



HUMAN RELATIONS MEDIA

Newsletter

NO NAME-CALLING

CONTENTS

No Name-Calling Week March 1-5	1
The Prevalence of Bullying	1/2
Consequences of Bullying	2
Bullies	3
The Difference Between Teasing and Bullying	3/4
What a Victim of Bullying Can Do	4
What a Bystander Can Do	4/5
Conclusion	5
Video/Print Resources	5

NO NAME-CALLING WEEK

March 1– 5

It's tough to be a young person sometimes. Not only do elementary, middle, and high school students have to cope with homework, extracurricular activities, and family issues, all too often they must also deal with hurtful bullying and name-calling at school or on the playground. Far from being harmless teasing or a rite of passage, bullying and name-calling can make children and teens feel unsafe and may cause depression or self-esteem problems that can continue for years. Educators owe it to their students to do all they can to stop such destructive behavior and make their schools a safe and pleasant environment for learning.

With this goal in mind, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, and more than thirty other organizations (including Amnesty International, Girl Scouts of the USA, Children's Defense Fund, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, and the National Mental Health Association) have come together to create a national *No Name-Calling Week*. Beginning the week of March 1-5, 2004, the *No Name-Calling Week* project aims to

bring attention to the problems of bullying and name-calling in schools and to spark discussion on how to eliminate name-calling for good. The project is tailored to grades five through eight because studies show name-calling is most acute during these years, but it can be adjusted for students and teachers of other grade levels as well.

The idea for *No Name-Calling Week* sprang from young adult author James Howe's book, [The Misfits](#). The book tells the story of four seventh-grade friends trying to cope with name-calling in school based on their weight, height, intelligence, and sexual orientation/gender expression. Angered by the social hierarchies they see, the friends form a new political party during student council elections based on ending all kinds of name-calling. They lose the election, but the school principal embraces their cause and adopts their idea of a "No Name-Calling Day" at school.

No Name-Calling Week's goal is to educate students and teachers nationwide about the harms of name-calling and to help create environments in which name-calling is unacceptable. To this end, the project has developed a resource guide with instructions for organizing and publicizing *No Name-Calling Week* in

individual schools, lesson plans and curricular material, and further resources for those who wish to extend the experience. In addition, a classroom video and accompanying Teacher Resource Book are available to increase awareness in students. GLSEN and Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing are also producing promotional materials to spread the word about *No Name-Calling Week*, and the website www.nonamecallingweek.org contains further information about the project.

THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING

There is a real need for education and discussion about name-calling and other forms of bullying. Bullying—including hitting, pushing, talking behind another's back, and leaving others out of activities as well as name-calling—is a more common phenomenon than many might realize. Several prominent studies have exposed the prevalence of bullying in American schools:

- The American Association of University Women found in 2001 that 83% of girls and 79% of boys report having experienced harassment at school, more than 25% of them experiencing it "often."

- 76% of students reported non-physical harassment and 58% reported experiencing physical harassment.
- The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)'s 2001 study of over 15,000 students in grades 6-10 found that almost a third of students—5.7 million children nationwide— have experienced some sort of bullying.
- According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 77% of middle and high school students in small midwestern towns have been bullied.
- An August 1999 CNN report found that 4 out of 5 middle school students admit they act like bullies at least once a month.
- A Kaiser Family Foundation survey revealed that more 8 to 15-year-olds chose teasing and bullying as “big problems” than those who chose drugs and alcohol, racism, AIDS, or pressure to have sex. In addition, more African-American students chose bullying as a “big problem” for people their age than those who chose racism as a “big problem.”

The activities of *No Name-Calling Week* in any given school will certainly reach an audience familiar with the

pains of bullying. The fact that such behavior is so widely practiced should provide additional motivation for educators to take a stand; not only do many children and teens suffer from verbal and physical bullying at the hands of their peers, the effects of this experience can be harmful and long-lasting.

CONSEQUENCES OF BULLYING

Bullying is in no way a harmless rite of childhood. Name-calling and other forms of bullying cause real emotional pain for the victims of such abuse and its harmful effects can last for years. The seriousness of the consequences of enduring repeated instances of bullying are all the more reason for educators to take steps to prevent such behavior in schools.

