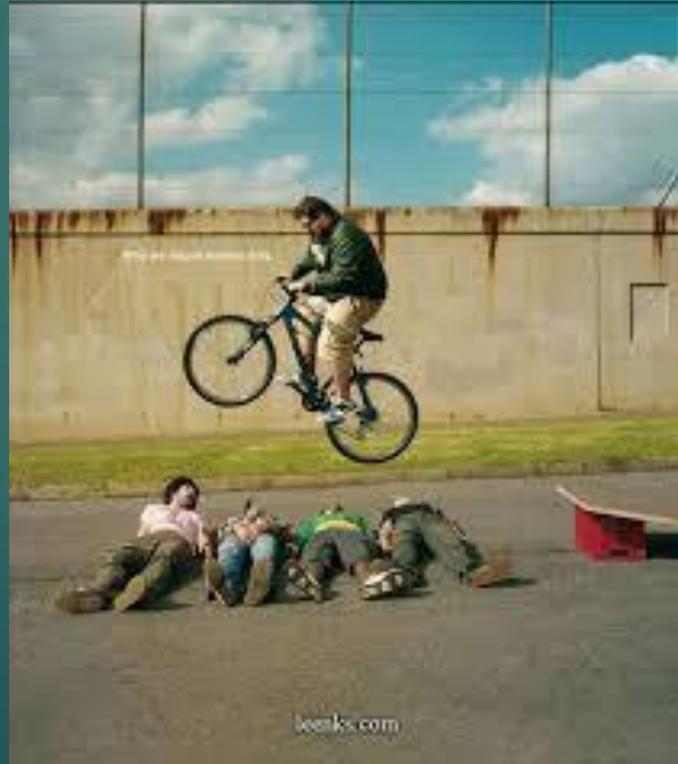
- ▶ The child becomes bigger and eats more.
- ▶ The adolescent needs to contribute to the hunting/gathering or eventually the tribe will starve.
- ▶ Adolescents need to reproduce both for the survival of their genes and for the tribe's survival.
- ▶ The adolescent has to want to move from comfort and safety toward scary situations, like hunting and bearing children.
- ▶ These moves will not happen unless the brain starts to change in adolescence.

The teen brain

- ▶ Has to be concerned with its status with potential mates
 - ▶ Socially aware – even hypersensitive
- ▶ Wants to be judged favorably by adults it considers important
- ▶ Has to move toward independence
- ▶ Has to be intrigued by higher-risk behaviors (we can talk about baseline dopamine levels if there's time)
- ▶ Wants to reproduce as successfully as possible
- ▶ Impulsive – decisions still driven by the limbic system (emotional, not forward-thinking)

The teen brain.

- ▶ The prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to develop.
- ▶ While the prefrontal cortex is developing, the limbic system makes the decisions.
 - ▶ **Decisions are emotional, immediate (not forward thinking)**



What evolutionary functions are served by bullying?

- ▶ Improved social status – better mates
- ▶ Asserting dominance over others – making oneself essential to the tribe
- ▶ Getting more resources – food means strength, less likely to become sick
- ▶ Culling the weak (drain on resources)

Bullying doesn't necessarily mean something is wrong with the kid.

- ▶ Peaks around age 13-14 (for our friends who work in grades 7-8, we feel your pain)
- ▶ Between 100-600 million adolescents engage in it (depending on how we want to define "repeated") annually
- ▶ Crosses all cultures

Why aren't we all bullies, then?

- ▶ There are risks (costs) as well as rewards.
- ▶ Bullying is theorized to be a “facultative adaption,” meaning that even though we have a genetic tendency toward being bullies, we need the right environment to “turn on” the genes/behavior.
- ▶ Costs involve strong adult sanctions, cultural taboos, and predicting if an individual can successfully bully (does the intended victim have traits that would make bullying backfire).

The “Pure Bully” – think of this as “Patient Zero”

- ▶ Male bullies tend to be larger and stronger than non-bullies
- ▶ Pure bullies are reported to have better mental health than non-bullies and bullying victims
- ▶ Tend to enter puberty earlier, date/mate earlier and more often
- ▶ Boys who bully other boys are more accepted by girls, suggesting that the traits they display are attractive to opposite sex
- ▶ Bullies’ aggressive behavior crosses into romantic relationships
- ▶ Girls’ bullying is more verbal and indirect (lower risk)
- ▶ Boys’ bullying is more physical and direct (higher risk)

Boy bullying.



