



COURTESY PHOTO

Caryn Hacker-Buechel shares her book about bullying with students Jaques Joseph and David Garay at Mike Davis Elementary School.

Bullying doesn't have to be tolerated

BY CARYN HACKER-BUECHEL

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The behaviors and effects of bullying are highlighted and depicted weekly on the hit TV show "Glee," symbolized in the cold vibrant red of a slushy tossed in the face or cruel, icy words from a malicious coach. Although the approach is comical, the realities are more invasive and longer lasting than a one-hour television show, and the repercussions cannot be alleviated through song.

Name calling, teasing, rumor spreading, hitting, pushing and callous and unkind texts are the most common forms of bullying.

All mean behaviors cannot, however, be classified as bullying; an occasional misdirected and uncaring act is actually an aspect of normal development and human interaction.

Some degree of conflict helps us find personal boundaries and a sense of our own power. In a healthy environment, it can also help teach us the difference between aggression and kindness or violence and acquiescence.

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The difference is in how the behavior is dealt with.

Each mean act offers the potential for an equal act of kindness; a positive for each negative. It remains the job of our families to begin this educational journey at a young age. Schools and our community, as a whole, have the responsibility to assist in the creation of healthy interaction and safety for our inhabitants.

Bullying, unlike an occasional uncaring act, is repetitious, with malicious acts targeting a specific person or people and consciously designed to harm.

Under their cruel and grandiose exterior, bullies actually have poor self-esteem, and their bullying behaviors are their attempt at misguided survival. Without a daily fix of offsetting superiority, their feelings about themselves come crashing into their reality.

Although they might say, "Oh, I didn't mean it," their behavior is no accident, and we as a community must know better.

It is also important to note that childhood bullies grow up to be adult bullies who cause further emotional difficulties in marriages, families and the workplace. According to www.bullyingstatics.org, 2010 statistics show that 2.7 million students are bullied each year and that one in seven students (kindergarten through 12th grade) is either a bully or has been the target of a bully. Without intervention, these numbers will continue to grow, affecting generations to come.

Bullying has been linked to a number of diagnosable psychological issues.

Both bullies and targets have been found to suffer from depression in greater numbers than children who have not experienced bullying. Symptoms can include anxiety, inability to concentrate, physical illness, changes in sleep patterns, sadness or irritability and/or feeling hopeless.

Studies have also shown that those who experience cyber-bullying are more likely to show signs of low self-esteem and/or have suicidal thoughts and possible behaviors.

We have also become too familiar with sad and shocking news reports of murder/suicides that stem from psychological trauma related to bullying. Bullying is believed to have played a role in the recent Ohio school shooting that killed three people.

The long-range effects of bullying are serious and demand our attention. As a community, we must create an environment that promotes peaceful conflict resolution and rewards acts of conscious kindness.

I was happy to see the Collier County Sheriff's Office, Collier County Public Schools and Crime Stoppers launch an anti-bullying texting program to catch bullying before it leads to deadly tragedies of this nature. And I am proud of my association with the David Lawrence Center, an organization with the resources to help those who need help grappling with the emotional issues related to bullying, whether the one who is targeted or the one who inflicts. The center is Collier County's only comprehensive, nonprofit mental health and substance abuse treatment facility serving children, adults and families. Referrals for assistance with the

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effects of bullying can come from schools, parents, doctors and community agencies.

One of the center's professional mental health therapists can assist the individual or family choose the most valuable type of therapy for each situation and help create the path to heal-

ing and life-changing wellness.

Let's begin to make the world a more peaceful place — one bully at a time. ■

— *Caryn Hacker-Buechel worked as a psychotherapist for more than 25 years and also wrote a book about bullying called "A Bully Grows Up: Erick meets the Wizard." She is a board member of the David Lawrence Center. For more information, call 455-8500 or visit www.DavidLawrenceCenter.org.*