A survey conducted by the Widmeyer Communications for the Health, Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed that minority pre-teens, overweight pre-teens, pre-teens who are unsatisfied with their physical appearance and pre-teens with special needs “say they are emotionally scarred from the verbal bullying they endure.” Indeed, young people who are bullied

regularly, both physically and verbally, report hurt feelings, low self-esteem, and emotional turmoil. The consequences for victims of bullying can go even beyond these shorter-term problems into depression, living in fear and torment, poor academic achievement, physical abuse, and suicide. These effects last for years—Norwegian bullying researcher Olweus found that former victims of bullying have higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem at age 23.

Another study by the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Counseling and Students Services (CSS) reported that up to 160,000 children skip school on any given day because of fears of bullying. A National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study added that victims of bullying also demonstrate lower levels of social and emotional adjustment as well as poorer relationships with classmates and higher levels of fighting, smoking, and loneliness.

The negative effects of bullying do not stop with the victims. The NICHD also discovered that bystanders to acts of bullying endure feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. They also tend to develop poor coping and problem-solving skills. When bullying is allowed to occur, too many children suffer.

BULLIES

Who are bullies? Why do they act the way they do? Do they ever “grow out” of their destructive behavior?

The Educational Resources Information Center reports that bullies often come from homes in which physical punishment is normal, where they are taught that the best way to handle problems is by striking back physically. A bully’s family is also likely to have little parental involvement in the children’s lives, and warmth is often lacking in parent-child relationships.

Every bully is different, but some believe bullies are cruel to classmates because they wish to feel superior, get attention from teachers (even if it is negative attention), or to cover up their own feelings of insecurity and unhappiness. Bullies often strike out at others before they can be attacked themselves. Allowing a bully to hurt classmates is detrimental to the bully as well as his or her peers. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development reports that bullies too demonstrate poor social and emotional adjustment, social isolation, poor academic performance, and involvement in trouble behaviors. Not only do their school years suffer, but bullies also tend to continue down a

destructive path in life. Olweus found that bullies have a four-fold increase in criminal behavior by age 24-60% of former bullies have at least one criminal conviction and 35-40% have three or more convictions.

By opening up a dialogue between students and teachers, *No Name-Calling Week* can help troubled bullies as well as their victims. Raising the bully’s awareness that his or her actions are hurtful and wrong as well as emphasizing that bullying is unacceptable in the school environment can help prevent a bully from forming a destructive habit and embarking on a path toward more serious crime.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEASING AND BULLYING

Not all forms of teasing are harmful. Most people enjoy playful banter and gentle teasing, and such interaction among students is normal and fun. However, sometimes children do not understand the line between teasing and hurtful bullying. Classroom discussions and activities should stress sensitivity and respect for peers, even when poking fun in good humor.

Good-natured teasing can be an entertaining part of a friendship. Such teasing is usually playful and involves a back-and-forth exchange between children. It also is done in a friendly tone of voice and comes with affectionate gestures. Good-natured teasing also brings people feel closer together, lightens up a dark mood, and is accompanied by laughter. Most importantly, children who are teased in a friendly way do not feel threatened, angry, or sad.

On the other hand, teasing becomes hurtful when it is done in angry tone of voice and/or involves angry body language, like clenched fists. It continues even after the child being teased tells the bully to stop or becomes upset. Harmful teasing can be a way for a bully to show off in front of classmates and makes the child being teased feel scared or distressed.

Every child is different, and what seems like fun teasing to one can be painful bullying to another. Students should think carefully before teasing someone, because he or she may not react in a positive way. Children need to consider the personality and life experiences of their peers: has this person become upset at teasing in the past? Is he or she very sensitive about a particular subject?

They should also think about their relationship to the other child: is he or she a good friend, or a more distant acquaintance? Have there been problems between them in the past? Is there a difference in age, size, gender, race, or anything else that may affect how the other child receives what is meant as gentle teasing?

Finally, students should consider the context of teasing. Is the child poking fun at a potentially sensitive issue, such as race, religion, or sexual orientation? Does the teasing concern the other child's appearance, intelligence, physical strength, or social status? Students must understand that other children don't necessarily think the same way that they do, and that what seems like a matter of little consequence to one child can be a very important and stressful issue to another. If children learn to treat their peers with respect, misunderstandings about teasing are less likely.