The Pure Bully is not (necessarily) a sociopath. Male bullies -

- ▶ Can “code switch” and have normal relationships with others.
- ▶ Pick a victim who is vulnerable – very specific target.
- ▶ Are likely to choose someone outside of the social group, which boosts his standing within the group
- ▶ **Are aware of which adults do not condone the behavior and will hide it from those adults.**
- ▶ Because this type of bullying is riskier with greater potential for retaliation, boys will tend toward in-group cohesion (think teams and gangs).

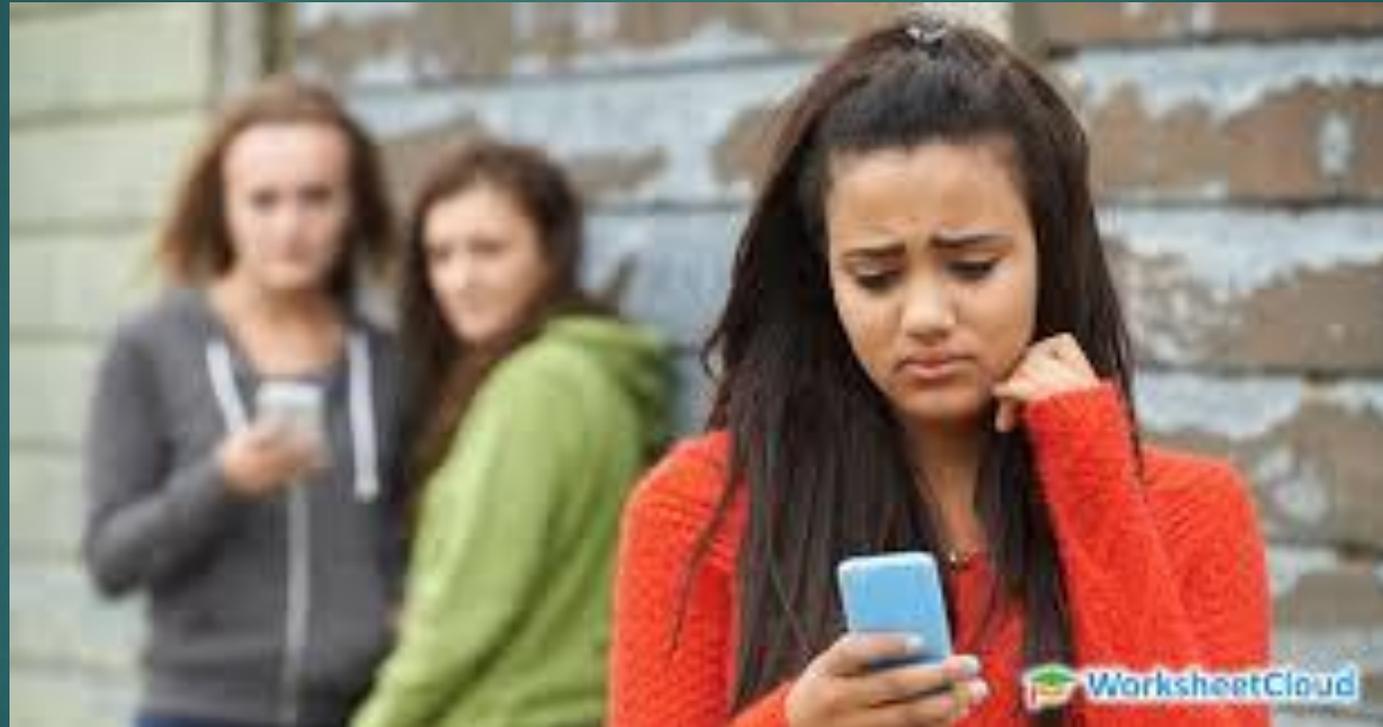
Bullying vs. Hazing

- ▶ At first glance, they look similar.
- ▶ They have different functions.
- ▶ A bully is trying to EXCLUDE the victim from the social circle.
- ▶ Hazing is a “rite of passage” to determine an individual’s worthiness to be INCLUDED in the circle.
- ▶ Because of the inclusive nature of hazing, the leader (often, the team’s coach) can stop it with clear disapproval and consequences.

