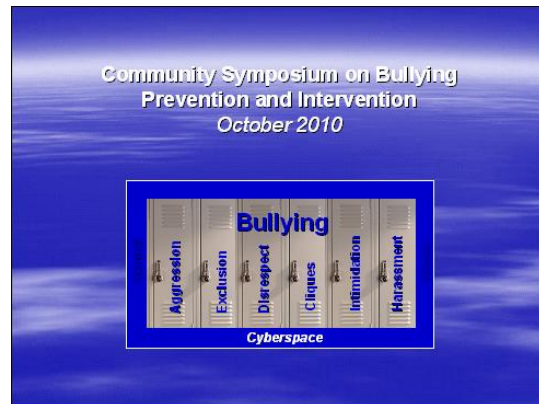


**Bullying Prevention and Intervention Speech
Community Symposium
By Liza Huber, Director of Pupil Services
October 20, 2010**



Welcome to the second annual Community Symposium and thank you for the opportunity (and invitation) to dialogue with you about new challenges for our schools, parents/guardians and community at large. An invisible bond connects all of us to support and model for our students as we work hard to make them successful, not only as students but also as citizens.

For a moment, let's go back in time – maybe some of you would remember them – most of you won't, as we are a “young” audience – an audience of the 21st century!

You may have heard the expression, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me!” In the 1950's, you could hear school children screaming out that phrase and seemingly the behavior - and related behavior - stopped. But, now looking back 60 years ago, those expressions may have been harmful. Was it conflict among kids, now called peer conflict, or was it more serious as Harassment, Hazing, Bullying and Teasing?



And then, you may remember (or don't choose to remember!) The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet sit-com with their sons Ricky and David Nelson. It portrayed the perfect family, its values and ideals. All activities were based at home (unlike today). This was the longest running live-action sitcom in US TV history – only to be outdone by the

Simpsons today! And, you may remember Barbara Billingsley, who died over the weekend, and played June Cleaver in “Leave It to Beaver”.

But, time has moved us and changed many things in our society. These shifts included the expanded definition of the family, the need to work long hours to make ends meet, the necessity of two parents/guardians to work, etc.

Then, the blast of the Information Age bombarded every family. How many of us can be without our cell phones with video, camera, or ability to text? The Internet? The iPad? The iPod? What did Ozzie and Harriet do? What would have Mrs. Cleaver have said to Beaver?

This is meant as a rhetorical question. But, let’s imagine with Cleaver’s style what would have happened. Whenever mischievous Beaver got into trouble, the Cleavers would reprimand and correct him. Between themselves, they debated child-rearing practices (nothing new, huh?). When perturbed, Mrs. Cleaver would use Beaver’s first name, Theodore! Even though physical punishment was not given, Beaver imagined what his brother would say, “Dad’s gonna clobber you!” In those days, those corrections, real or perceived, were sufficient to resolve conflict. What we imagined as peer conflict then has been more defined today, as you have seen in the slide that we just showed.

Now we add to these above challenges a new science, called neuroscience, a discipline that was in its infancy years ago. We have grown in our understanding of how children’s and adults’ brains think, empathize, and make decisions. Some interesting work has come out of the University College London (UCL), one of the most prestigious colleges in the world, yielding 21 Nobel prizewinners from its ranks. Dr. Sarah-Jayne Blakemore concluded that adolescents today “take less account than adults of people’s feelings and, often, even fail to think about their own (feelings).”

It appears that we are becoming a more self-centered and less empathic community.

Let’s look at these alterations – society changes and shifts, the global reach of the Information Age, and the differences in adolescent thinking and feeling and behavior. It creates a monumental hurdle for all of us and we must take the time to understand the cultural shifts in family life today – the impact of the Information Age – we must appreciate how children think and act – and we must be more cognizant of how to become good role models for our children; how to set strong limits with high expectations for what is accepted (and acceptable) as standards for respect, tolerance and decency.

How do we, as a community of adults who respect each other and our children, keep these children safe while they are developing their adult brains? How do we teach and model for them appropriate behaviors, respect and tolerance for each other? What does that look like?

It is the 7th grade soccer team playing another school and noticing the young man with Down Syndrome on the team. It’s the unspoken communication that happened among our students who fell back and supported the disabled student make a goal at their own expense.

It is the bystander who steps up during a Face book exchange, full of anger and violent themes who write and says that those involved should remember that all internet writing is traceable.

It is the bystander who speaks out against taking a cell phone picture of a locker room situation, which could be posted on You Tube.

In these situations, we can see that the bystander plays a critical part in diffusing disrespect and intolerance. Actually, there is a sense that the bystander models good citizenship and respect for others.

Sadly though, some of our children are vulnerable and have become targets of bullying, harassment (sexual as well) and teasing in merciless ways that violate human decency and respect for others.

We are aware of the pervasive and detrimental impact that bullying has within and on our schools. Walk in the victim's footsteps. Low self-image? Feelings of unworthiness? Feelings of sadness? Depression? Internal rage and anger and resentment? Feelings of giving up? And, even in some cases, suicidal? For our students, a feeling of being unsafe impacts school engagement and academic achievement. Coupled with this ever-expanding technology, we are all aware that this important problem must be expediently addressed.

Let's begin with defining the terms.

Harassment is unwelcome verbal, written, graphic, electronic, or physical conduct..... that relates to a person's race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation or disability..... that creates a hostile, humiliating, intimidating or offensive environment..... that limits your ability to participate in a program or activity.

In a school, harassment can be insults, offensive jokes, name calling, teasing, taking personal belongings, intimidation, hateful graffiti.

