

**Seminar told**

# Adult help is often needed when dealing with a bully

Although bullying has been around for many generations it doesn't mean it should be accepted as a "rite of childhood" said a counselor with the Children's Assessment and Treatment Centre (CATC) at a seminar about bullying last Wednesday.

"It's a cross-cultural problem," said Carol McCall of CATC, who provides a program to schools called, Begin Realizing That Alternatives to Violence Exists (BRAVE). "It's not just a school problem."

The seminar, hosted by the Parent Education Network at Georgetown District High School, drew about 70 people.

McCall said bullying is about "an abusive use of power."

"The key to dealing with bullying is to remove the power," said McCall.

She outlined strategies to taking action against bullying.

She said kids need to build connections, to play with other students, and invite others to play with them.

Use of authority is another strategy. "Adult help is almost always needed when dealing with bullying," she said.

"Once the secrecy is exposed the bully loses its power."

She said kids need to keep telling adults about the bullying until someone does something about it, and there should be ways for students to remain anonymous.

"Students need to know action will be taken," she said.

She said the most important strategy "is to teach our children to be accepting of differences."

Halton Regional Police Const. Laurel Barnett outlines what happens when police are called in on a bullying incident.

She said a decision is made based on the offence, the victim's wishes and the best interests of all involved.

She said a new project called Halton Under 12 Outreach Project helps youth under 12 to improve self-control and learn problem solving skills.

Through the project, the child is in a club where they learn to Stop Now And Plan (SNAP).

She said they meet after school and evenings for approximately 12 weeks and the program includes parent training groups, individual befriending, school advocacy services and fire education if applicable.

Barnett said victim restitution encourages the child to apologize to their victim.

If the culprit is over 12, police could caution him, lay charges, or send him through the diversion or conference program.

In order to go through the diversion program the culprit must admit guilt, and there must be enough evidence to proceed with charges. Only certain offences can be considered under the diversion program including theft or fraud under \$5,000, mischief to property, credit card offences and minor assaults.



CONSTABLE LAUREL BARNETT



Guest panelists at a seminar on bullying included, from left, Holy Family School principal Sean Briggs, Const. Laurel Barnett, Carol McCall of the Children's Assessment and Treatment Centre and Cindy Cooper, from the Halton Hills Public Library.  
Photo by Lisa Tallyn

With the conferencing program, the victim's participation is required so all parties can meet and the victim has a chance to make their feelings, and the impact of the crime, known to the culprit. Restitution is part of the program.

Halton Hills Public librarian Cindy Cooper outlined a wide variety of resources on bullying available through the library and said they will soon be offering parenting kits that contain information specifically on bullying.

Audience members had the chance to ask questions after the session.

One woman complained that she went to police with concerns about a bullying incident at her son's school but nothing was done.

"Usually we take a pretty hard line. If anything can be done we will do it," said Barnett.

Another woman raised the issue of a bullying incident at an elementary school where she believes the principal and vice-principal refused to take a stand.

Barnett suggested the police may not have been notified about the incident because the children involved were only 11 years-old.

Holy Family School principal Sean Briggs, who shared the experiences he has had at his Oakville school with bullying and the approach they have taken, said parents have another option other than the principal.

"If I'm not doing my job, go above me," said Briggs.

One woman questioned if suspensions were actually a deterrent.

"In the elementary panel most students want to be back in school with their friends," said Briggs, who added he likes in-school suspensions.

He said often suspensions are a "pain in the butt" for parents and it's often them who get on the child's back.

A man in the audience said he was disappointed no staff members from Georgetown District High School were at the seminar.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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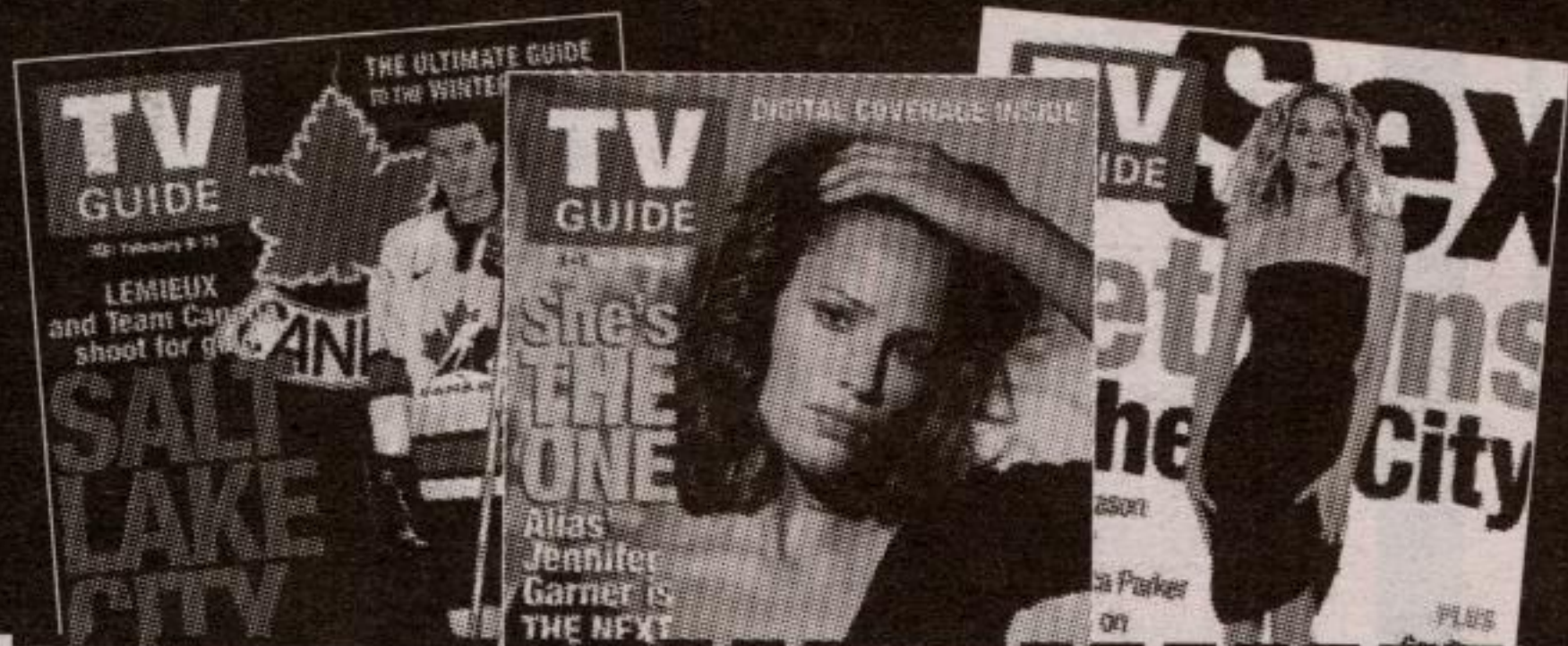
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