Helping Hand

Sponsored by: The Glen Ridge Municipal Alliance Committee
Volume 18 Issue Seven

No Bullies on Board: Putting the Brakes on School Bus Bullying

By Lynne Lang

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in violence on school buses. Students are inflicting harm verbally, physically, emotionally and sexually to one another. In working with thousands of children of all ages to reduce and prevent bullying behaviors, BJC School Outreach developed

a survey to determine the areas where students encounter bullying most frequently. The results ranked buses as the No. 2 place for bullying, second only to the playground. What are some factors that contribute to this significant problem?

First of all, we are asking the driver to be concerned with getting children to their destinations safely. That is a difficult task! Drivers cannot always stop when conflicts occur, and many are on a very tight schedule. Bus drivers must obtain a chauffeur's license to drive a bus, but that license does not involve training in behavior management. Many drivers are simply not equipped to handle the unsupervised behaviors they are faced with. Traffic control and behavior control are completely unrelated and incompatible.

Having cameras on buses cannot solve the entire problem. When interviewing students about the effectiveness of cameras, they reported, "If you can't see the lens, then the camera can't see you. Anyway, lots of buses don't have film in the camera." Yet these same students report that when there is a bond between the driver and the students, behavior tends to be more positive.
Change cannot happen without support from all sources. Some of the key points to making those changes are:

- Define bullying and make sure everyone knows the definition: one person or more intending harm, humiliation and/or intimidation to others with words and/or actions. There are five types of bullying: verbal, emotional, physical, gender, and more recently, cyber (use of the computer).
- Create immediate and consistent consequences for misbehavior; post guidelines on buses.
- Train drivers to de-escalate aggression, and know where police and fire stations are along the route in the event they need help; also train them on safety procedures when weapons are present.
- Recognize the importance of dealing with low-level aggression such as name-calling, put-downs, or negative humor in preventing more serious offenses.
- Have assigned seats.
- Praise and reward appropriate behavior, using small incentives if necessary.

- Get parents involved; have a “meet the driver” session before the year gets started to discuss mutual expectations.
- Consider adding another adult on the bus — this can be a volunteer or paid staff member.
- Give daily reports of incidents—a bad experience on the way to school can affect the entire day for some children.
- When it is difficult to determine the fault, have all students write out statements privately so the truth can emerge. Support training and keep communications open with drivers and building administrators. Set policy that supports positive steps rather than punishments.
- Help troublemakers become peacemakers by giving them responsibility.
- Train students to be vigilant, caring witnesses—teach empathy; if students take responsibility for safety, they can work together to stop violence.
- Bring bus drivers into classrooms to allow students to relate to them in a different environment.

With acts of violence on the increase, bus safety will continue to be a growing concern with regard to bullying. Organizing a bus committee comprised of students, staff, drivers, and parents can be an opportunity to create a plan that ensures safety and well-being of all passengers and will help improve school performance. When buses are friendlier environments and drivers can focus on traffic and safety, then everyone wins.

Lynne Lang is a school-community health educator in St Louis. Contact Lynne Lang, BJC School Outreach & Youth Development, at LML1435@BJC.org

In Confidence —How to Respond Appropriately When Children Approach You With Problems or Concerns

At almost every turn these days, young people are advised to talk to a trusted adult if they experience uncomfortable emotions or if they're concerned about the emotional health of a friend.

We can expect at least some of those young people to heed that advice. If you are the person to whom a troubled young person turns, the following guidelines can help you to help that child.

Educators and other school-based adults must remain professional when a young person confides in them. Show concern and demonstrate willingness to help—but within appropriate school guidelines, not the kind of empathy the child would get from a same-age friend.

The most common problem students experience involves their peer relationships. Steer clear of any hint of engaging in gossip about another student, teacher, or a parent when talking with a young person. Encourage the young person to be tolerant of others and respectful of his/her own feelings.

Focus on the child's problem. Resist the temptation to reveal details about yourself as a way of showing sympathy or empathy.

Avoid saying, "When I was your age ..."

Keep the young person's conversation with you confidential—this includes sharing with other teachers or adults close to the child (unless the child confides a situation that could put him/her in danger).

Help the child put his/her problems in perspective. Young people tend to dramatize their problems, view them as being unique, and believe that the

present situation will last forever. Gently remind the young person that he/she has gotten over problems before, and that this one and the uncomfortable emotions attached to it will fade with time.

Teachers are legally obligated to protect the safety and well-being of their students. This means they must seek help from an appropriate source (a school counselor, student assistance professional, or administrator) when a student's confidence involves sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, pregnancy, threats and intimidation by others, substance abuse, illegal activity, depression and/or suicidal thoughts or threats. Other adults should seek the help of a school counselor, student assistance professional, or a community mental health professional to determine how to proceed legally and in a way that will help the child.

(Source: Adapted from *Discipline Survival Kit for the Secondary Teacher* by Julia G. Thompson

Helping Hand v18i7

Performance Resource Press, Inc.
1270 Rankin Dr., Suite F
Troy, Michigan 48083-2843
248-588-7733
www.PRPonline.net
Editor: Erin Bell
Graphic Designer: Diane Chatterson
Please send suggestions or contributions to the editor at the above address or through your student assistance program.
HELPING HAND is published monthly (September- May) to provide timely information to readers; its
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What Happened to Courtesy?