A harasser can be anyone – a district employee, a school community member, a student.

Sexual harassment includes additional conduct of a sexual nature; unwelcome sexual advances, and other verbal, written, or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

So what is bullying?

What is Bullying?

Critical components:

- Persistent
- Pervasive
- Chronic

Types of Bullying:

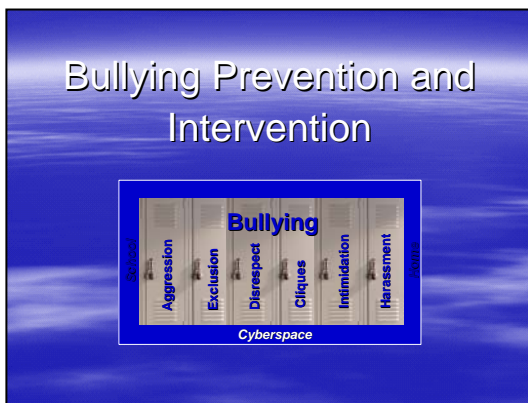
- Intimidating
- Threatening
- Malicious
- Intentional
- Retaliatory
- Electronic
- Written
- Verbal
- Physical
- Mental
- Visual

The slide also features a photograph of a young child in a yellow safety vest holding a red octagonal stop sign on a crosswalk.

In Massachusetts, Governor Deval Patrick recently signed into law a bill that covers both verbal and electronic bullying and requires schools to develop and teach a preventative curriculum. It also requires school employees to report bullying incidents and principals to investigate.



Here in Acton, in our continued commitment to improving school safety, the District started thinking about this issue – in earnest in June of 2008. We wanted to create practical guidelines so that all children, staff and faculty feel safe within the school and/or work environment. The scope of our mission creates a safe and comfortable school and work environment that addresses bullying, hazing, and harassment in new ways.



The Bullying Task Force grappled with the following issues:

- **The impact of cyberspace**
- **The cycle of victims and perpetrators**
- **Relevant issues for inside and outside the classroom**

In each of the sub-committees, areas of responsibility and accountability were addressed, how to consistently collect data for individual and systemic intervention, and most importantly, what kinds of training is needed system wide to enhance the principle of “respect for one another”.

These are the underpinnings of our social character and our obligation for teaching our next generation. It’s what the nuclear family of Ozzie and Harriet did for Ricky and

David. And Mrs. Cleaver did for Beaver. Now, the schools, family, and community are interconnected teams that assist, correct, teach and model for this generation. We become the modernized Ozzie and Harriet – the realistic Mrs. Cleaver.

We need to communicate from the first moment student come to school that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated.

We have to be the “go-to” people in schools, and at home, and within our community for students to be able to trust us to listen and respond in a helpful (not hurtful) way.

The advent of cyber bullying outside of school has made it more difficult for school administrators to track incidents, but trust between teachers and students help a great deal. It is these relationships that keep our schools safe – more than locked doors and rules. You know in your heart when your child comes to you because he/she trusts you and reciprocally the child knows he/she will be safe; the seed has been planted for a long life stand of credence between parent and child. The schools do the same by establishing a community of respect and tolerance and a personalized level of trust and respect for every student in the school – that’s our goal and expectation.

For this school community, this has been a time to reexamine our priorities and make sure that our school culture is as positive as it can be. This is a time to re-examine our priorities and make sure we are being as pragmatic as we can be. This is a time to be as pro-active as we can be.

Our school district goal helps us to ensure that our school culture is conducive to learning and achievement so that all individual learners have opportunity to meet the challenges of the Information Age while at the same time learning, practicing and modeling their efforts so that, in the end, they become solid citizens and community partners.

We all know of the tragedies that have occurred recently in Massachusetts and in our out of state colleges. These tragedies give evidence that our work is never done and are a wake up call to those of us who continuously try to help our kids in their long life journey toward success and adulthood.

Consequently, our schools have instituted ways to ensure that the victim and the family are supported. The role of the bystander is critical in resolution and is rewarded for good behavior. Let me share with you some steps that we have taken:

- 1. Appointing a liaison (such as a counselor or psychologist) to the victim and his/her family to ensure direct and accurate information and support, as well as to ensure appropriate follow-up.**
- 2. Immediate focus on providing care and support to the victim within the family and school context (see above) while concurrently investigating and responding to the bully and bystander(s).**
- 3. Upholding the professional standards of confidentiality.**
- 4. Notification of not only the family (parents and guardians), but also the staff members on a “need to know basis”.**

5. The primary gain is safe schools. The secondary gain reduces the potential of conflict and distrust between school and home.

You and I know that the schools are a family as it joins the most important family, the home. The community is interconnected with the schools and families offering us an opportunity to set excellent models for our kids. Most units are rule-governed so that limits are set and thus, we live in harmony. Our challenges are different today than they were when the sitcoms, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave It to Beaver*, portrayed perfect harmony because we have different pressures in family life; we have experienced a significant downturn of the economy; and we are growing up in the Information Age where many are connected to cell phones, iPads, Facebook and every other imaginable device to communicate instantly. What may be instant news could be turned to instant tragedy by disrespectful comments or videos.

We need each other to make our kids safe, teach them respect and tolerance and assist their cognitive growth so that they think about other people's emotions by walking in their shoes. I believe in the youth of today; let build this culture in 2010 to be a one of tolerance, respect, and kindness. We have the same family goals, that is, to create and support youth by our models of good citizenship, respect and kindness. These are the citizens we want for our next generation – those who respect each other, are kind to each other, who tolerate each other and understand differences. These made the best adults, the best husbands, wives and partners.

Thank you, my friends.