Bullying Prevention and Defusing Student Anger

<u>Introduction</u>

Bullying can be either covert or overt behavior. An open attack on a victim is an example of direct bullying, while covert or indirect bullying may take the form of exclusion and social isolation. (Hoover & Oliver, 1996). Bullying tends to be more prevalent during the late elementary and middle school years. It peaks in middle school and taper off in high school. Usually bullies are turned into bullies by bigger bullies. When you meet a bully, somewhere in the past there is likely to be a story of how a bully pushed him or her around. When students call other students names, gossip or put them down, usually it is because they feel insecure and inferior.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, programs cracking down on individual bullies rarely work, but when there is a school wide commitment to end bullying, it can be reduced up to 50 percent. The Office of Civil Rights is now investigating complaints of bullying and harassment because it is a violation of a student's right to an education.

On December 16, 2010, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, sent a memo of technical assistance to all chief state school officers and governors highlighting best practices of comprehensive state bullying laws. Among them are:

- ✓ A clear and comprehensive definition of bullying including enumeration of categories of students who are often targeted.

- ✓ Detailed reporting, investigating and responding procedures.

- ✓ Graduated consequences for those engaged in the behavior.

- ✓ Referrals to mental and physical health resources (ASCA, July/August 2011).

The "New" Bullying: Cyber Bullying

- ✖ Through email, instant messaging and text messaging on cell phones or pagers.

- ✖ Since contact and emotions are masked, verbal assaults are harsher (i.e., assault or death threats) and messages are likely to have sexual overtones.

Often, students don't fully understand why they are victims of reoccurring bullying from their peers or how to stop it. By the same token, the bully himself may not know the real impact his/her behavior has on their victims. It is important that students understand, identify, manage or quit bullying behaviors. Bullying must be taken seriously and cannot be placed on the same level as the "rough and tumble" of normal childhood development, because it can lead to more dangerous and violent crimes and create extreme misery for the victims (Hoover & Oliver 1996). Stopping bullies takes a whole-school effort by implementing an anti-bullying philosophy.

The keys to bullying prevention are:

      1.   *Knowing how to recognize bullying behaviors and how to communicate with the bully.*

      2.   *Knowing the factors that place students at risk of being bullied.*

      3.   *Teaching the victims of bullies how to stand up for themselves.*

      4.   *Knowing how to diffuse student anger.*

      5.   *Implementing a school-wide anti-bullying philosophy*

What factors place a student at risk of being bullied?

Students are bullies for numerous of different reasons. The following is a chart of the reasons

why students thought they were bullied. They are ranked by grade level and sex.

A. **EIGHT THROUGH TWELVE GRADES**

RANK	MALES	FEMALES
1	Didn't fit in	Didn't fit in
2	Physical weakness	Facial appearance
3	Short temper	Cried/Emotional
4	Who friends are	Overweight
5	Clothing	Good grades

B. **FOURTH THROUGH EIGHTH GRADES**

RANK	MALES	FEMALES
1	Didn't fit in	Didn't fit in
2	Who friends were	Who friends were
3	Physical weakness	Clothes worn
4	Short temper	Facial appearance
5	Clothing	Overweight

Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler (1992)

Hoover, Oliver, Thompson (1993)

What should be done?

- **Develop a needs assessment to see how prevalent bullying is in your school, getting information on the following:**

    a. General information (age, sex, grade, but keep the needs assessment anonymous.

    b. Questions to find the frequency of bullying

    c. Questions to assess your students' attitude toward bullying.

- **Learn how to talk to bullies to get them to change their behavior by using the following:**

    a. Behavior contracts

    b. Problem solving techniques

    c. Self monitoring techniques

- **Teach the victims of bullying how to protect their rights using the following:**

    a. Assertiveness training – "Say what you mean and mean what you say"

    b. Social Skill Training – Model appropriate behavior for the student

    c. Teach victims to change irrational thoughts.

    d. Teach coping skills

    e. Have the victim externalize the problem

    f. Compliment the bully

    g. Develop a counseling library of resources for the victims

- **Learn how to diffuse student anger by doing the following:**

  a. Acting immediately

  b. Not showing anger

  c. Showing acknowledgement for what the student has said

  d. Getting the student seated

  e. Allowing the student to vent

  f. Making suggestions

  g. Following up with the student

- **Implement a school-wide bullying prevention philosophy by doing the following:**

  a. Implementing the bullying needs assessment.

  b. Helping to create an empathetic school adopting an "I am my brother's keeper" philosophy.

  c. Implementing a referral method to counselors and community agencies.

  d. Generating and post throughout the school and community literature which supports anti-bullying.

  e. Doing classroom guidance on bullying prevention using scenarios.

  f. Developing an anti-bullying committee consisting of parents, students, counselors, teachers and administrators.

Remember that it does not matter if a student is a bully, victim or is simply angry, we should provide all of them the best support and guidance they deserve when they come into our schools. A student may be a bully today and a victim tomorrow because they change roles so frequently.

How to defuse student anger

Suggested steps to diffusing student anger

1. *Act immediately:* If we hear profanity, name calling and threats, we need to step in and find out what is the problem. No longer can we ignore anger and make simplistic statements like "boys will be boys" and "she will get over it". Something triggered the anger. What was it?

2. *Don't show anger:* When approaching an angry student do not reveal your own anger as this could backfire and an eruption could result. It is dangerous to use an authoritative or hostile approach and make statements like "You are not going to act like this in my office." A calm an inquisitive tone should be used and be polite as possible. No matter how upset you are, never show anger!

3. *Show acknowledgement:* Let the student know what you have seen and heard but not necessarily in words. You can use several nonverbal cues to let the child know you are aware of what is going on. Your facial expression, a nod and a "lets hear about it" stance can speak wonders. When you do say something, let it be neutral words like "it seems like you and John are not very happy with each other." You should never put your hands on a student unless it is absolutely necessary.

4. *Get the student seated: Find* a place to sit down with the student and offer statements like "Lets sit down so we can talk " By getting the student to sit down, you can reduce the risk of the student flaring up again.

5. ***Allow the student to vent*** *:* Let the angry student talk and vent in the manner he or she chooses without reprisal and get to the heart of the issue as quickly as possible. Avoid making statement that will further enrage the student. It is important to remember that an angry student is likely not to be rational and may say and do things they may not normally do. The best way of dealing with this is to listen and make a statement like "what can I do to help"?

6. ***Make suggestions****:* Now is the time to offer your input. If you have information or suggestions to diffuse the student, do it now. You may make statements like "This is how I see the situation" or "May I tell you something I see in this situation?" If you can find some common ground with the angry student, you will have more success in relating to him or her.

7. ***Follow Up***: It is important to follow up with the student when the incident seems over. The situation may not really be over. By not following up, the student may feel manipulated and get angry again, even at you. Simply ask the student at the follow up meeting if the problem is resolved. If so, discuss management techniques for controlling anger and what was learned from the situation. If the problem is not resolved, continue to seek solutions and provide support for the student. (Obryun, 2001)