By Cheryl Davenport

People seem to no longer reply to invitations—at all. Social commentators have guessed that many people may not know what the letters "RSVP" mean at the end of invitations. It is a French phrase—répondez s'il vous plaît—that means please tell the person who sent the invitation if you will or will not attend the event.

While this lack of understanding could explain that social blunder, also consider that other words conveying courtesy are often missing from everyday conversations. These are words young people must hear and use if they are to get the message that being polite is not only a desirable social convention, but also a way to avoid conflict.
Words that convey politeness also convey many other valuable messages. Saying "please" to students is a way of saying that you respect them for their ability and willingness to do as you ask. "Thank you" is a way of showing gratitude for things, behavior and people.

Two of the most important words in our language are "I'm sorry." As delightful as children can be, they can also be annoying and tiresome. In response to that type of behavior you may do or say something you immediately or later regret. Don't be afraid to apologize. Far from diminishing your authority as a teacher or parent, a sincere apology does just the opposite. You'll be setting a good example that young people can follow for a successful life.

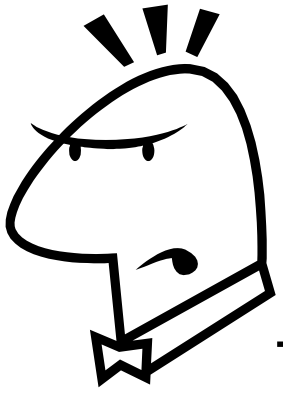
Cheryl Davenport is a prevention specialist for Troy (Michigan) Community Coalition.

A Day in the Life of American Adolescents: Substance Use Facts

According to a recent OAS Report (Office of Applied Studies), on an average day during the past year, American adolescents aged 12 to 17 used the following substances for the <u>first time</u>:

- 7,970 drank alcohol for the first time;
- 4,348 used an illicit drug for the first time;
- 4,082 smoked cigarettes for the first time;
- 3,577 used marijuana for the first time;
- 2,517 used pain relievers non-medically for the first time;
- 1,603 used inhalants for the first time;
- 1,281 used hallucinogens for the first time;
- 909 used cocaine for the first time;
- 860 used stimulants non-medically for the first time;
- 236 used methamphetamine for the first time; and
- 86 used heroin for the first time.

(Source: http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k7/youthFacts/youth.htm)



The Root of All Violence Is *Anger*

Young people often model what they see. And what they are seeing these

days is an increase in bad tempers, acting out on hurt feelings, and disrespect for others' feelings. This lack of self-control can lead directly to violence.

"The example we're setting for our kids is terrible," says a parent who was quoted in a *USA Today* article on what the author calls our nation's "anger epidemic."

In Reading, Mass., one father beat another one to death over an argument about rough play at their sons' hockey practice. A coach in Hollywood, Fla., turned himself in to authorities after breaking an umpire's jaw when the coach disagreed with a call. We hear and see mothers and fathers using harsh discipline on their children in public places and husbands and wives who speak to one another with contempt. Our children see it, too.

We should be modeling the behavior we want to see our children exhibit. Dr. James Sipe, creator of a *Chill Skills* anger management curriculum, says to remember that: "Peace begins with me."

Repeat that phrase several times to yourself—or even out loud—whenever you feel your anger level rising. It will help raise your awareness of your behavior. It's hard to develop an angry train of thought when you're thinking about something else. It's a simple therapy that really works.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T:

Find Out What It Means to Adults and Children

One of the hallmarks of a person of character is that he/she understands the concept of respect and practices it. Writing in *7 Strategies of Developing Capable Students*, author H. Stephen Glenn, PhD, says, "Respect is not a one-directional virtue. It is not meant to flow exclusively from 'lower' to 'higher.' Nor is it something that is deserved by 'higher' and earned by 'lower.' It is something that belongs to the wife as well as the husband; it belongs to the son as well as the father." It should be added that respect belongs to the student as well as the teacher.

Respect is basically taking ourselves and others seriously as people, as human beings who feel, think, act and react. If we respect ourselves this

way, we will respect others and all of life. This sounds simple and logical. So, why does it seem so hard to teach today?

Another book addresses these questions. Authors Kevin Ryan and Karen E. Bohlin say in *Building Character in Schools: Practical Ways to Bring Moral Instruction to Life*, "The problem in getting this notion [character] across lies not so much in its intrinsic difficulty as in certain competing notions that tend to crowd it out."

Those "competing notions" are really well-intended but misguided systems humankind has tended to establish for evaluating ourselves and our place in society. At least one of those misguided notions is older than Greek philosopher Socrates. In 399 BC, he talked about the damage that can come from being concerned not with one's own virtues as a measure of social standing but rather with one's status or reputation or "images." Socrates said that more important than what we **have** is who we **are**. And if we value ourselves for being virtuous and true to ourselves, then we will value others for the same thing.

Another, more modern way we lose sight of respect is found in an idea that became popular during the self-esteem movement. Namely, that we should turn a blind eye to our own and others' shortcomings so that we (and they) will always feel good. But this does a big disservice to all. Ryan and Bohlin write, "To deprive students of feeling bad about doing less than their best is to deprive them of one of their chief incentives to grow, improve and mature."

As with trying to establish all positive behaviors, the key to teaching respect is to model it. When children see adults dealing respectfully with all others, no matter what that person's social or economic status, then children eventually will learn to do the same.

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