Bullying Lecture - March 24th 2006

During the childhood years, children's friendships changes markedly in nature and intensity. Friendships help children navigate the worlds of school, home and after school activities. A friendship group gives a sense of identity. Friendships offer support, companionship and understanding. Parents and teachers may be baffled when their child is upset over the break up of a friendship or when another child ignores them on the playground. With children, the social landscape can change in an instant. This can be even more intense in smaller schools where there are fewer children to choose as friends

Difference between boys and girls – younger children are less discriminate in friendships but as they get older groups become more important. Girls are more relationship oriented (while boys are more likely to base friendships on shared activities.

The Definition of Bullying.

20-30% of children report current bullying. 80% of children report bullying at some point in time. Bullying is verbal or physical aggression, direct or indirect, that is chronic, has an imbalance of power and the victim has a hard time defending themselves.

The types of bullying are as follows:

a) Physical aggression – boys more likely to engage in physical aggression.. Boy's behavior and choices are largely dictated by their definition of masculinity. Most boys won't reveal their feelings and problems to their male friends. They might confide in a female friends. What distinguishes a bully from someone who teases occasionally is a pattern of repeated physical or psychological intimidation.

   1) Aggression – calling each other a girl or gay is very damaging.

   2) Fights – often carried out far enough away from adults so that no one know shat happened

   3) Deliberate humiliations – stealing books, harassing in locker room.

b) Relational aggression -. Use of relationships to peer peers. Acts that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship or group inclusion.

c) Girls are more likely to engage in relational aggression or RA. Socialization of girls to "not get angry" to be "sweet" to be "nice to everyone" they develop other indirect ways of expressing anger and aggression. Can happen with boys too, more likely in opposite sex relationships:

1) Ignoring someone to punish them or get one's own way

2) Sabotaging someone else's friendships

3) Threatening to end a friendship unless the friend agrees to the request

4) Gossiping – often serves to solidify bonds between girls if they are sharing secrets but also service to exclude other girls

5) Teasing – the difference between good and bad teasing. Teasing within and outside the group. Good teasing is between friends – the person feels liked and does not feel put down. Bad teasing – happens inside and outside the clique. Done to put the recipient in her place usually about something that she feels insecure about. She's dismissed when she defends herself "why are you making such a big deal about this"

6) Scapegoating – "don't talk to Jenny. Marcy (the clique leader) is mad at her" – what has happened here is that jenny may have challenged M's authority (and not even know it) and is now being put in her place.

7) Backstabbing – revealing a friend's secret to others. Ex- an anonymous phone call telling a child that another girl does not like her.

8) Belittling – face-to-face comments delivered with a smirk or like a joke. Ex: weren't you wearing that last Friday?

9) Rumors – using the grapevine to pass along a juicy tidbit – whether or not this is true. Themes are often being promiscuous or gay.

10) Cyber – RA – another venue to communicate. E-mails, instant messages, chat rooms. Any method of communication that allows for anonymous interactions will change the level of responsibility and accountability a girl feels for her behaviors. 58% of girls are more computers savvy than their parents. Messages received via computer are as damaging if not more so than live interaction.

11) How to decrease cyber RA
    a) Learn the technology
    b) Know where the child is – if so was going out at night or to a friend's house, you would know. Ctrl-I gives a history of where been on-line.
    c) Limit the amount of time on-line with a password
    d) Protect personal information. Address, phone number etc.
    e) Don't have a screen name that tells any personal info.

       f) Be careful what you say in chat rooms. It's harder for people to interpret intent when not in front of you – anger vs. teasing etc.

       g) Adopt the IRL principal – In real life. Your actions on the Internet should be the same as in real life.

2) Research has show that RA is:
      a) RA is evident in all age groups from pre-school through adulthood
      b) For students in grades 3-6, RA is a stronger predictor of future social maladjustment than overt physical aggression.
      c) Girls are more likely to use RA within their own friendship circles; boys tend to aggress outside of circle.
      d) Girls who are RA are also less likely to show empathy for others
      e) Girls are more likely to approve of and use RA, boys are more likely to approve of and use physical aggression.
      f) RA girls are more likely to believe that aggressive behavior is acceptable or normal
      g) Both victims and initiators of RA have a higher incidence of depression, loneliness, alienation, and isolation.
      h) At the college level, proper experience with RA is associated with bulimia.
      i) Older adolescents with a well formed identity (goal directed, know their own values) are less RA

3) Myths about bullying
      a) *Bullying is a consequence of large classes and/ or schools* – there is no positive association between the proportion of victims and/ or bullies and class/ school size. However the absolute number of problems is greater. The intensity can be greater at a smaller school.

      b) *The behavior of bullies can be attributed to failures and frustration at school.* Research has failed to support this myth. There is a weak correlation between poor grades and aggressive behaviors but we cannot assume causality. Interestingly, bullies are often thought to mask anxiety and insecurity through their aggressive and tough behavior. Empirical data paints another picture. Bullies had unusually low anxiety and insecurity or were similar to peers on these dimensions. Also they did not have low self-esteem. Instead they have a more positive view of violence than other students. They may be impulsive a feel a need to dominate others.

      c) *Victimization is caused by an external deviation (e.g. being overweight, wearing classes, speaking with an unusual dialect etc.)* - There is no support for this from empirical data. Victims were no more deviant than control group.