WHAT A VICTIM OF BULLYING CAN DO

Students who are bullied may not know how to deal with their feelings of fear, sadness, or anger. The most important thing they must realize is that

the bullying is not their fault—but there are further ways to cope with such difficult and scary social situations and to stop bullying.

One way to prevent harmful bullying is to appear positive and strong. As hard as it may be at first, children should be confident and try not to show any fear. Responding immediately to the bullying with a strong command to stop can help; sometimes making a funny comment can lighten the situation as well, but students must take care not to antagonize the bully.

Avoiding a negative situation can also help. Students who are bullied should walk away from taunts instead of fighting back physically or responding with their own hurtful comments. They should also stay away from potentially dangerous places where there may not be many other students or teachers around. By sitting with friends at lunch or on the bus, children minimize opportunities for the bully to single them out.

It can be helpful for children to seek out support. Talking to peers who have had similar problems can make students realize they are not alone. Another good way to find support is to explore new hobbies or join a club or activity; meeting new people who accept a student for who he or she is boosts confidence,

and new friends can stand up for a child if a bully tries to harass him or her again.

Finally, a bullied student may feel overwhelmed by emotions. Expressing these emotions is a healthy way to deal with being bullied. Talking to friends, family, teachers, or counselors is a good idea, but students can also write about their feelings in a diary or journal if they don't feel comfortable sharing their experiences with others.

For a child who has to contend with bullies, ignoring the situation can be the worst way to solve the problem. Students should understand that they are not powerless—that there are steps they can take to improve the situation. They should also know that their teachers are there to help them deal with bullies and to make them feel safe at school.

WHAT A BYSTANDER CAN DO

Bullies often tease other students in part to show off for their classmates. If bystanders stick up for the child being bullied, chances are that the bully will stop because he or she is not getting the desired reaction. Students need to recognize that standing by and watching another student

being bullied is almost as bad as doing the bullying themselves, and that they have the power to help.

If a child who witnesses bullying feels safe, he or she can always tell the bully to stop. If the bully is trying to be funny or “cool,” a bystander can tell him or her strongly that it isn’t funny and no one thinks cruelty is cool. A bystander, however, should not play the bully’s game and call names or physically fight—this could make the situation worse.

Sometimes a bystander may not feel safe interfering when a bully is teasing or hurting a classmate. In that case, he or she should tell an adult. Students should realize that bullying causes pain for victims, and bullies need help too—helping a peer is not “tattling” and a bullied child needs the abuse to stop as soon as possible. Besides telling a teacher, parent, playground aid, or other trusted adult, bystanders can also help by being friendly to the bullied child. Sitting with such students at lunch, telling them that the bullying isn’t their fault, and supporting them if they want to report the bully are all very helpful and considerate actions a bystander can take.

CONCLUSION

Name-calling, intimidation, and other forms of bullying hurt everyone involved, from targets to bystanders to the bullies themselves—and it can be found in every American school. Part of an educator’s mission is to provide a safe and healthy environment in which children can learn; failure to do so can result in any number of serious consequences. By participating in the events of *No Name-Calling Week*, teachers and administrators can take giant steps toward the goal of eliminating harmful social behavior among students and help make education as enjoyable and enlightening as possible. GLSEN, Simon & Schuster’s Children’s Publishing, and more than thirty partner organizations urge schools to embrace *No Name-Calling Week*. Through the discussion, lesson plans, and awareness-building resources available for the project, students and administrators together can build mutual respect, understanding, and support as they move toward ending name-calling and bullying for good.

VIDEO/PRINT RESOURCES

No Name-Calling week Resource Kit
Grades 4 – 8

No Name-Calling: Creating Safe Environments
Grades 5 – 8

Bullying: You Don’t Have to Take It Anymore
Grades 7 – 12

Tolerance: Responding to Differences
Grades 6 – 8

Don’t Call Me Names
Grades K – 2

Harassment Hurts
Grades 3 – 5

Using Your Wits: Strategies to Stop Bullying
Grades 3 – 8

Walk This Way: Exploring Tolerance, Diversity and Difference
Grades 3 – 9

Dealing with Difference: Lesbian, Gay and Straight Issues
Grades 8 – 12