

Bullying...A New Direction

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Since the beginning of time, bullying behaviors continue to exist because both the bully and the victim agree on one very crucial, yet erroneous message; they both believe that the bully has power and the victim has none. The truth is that most bullies would stop if someone told them to, but no one ever does. Our continuous goal here at Chippewa Valley high school is to significantly diminish the existence of bullying and its devastating effects.

Many adults naively report bullying as a “normal” adolescent experience; a rite of passage. Unfortunately, we are only just beginning to understand the lasting emotional and psychological devastation that bullying causes. Technology now has the ability to track, intrude and touch in an endless, nonstop, invasive and relentless manner. With the development of Texting, Instant Messenger, Facebook, Twitter, Facetime, Snapchat, and Instagram there is no escape from bullying. The bully can find its victim anywhere, anytime, 24/7. A victim of bullying often feels a constant sense of being physically afraid even though the bullying is not usually physical in nature.

In 2008, two Chippewa Valley high school counselors attended a suicide prevention conference in Lansing. Kevin Epling was a presenter who discussed how his teenage son had been bullied at school and then committed suicide. With this information, the high school’s Crisis Team decided to make anti-bullying a component of its already established suicide prevention campaign. It was named “Hero In The Hallway” and has a very clear message....“Stand Up and Speak Out”. Our motto is... “Be A Hero Every Day, Everywhere, Every Time and In Every Situation.”

The Hero program is a feel-good, empowering initiative of hope, positive power and change. It serves to diminish the perceived strength of the bully, while creating a very public support system for the victim. It is not designed to help the bully because that person is probably not ready to change. The personal, emotional and familial dynamics of someone who bullies are very complex. As much as we wish the bully would stop the cruel behaviors, that is not where our time and energy is best spent. That is not where the quickest and most permanent change will occur.

Chippewa’s Hero program is specifically designed to help the victim; the person who gets on the bus every morning or who goes to lunch every afternoon or who turns on the computer or cell phone every night and faces non-stop torture, torment and mistreatment. Bullying is repeated and intentional torment in order to gain power over another person. It is important that educational efforts contrast the difference between incidents of bullying and fighting. Fighting can lead to bullying, but usually it is a mutual, reciprocal and unhealthy manner in which students choose to deal with a misunderstanding. School counselors contend with fighting differently than a true bullying situation. When dealing with bullying, the goal is to help the victim know that he or she is not alone and has a right to expect better. The Hero program changes the school climate by providing support, strategies and options for the bystander; the person who sees it happen. Most students are very uncomfortable when they see another student being bullied. The Hero program teaches students ways to “Stand Up and Speak Out” against bullying behaviors. Bystanders represent the majority of the student body. Empower them, activate them and real change will happen.

Openly and frequently discussing the issue of bullying serves to diminish the perceived power of the bully and create an atmosphere of support for the victims and bystanders. At Chippewa Valley high school (including the Ninth Grade center), every Wednesday is “Hero In The Hallway” day and most of the staff wear Hero shirts. The staff members include teachers, administrators, custodians, clerical employees, security guards, a police liaison officer, lunchroom personnel and hall monitors. It is a visual, unspoken message of support indicating that the adults are ready, willing and able to assist any student who reports an incident of bullying.

The Hero program provides constant, visual reminders to students that their school is a safe place where bullying is not tolerated. There is a Hero Box located outside of the guidance office where students can anonymously report a bully or a hero. The Box is checked every day and incidents of bullying are dealt with, while reports of heroes are rewarded. The heroes receive a gift card to their favorite fast food restaurant, their photo is placed in the school’s Hero Showcase and an email is sent to all staff to acknowledge and commend the student hero’s brave and exemplary behavior.

In terms of program effectiveness, in 2008, 2010, 2012, and again in 2014 ninth and eleventh grade students at Chippewa Valley high school took the Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth (MiPHY) survey. The results were compared and statistically significant in indicating that students consistently reported a genuine improvement in the area of bullying. There has also been a noticeable and consistent increase in the number of students who are not only reporting incidents of bullying, but also demonstrating random acts of kindness and compassion. The school’s climate now better indicates a new found sense of entitlement and expectation that every student deserves to be treated with respect.

This is the seventh school year for the “Hero In The Hallway” initiative at Chippewa Valley high school. Keeping it a feel-good, positive and successful program means yearly speakers, frequent PA announcements, numerous signs and posters placed throughout the building and on the school busses, contests, games, giveaways, displayed student pledges committing to be a Hero in the hallway and, most importantly, good role-modeling behaviors exhibited by the adults on campus.

The Chippewa Valley high school’s Hero program has been formally presented at the MISD for the Student Assistance Specialists, the MAC (Macomb Area Conference) Principals and at Eastern Michigan University for the Michigan School Counseling Association. The Roseville school district and our sister high school, Dakota, along with Chippewa’s four middle schools, have currently adopted the Hero program. East Detroit and Fraser have asked for a Hero in-service, and representatives from Clintondale and Southfield schools came one Wednesday to see the program in action in order to begin one of their own. We even received a phone call from a school as far away as Grand Rapids who had heard about our program.

So... let’s all take a new direction and eradicate bullying by Standing Up and Speaking Out, and by being a good, decent, kind, helpful, compassionate, considerate and thoughtful person who does the right thing Every Day, Everywhere, Every Time and In Every Situation.