

#### Article 4:

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#### **Bully-Proof Your School**

*Recognized as more than just a problem between kids, schools are called upon to put forth a team effort to end bullies' longtime reign of terror.*

¶1 In *Arthur's April Fool*, Marc Brown's lovable aardvark gets the best of a school bully by playing a joke on him. Lucky for Arthur, the book ends there.

¶2 As most children know, and many adults remember, struggles with real-life bullies rarely are resolved so easily. The enormity of those struggles are now recognized, and bullying in schools, once shrugged off with a kids-will-be-kids attitude, has come to be regarded as a serious problem around the world.

¶3 The facts about bullying show that 10 to 15 percent of children are bullied regularly, and bullying most often takes place in school, frequently right in the classroom. The facts show, too, that bullying is an equal-opportunity torment -- the size of a school, its setting (rural, urban or suburban) and racial composition seem to have no bearing on its occurrence.

¶4 Bullying takes a heavy toll on the victims. As many as 7 percent of eighth grade students in the United States stay home at least once a month because of bullies. Chronic fear can be the source of all-too-real stomachaches and headaches and other stress-related illnesses. According to Norway's Dan Olweus, a leading authority on the subject, being bullied also leads to depression and low self-esteem, problems that can carry into adulthood.

¶5 The effects of such behavior are grim for the offender, too. One study by Olweus shows that 60 percent of kids characterized as bullies in sixth through ninth grades had at least one criminal conviction by age 24.

¶6 Rather than help resolve the issue, schools have contributed to the problem. Teachers and principals underestimate the amount of bullying in schools and, when they do witness it, often are reluctant to get involved, says Nan Stein, a researcher at Wellesley College, in "Beating the Bullies" (*Teacher* magazine, August/September 1997). "Kids say that when they tell the adults about the bullying, adults don't take them seriously, or they make them feel responsible for going back and working it out." In the same article, researcher Charol Shakeshaft of Hofstra University said she found that "kids believe that teachers thought it was OK to behave that way because teachers didn't intervene."

¶7 Until recent years, the problem of bullying has been addressed primarily through efforts to raise the self-esteem of victims, many of whom are more passive and physically weaker than their tormentors. While this helps, it's not nearly enough. Olweus and other researchers emphatically agree that preventing and eliminating bullying in schools requires a clearly stated, zero-tolerance attitude toward bullying and a wholehearted team effort involving teachers, administrators and support staff, as well as students and parents.

¶8 The approach advocated by Olweus, detailed in his book *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*, includes first distributing a questionnaire on bullying to students and teachers to foster awareness, justify intervention efforts and establish a benchmark for later comparison. He also recommends:

- Conducting a parental awareness campaign through newsletters, parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings, and publicizing the results of the questionnaire;
- Intervening individually with bullies and victims, implementing cooperative learning activities, and stepping up adult supervision at recess and lunch (opportune times for bully behavior);
- Working with students in role-playing exercises and related assignments that teach alternative methods of interaction, and developing strong anti-bullying rules, such as "we won't bully other kids" and "we'll include other kids who are easily left out." Such messages repeated on a regular basis can have a lasting positive effect.

¶9 In his article "What Schools Can Do About Bullying," Ken Rigby of the University of South Australia says teachers can have a significant impact on the problem by specifically:

- Expressing disapproval of bullying whenever it occurs, not only in the classroom but also on the school playground;
- Listening sympathetically to students who need support when they are victimized, and then initiating or taking action according to procedures approved by the school;
- Encouraging cooperative learning in the classroom and not setting a bad example with their own behavior (Assess yourself honestly: Do you use sarcasm or mean-spirited humor?);
- Talking with groups of students about bullying, and mobilizing student support for action to reduce bullying--for example, by including victimized students in their activities. "Most students are in fact against bullying," Rigby says, "and, given the chance, can provide not only active support for the school policy but also make positive proposals and undertake constructive actions to counter bullying."

¶10 Anti-bullying campaigns make a difference. Schools in Norway and in South Carolina that adopted Olweus' program reported incidents of bullying dropped by 50 percent. For anybody who's ever felt the sting of a schoolmate's punch or caustic words, that's very good news.

### Related Resources

Sources from *Teacher* magazine:

- **Bully-Proofing Your School**, by Carla Garrity, Kathryn Jens, William Porter, Nancy Sager, and Cam Short-Camilli, 1996; \$29.95. Contact: Sopris West, 1140 Boston Ave., Longmont, CO; 80501; (303) 651-2829. **Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do**, by Dan Olweus, 1993; \$19.95. Contact: Blackwell Publishers, P.O. Box 20, Williston, VT 05495; (800) 216-2522.
- **The Bullying Prevention Handbook: A Guide for Principals, Teachers, and Counselors**, by John Hoover and Ronald Oliver, 1996; \$21.95. Contact: National Education Service, 1252 Loesch Rd., Bloomington, IN 47402; (812) 336-7700 or (800) 733-6786.
- **Bullyproof: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use With Fourth and Fifth Grade Students**, by Nan Stein, Lisa Sjostrom, and Emily Gaberman, 1996; \$19.95, plus \$5 shipping and handling. Contact: Centers for Women, Publications, Wellesley College, 106 Central St., Wellesley, MA 02181; (617) 283-2532.

From the National PTA:

- **Safe at School: Awareness and Action for Parents of Kids K-12**, by Carol Silverman; Saunders Free Spirit Publishing Inc. 400 First Ave. N., Suite 616 Minneapolis, MN 55401-1730 (612) 338-2068. The tips in this book help parents deal with bullying, gangs, sexual harassment, and other school safety issues.
- **Set Straight on Bullies**, by Stuart Greenbaum with Brenda Turner and Ronald D. Stephens; National School Safety Center 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290 Westlake Village, CA 91362 (805) 373-9977. The problem of bullying is examined in this book. It offers prevention and intervention strategies for parents, teachers, and students.
- **Why Is Everybody Always Picking on Me? A Guide to Handle Bullies**, by Terrence Webster-Doyle; Atrium Society Publications P.O. Box 816 Middlebury, VT 05753 (800) 966-1998 or (802) 388-0922. This book helps children and teens to develop the confidence needed to resolve conflicts without fighting and to cope with bullies.

## Related Sites

Dr. Ken Rigby's Bullying Pages

Includes information on resources concerned with bullying in schools and questionnaires (for sale) for use in schools, plus the article "What Schools Can Do About Bullying."

- Teaching Children Not to Be -- or Be Victims of -- Bullies  
From the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
- Safeguarding Your Children at School: Helping Children Deal with a School Bully  
From the National PTA.
- Dealing with Bullies  
From the Safe Child Organization.
- Prevent Bullying: A Parents Guide from Kidscape  
From a London-based agency that teaches children about personal safety.

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