

Take Action to Control Bullying

A recent survey presented to the American Public Health Association paints an ugly picture of bullying on American school campuses.

According to a survey of 10,000 school students, the bullying ranged from physical assault and threats to being called names and having their personal property broken or stolen.

Among the findings:

- 43 percent had been physically bullied
- 51 percent were teased in an unfriendly way
- 50 percent were called hurtful names
- 31 percent were excluded from a group to hurt their feelings
- 39 percent had an unkind rumor spread about them
- 28 percent had their belongings taken or broken
- 21 percent were threatened to be hurt.

The bullying was so bad that in the previous month one in four said they had skipped recess or stayed away from the restrooms or lunchroom. Eight percent of the students said they had skipped school to avoid bullies.

The students said the classroom, lunchroom and hallways at school were the places where bullying was most likely to occur. The students said bullying that occurred in the classroom made them feel most threatened and unsafe at school.

Is there anything school administrators can do to control

bullying? There is, but it will take a real commitment to making a change. Educators need to admit the situation does occur on their campuses. Teachers and staff will need training to learn to spot bullying and how to handle situations when they arise. Schools will need to work with parents to help them understand that bullying is a severe problem and that they should talk with their children about it. And the students will need to be made more aware of the effects that bullying can have on their classmates.

From my six years as head of security for Washington, D.C. Public Schools, I started with a risk assessment of each campus to judge its security strengths and weaknesses. Then I could make specific plans for each campus to tackle problems such as bullying.

We needed cameras installed throughout the school, especially in the hallways, near restrooms, inside the lunchroom and on the playground – those areas where bullying was most likely to take place.

Having direct evidence of bullying is important. Many parents would insist their child would never bully another student. But when they were shown the video evidence, most would promise to work with their child at home.

The video also made it easier for us to enforce detentions and suspensions for bullies. Also, we could ban bullies from attending extracurricular events such as dances and athletic games.



It also helps to keep an adult, ideally a teacher or administrator, in the lunchroom during mealtimes, on the playgrounds during recess and in the hallways during passing periods. Most bullies are really cowards and won't act up when they know they are being watched.

I also recommend having a phone hotline or other means of communications that allow students and parents to anonymously report incidents of bullying. Teachers have concerns that if they report bullying they might face severe repercussions. There needs to be a mechanism for teachers to share information about bullying outside of the normal reporting structure.

There is no reason we should continue to have kids afraid to go to school and participate fully in events. It takes planning and the will to act, but bullying can be brought under control. ■



Patrick Fiel is the former public safety advisor specializing in education for ADT Security Services. He brings more than 30 years of security experience to the position. For six years was executive director of school security of Washington, D.C. Public School System, where he managed 163 school campuses. During his tenure with the United States Army Military Police Corps, he had operational and management oversight roles with the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) at the Pentagon, at NATO Headquarters – Belgium, and at West Point Military Academy.