Girl bullying

- ▶ We have to talk about sex. Boys can reproduce without long-term consequences and have more offspring than girls. Girls also have to consider being long-term care givers.
- ▶ This leads to girl behavior (with regard to bullying) looking different from boys'.
- ▶ Girl bullying is less risky – higher level of verbal and indirect social bullying.
- ▶ Lesser chance of adult punishment and victim retaliation.
- ▶ Girl bullying focuses more on other girls' sexual promiscuity and flaws in physical appearance. Why? To reduce the victims' appeal to potential mates.
- ▶ Rumors and social exclusion also limit victims' access to potential mates.

Girl bullying.



Risk/Reward – Snapchat– the perfectly designed platform for girl bullying.



- ▶ Social media bullying is on the rise.
- ▶ If one were to design the perfect girl bullying platform, it would look a lot like Snapchat.
 - ▶ Messages disappear – low risk
 - ▶ Internal social groups are involved, allowing for social dominance – high reward

Pure bullies are frustrating.

- ▶ They know what to say to adults to deflect blame or hide the bullying.
- ▶ They often are able to maintain appearances.
- ▶ Because their targets are often afraid to speak out, they can continue with the behavior.

The “bully-victim”

- ▶ This is a person who bullies as a response to being bullied
- ▶ Bully-victims: less adept at pro-social behavior, exhibit less self-control, and tend to be less athletic
- ▶ The bully-victim is less likely to bully for social dominance
- ▶ The bully-victim engages in reactive aggression, retaliation, and impulsive, emotionally volatile behaviors
- ▶ Will often have ill-advised targets (across genders, or at authority figures)
- ▶ This is the profile of EVERY special ed student at OGHS who was sent for terroristic threats! (BTW: their bullies have never been sent to OGHS for the initial bullying behavior.)

Pure Bully vs. “Bully-Victim”

- ▶ Pure Bully is in it for social dominance, improved status, better mate potential.
- ▶ Bully-Victim engages in bullying behavior out of frustration and anger.
- ▶ Their behaviors serve different functions.
- ▶ The bully-victim has already been excluded from the group. This is a problem.
 - ▶ Remember oxytocin? When the BV no longer feels a sense of community, the anger and embarrassment can build.

Bully-victims' subsequent behaviors.

- ▶ Data from the National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) regarding bullying and school shootings: about 46% of shooters reported having been bullied. About 63% reported troubled relationships with peers.
- ▶ All of the research suggests that there is not a single cause for shootings. **We cannot say that being bullied is the reason a student commits a violent act.**
- ▶ Research into the relationship between violations of Ed Code 48900.7 (terroristic threats) and bullying still needs to be done.
 - ▶ Anecdotally, there is a link between bully victims and terroristic threats.

Not everyone who is bullied becomes a “bully-victim.”

- ▶ Most people are capable of dealing with the unpleasantness.
- ▶ They adapt by **decreasing their vulnerabilities** or **avoiding the dangerous people.**
- ▶ They can also adapt by **increasing their social capital within their social circle.**

2/3 of bullying goes unreported.

- ▶ Most people who are bullied adapt to minimize the behavior.

Okay, what can we do?



If the traditional “progressive discipline” system worked, we wouldn’t have a problem.



Prevention.



Let's move beyond signs, suspensions and forms.

- ▶ When we create a culture in a school of:
 - ▶ Belonging (remember oxytocin?)
 - ▶ Empathy
 - ▶ Kindness
- ▶ We are creating an environment where a Pure Bully does not get the benefits from the behavior.
 - ▶ The norms of the group are not responsive to displays of aggression or bullying. Bullying puts you outside the circle.
- ▶ When students can say, "That's not cool" or "That's not attractive" in response to bullying behavior, there is not a gain in social status.



It's easy to say, “We need to include kindness, empathy, and belonging” into classes.

- ▶ However, if the **teachers are not trained** in integrating these things into the classroom environment and curriculum, it's not going to be systemically adopted.
- ▶ And if the **site administrators** are being told that test scores are more important than creating a culture where we recognize the neurobiology of kids, it's not going to be systemically adopted.

