

Breaking 'bully' cycle the most difficult task

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school board has developed a new strategic action plan to deal with aggressive behavior in students.

Spearheaded by Holy Spirit Catholic Elementary School

vice-principal Connie Marsh, the document will be used in conjunction with the safe schools policy.

A list of resources, community service programs and videos will be included in the text, to be distributed to the schools in September.

"More and more incidents of this type of behavior have been coming to my attention and you really have to deal with it early before it becomes a big problem," said superintendent Joseph Rapai. He stressed the need to help children who may look or act differently from their classmates.

"Bullying is one of the key areas of concern for parents and educators and no one wishes to be involved in a situation where they are victimized. If you expose this type of behavior into society, it just wouldn't be tolerated."

Breaking the cycle of bullying can be the most difficult task of all.

"There is a popular myth that children

should be left alone to solve their problems," said DiPasquale.

"This strategy can fail horribly, he said, pointing to a recent example in which a boy had been bullied in the school washroom. He refused to use the washroom and, as a result, wet himself at school.

"People also think victims should stand up to the bully because a bully is a coward. When that happens, a bully usually beats the snot out of him," DiPasquale said.

He suggested victims think in terms of action, instead of just taking the abuse. Scan the environment for the nearest teacher or adult, or tell the bully what he or she is doing is wrong and then turn around and walk away.

Bullies also relish a child who is isolated from his peers. If the victim can convince the majority of the kids not involved to speak out against bullying, it will stop.

Miscommunication is one of the main causes for bullying at the secondary school level, added Loretta Cal, a guidance counsellor at Father Bressani Catholic High School in Woodbridge.

"Gossip is a big thing at this age and, instead of talking things out, students are listening to their friends instead," said Cal. "If we can sit them down and do some mediation, we can usually get most of the cases cleared up."

"I think a bully is a bad flu, you need a lot of strength to get rid of it as fast as possible. Except there's no cures or medicine, except for friends and belief in yourself."

"No one wants to act against a bully without proof, but we don't need to catch kids on video to act," said DiPasquale, who is developing a video on bullying that teachers can use in the schools. "You will freeze people in their tracks if you act on it."

"Kids have a right to go to school and feel safe. It's up to the adults to solve the problems."

Who are schoolyard bullies?

The art of a bully:

- Aggression starts at an early age.
- It takes a specific set of conditions to produce a child who can start fights, threaten or intimidate a peer.
- Bullying causes a great deal of misery to others and its effects on victims last for decades, perhaps even a lifetime.
- The person hurt most by bullying is the bully himself, as the negative effects increase over time.
- Most bullies have a downwardly spiraling course through life, their behaviour interfering with learning, friendships, work, intimate relationships, income and mental health.

Bullies turn into antisocial adults and are far more likely to commit crimes, batter their wives, abuse their children and produce another generation of bullies.

The aging bully: As an eight-year-old:

- School yard aggression;
- Social outcast;
- Difficulties at home;
- Wide range of intelligence;
- Sub-par academic.

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