4) Types of victims and risk factors – 2 types of victims

a) *Passive-Submissive Victim* – tends to be more anxious insure and lonely at school than other children. They are characterized as cautious, sensitive, quiet and lacking evening one good friend. (Amanda) They react with crying or withdrawal when attacked, therefore the bully does not fear retaliation from the student (also, because the victim often lacks friends, the bully does not dear retaliation from a peer group.) A study of victimized boys found that parents described them as more cautious and sensitive from an early age. They also may have closer contact and more positive relationships with their mothers. Teachers have tended to view this closeness as overprotection.

b) *Provocative victim* – represents a smaller proportion of victims. They are characterized by anxious and aggressive reaction patterns. They may have poor concentration, exhibit hyperactivity, and behave in ways that irritate others

c) *Risk Factors*:
   1) Not having friends
   2) Younger age at the school you attend
   3) Behavior Problems

5) Bullies – seek out targets for whom the negative consequences of aggression are minimal in relation to the benefits. Bullies may initially "sample" a wide variety of peers for potential victimization, targets become less varied as victims are identified. Pick people unlikely to fight back or for whom peers are unlikely to step in. Or who reward them with tangible tears etc.

   a) Research into bullies and aggressive children based on the Social Information Processing model. Basically:

      1) Aggressive children display a marked tendency toward interpreting ambiguous social cues as provocative. They have found links between such bias and aggressive behavior in school aged children

      2) Aggressive children generate fewer potential responses than do other children. Aggressive children tend to produce responses that are either hostile in nature, or ineffective and irrelevant

      3) Response Decision – Researchers have consistently found that aggressive children and adolescents evaluate the potential outcomes of aggressive behavior more positively than do their non-aggressive peers.

6) Special issues for teachers:
   a) what is bullying vs. normative childhood behavior
   b) parent's attitudes:

1) some who did not acknowledge that their child is a bully (Delaney's mom) and who believe that it is better that the child states up for self.
2) Some who think that the child is being bullied when they are not
3) Parents who rush in to help – child does not develop the coping skills. Can be seen as a target. Sends the message that the world is an unsafe place and that they are not strong enough to take care of self.
4) If parents allow exclusion – parents who might allow their child to not invite everyone to a birthday party. Participation in Lexington social clubs. Where children might see each other outside of school.
5) How parents fit in school – this might influence how they think their child should act or the advice they give. Parent might feel that they weren't popular and want to help their child. On the flip side, parents may see what popularity might do and not want their child to be a part of this. Ex. Amanda

c) How can teachers catch the bullying when it is "under the radar"
d) How can teachers encourage parents
e) Important to recognize a child's pain and hurt over bullying. Do not say things like "just ignore it" or "no one noticed but you" or "things will be better when you are older." Important to acknowledge the hurt and make the child feel loved and accepted.

7) Ideas about interventions

a) Situation of a child being mean to another child

   1) Child can confront the mean girl - must prepare the child by having her practice and describe specifically what is bothering her, request what she does or doesn't want, affirm the person and/ or the relationship. Best to do it one-on-one, not in a group.

   2) Ask a teacher or counselor for help.

b) Parent intervention – make sure the parent has all the facts

   1) Before you intervene, disentangle your experience from your child's. Are you fighting your child's battle or your own – also decide if it is better for you child to work it out themselves. Studies from Norway found that overprotecting parenting is a leading cause for a child's being a target. When a parent is motivated by loving and caring, a fix-it instinct conveys a self-defeating message (you are incompetent) to the child.

   2) You can call the mean child's parents – this can work well if you know that parent. Be careful how you frame the situation – express concern that your children need to learn how to get along.

c) Make assessing for bullying and harassment a part of routine assessment and check-in. Research shows that youth experience disproportionately high rates of victimization across family, school, and community domains. Many clinicians only assess for one type of victimization in isolation of other types, which means you may be targeting one problem, while missing a problem that may be even more important to the client. Victimization tends to co-occur, and child abuse can be a risk factor for peer victimization.

d) Programs like Steps to Respect, Bully Busters, etc. They are for a whole-school approach, but you may be able to adapt them for groups.

e) Social skills groups and friendship development and maintenance groups for victims. Having at least one good friend protects against victimization and the mental health consequences of it.

f) Problem-solving skills for repairing relationships (so they don't resort to retaliation through rumor-spreading, etc.).

g) For bullies—building empathy and perspective-taking. Also, work to counteract the hostile attribution bias (what are alternative explanations, how do you know? What behavior to look for in evaluating the cause for something).

h) For sexual harassment—it is harder to say blanketly that certain behaviors are right or wrong. But, it is important to differentiate flirting from harassment. Compliments make a person feel good, harassment demeans the person. Both people may feel good with flirting, but not with harassment. May not know before hand if a comment will be well-received or not, so look at the person's reaction. Does it make them feel good? Or do they look hurt or embarrassed? Apologize if you do not mean to make them feel uncomfortable.

i) Bystanders—try to create a peer culture where they do not condone bullying. Teach them how to respond.

j) Identify adults and peers they can turn to for help and support. Differentiate tattle-telling from reporting.

k) Work with adults on recognizing and appropriately responding to bullying.

l) Help victim identify safe places at school or on the way to and from school they can go to if they are in fear of their safety.