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Methods of helping victimized kids cope

BY CHERYL ELLIOT
Special to The Champion

Bullying, the age-old problem in playgrounds, is still alive in schools today, but the Halton Board of Education is taking new steps to deal with the problem.

A survey of 2,200 students by the board shows that nearly 50 per cent of the students have been victims of

bullying, Harvey Lemmon — a social worker for the board — told a Parent's Voice For Action meeting recently in Oakville.

Parent's Voice For Action is an information network of 100 parents which started in Halton last year.

Just under 30 percent of the students admitted to bullying others in school, and when asked why they do it, the biggest response was "to get even."

"Kids always have a reason for being aggressive," said Mr. Lemmon, "and it always has to do with righting a wrong."

He added that he had never met an aggressive student who said about his victim, "he didn't deserve it."

The project also looked at the profiles of victims and bullies.

"Victims all have one thing in common," said Mr. Lemmon. "They don't retaliate."

Victims tend to be physically and/or psychologically weaker, relate to adults well, be anxious, insecure, and have low self-esteem. They are sometimes isolated by their peers and have a negative view of violence. Victims get victimized over and over again.

Bullies usually have physical and/or psychological strength, poor impulse control, are not anxious, and see violence as a solution.

Contrary to the popular belief that bullying is an outlet for low self-esteem, Mr. Lemmon said bullies usually have a positive self-concept and are confident.

Armed with the results from the survey, the eight elementary schools are trying some fresh approaches to handle this old problem.

He encourages parents to make a fuss about bullying, "because kids take the cue from us."

Less than 10 percent of students ever report bullying to teachers. They usually tell a friend first, parents second, and then a sibling. Mr. Lemmon said there is a lot of shame for parents of victimized children.

He advised parents not to be quick to give a victim all kinds of instructions on how to deal with a bully, when all they want is sympathy.

"Concentrate on hugs and sympathy," said Mr. Lemmon. "Howl at the moon with them." For families with aggressive children, he recommends getting professional help.

Thirty additional schools have asked to join the pilot project since it started last year.

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