If we want to build kindness, empathy, and belonging in classrooms, there is a question...

- ▶ Are we willing to practice what we preach?
- ▶ Are we creating cultures in school districts where the adults experience those things?
- ▶ Are we creating cultures in schools where adults do not bully each other or students?
- ▶ We model behavior and the kids are watching.



A threat of suspension is not as powerful as the idea of disapproval.

- ▶ This means there must be a relationship in place.
- ▶ If the child believes the adult cares about him/her, there is weight to the adult's approval/disapproval.
- ▶ So...
- ▶ We must foster relationships!

How can we respond more effectively when it happens?



Risk/Reward

- ▶ Studies show that **parental awareness training** is one critical area for lessening bullying.
- ▶ Adolescent bullies are **responsive to parent/adult awareness and disapproval.**
- ▶ **When parents know about bullying behavior and impose consequences,** there is a measurable decrease in the behavior.
- ▶ When there are **strong relationships at the school with adults, the adults have more power to express disapproval** in a way that takes social capital from the bully
- ▶ We need to include a **replacement for bullying** – if the bully is getting a need satisfied by bullying, simply saying “we have zero tolerance” is like “just say no to drugs.”

Replace the behavior.

- ▶ If social dominance/security is a goal for the pure bullies, then we should be working to develop:
- ▶ Inclusion in **groups/teams – Help the child find status in a positive way**
- ▶ **Encourage bullies to engage in acts of charity and/or altruism** (this increases social status by allowing them to flaunt their skills/attributes in a positive way)

Restorative Practices – you need a bigger picture before you jump in.

When a victim tells the bully, “You hurt me and made me feel like I am less of a person,” the bully hears, “I won.” We just reinforced the behavior.

In order for RP to work, the perpetrator has to have a sense that he has done something wrong and that there is more value to apologizing/stopping the behavior than continuing it. To an extent, he has to feel guilt.

RP can work if the school has been modeling circles and has created a safe community. The bully must feel he/she has violated the norms of the community.

Peer Courts.

- ▶ Peer courts have been used effectively to stop bullying behavior.
- ▶ When peers formally express disapproval for the behavior, the social capital of bullying is lessened.
- ▶ By creating a school community where there is a peer court, the group expectations are clear – so it can be preventative.
- ▶ The challenge: peer courts require communication with the community and a clear plan for implementation. Successful peer courts are highly structured and organized. They are not a “last minute” idea to respond to a volatile situation.

Follow through.

- ▶ Bullies exhibit a relative lack of fearfulness (so don't threaten them with discipline unless you're going to carry it out – because they'll push you).
- ▶ This means administrators have to know what to do and have the tools to do it.
 - ▶ Parents must be contacted.
 - ▶ An adult on campus who has a relationship with the bully must meet with the bully and explain why the behavior is unacceptable.
 - ▶ This is tough, but there has to be a meeting with the parents of the victim, staff that has a relationship with the BV, and resilience-training based on the needs of the individual.

The good news is that the behavior TENDS to fade with maturity.

- ▶ The teen brain is making decisions in the limbic system.
- ▶ These emotionally-based decisions USUALLY end up being replaced as the brain develops.
- ▶ When the bully finds the behavior to be ineffective in achieving their goals, they stop. So, when they find success through other processes, bullying subsides. (However, like any behavior, when it succeeds, it is reinforced, and it continues.)
- ▶ There is a saying: Memories that happen more than once become models. So, a person who bullies without ever having the behavior checked is likely to continue into adulthood.

The third rail.

- ▶ The average age of a school shooter is between 16-17 (sadly, because of the frequency of shootings, this is constantly changing).
- ▶ Does a bully-victim become a shooter?
 - ▶ Sometimes.
 - ▶ But there are other factors contributing to the act.



“A crucial component of preventing targeted violence at schools relies on developing positive school climates built on a culture of safety, respect, trust, and social and emotional support.”

- ▶ Clearly, this was written by some hippie-left-wing-tree-hugger group.
- ▶ Oh wait: it was the US Secret Service NTAC (National Threat Assessment Center) Study on School Shootings.

Thanks for coming!



Questions? Contact me:

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