Prevent Bullying, Promote Kindness: 20 Things All Schools Can Do

by Tom Lickona

Phoebe Prince, 15, moved to the U.S. from Ireland in summer, 2009. At her high school that fall, some students called her an “Irish slut” after she had a brief relationship with a popular senior boy. They would knock books out of her hands, attack her on Facebook, and send her threatening text messages, day after day.

On January 14, 2010, students harassed her in the library, lunchroom, and hallways, and threw a canned drink at her as she walked home. That afternoon, her sister found her hanging from a stairwell in their home. Six students, two boys and four girls, were charged with felonies including statutory rape, harassment, and violation of civil rights.

Carl Walker-Hoover had always enjoyed sports, Scouts, and school. In 6th-grade, however, he began acting out in class. He eventually told his mother that some other kids had been picking on him, saying he acted “like a girl.” She complained to the school, but he wouldn’t tell on his classmates. The harassment continued. On April 6, 2009, his mother found Carl hanging from a rafter.

It took a rash of “bullycides” like these to finally galvanize society’s resolve to deal proactively with school bullying. Nearly every state now has some form of bullying prevention legislation.

New Jersey’s 2010 law is one of the toughest. School personnel must report bullying incidents to the principal on the same day they learn about it. An investigation must begin within one school day and be completed within 10 school days, after which a solution must be carried out. The law applies to all school-related functions, and to bullying off school grounds (such as cyberbullying) “whose effects carry into school.” Finally, there must be “year-round anti-bullying instruction appropriate to each grade.”

The High Costs of Cruelty

Student suicides are the most tragic consequence of peer abuse, but far from the only cost. On any school day, an estimated 160,000 U.S. students stay home because they don’t want to face peer persecution. Many become anxious and depressed; others have sought revenge. A U.S. Secret Service study found that most school shooters had been bullied.

Kids who are habitually cruel are deforming their own character, with long-term costs for society. By adulthood, one study found, 60% of school bullies will have a criminal conviction.

The academic costs are also high. Peer exclusion in kindergarten is associated with decreased class participation and lower academic achievement in later grades. In a study of 2,300 middle schoolers, bullying victims had significantly lower grade-point averages than their non-victimized peers.

Defining the Problem

Clearly, schools must take strong steps to curb bullying that involves dominant aggressors preying upon weaker victims who cannot stop the aggression. But a moment’s reflection tells us that schools face a much broader problem than bullying of this kind. The broader problem is cruelty and disrespect of all kinds, including that between social equals and near-equals.

In a 10-year study of 70,000 middle and high school students, the National Center for Student Aspirations found that only 37% agreed with the statement, “Students in my school show respect for one another.” Powerful bullies who target defenseless victims are a subset of this larger category of negative interpersonal behaviors. Bullying feeds off a wider peer culture that permits or promotes disrespect and unkind behavior.
New light on the problem faced by schools comes from *The American Sociological Review* (Feb. 2011). Researchers asked 4,000 students (grades 8-10) whether they had ever engaged in peer aggression (physical violence, verbal harassment, rumors and gossip, or ostracism). The surprising findings:

**Fully one-third of students admitted engaging in one or another kind of aggression (social aggression being twice as common as physical aggression). The more popular kids displayed more frequent social aggression.**

Many popular kids appear to climb the social pyramid by using exclusion, rumor-spreading, etc. against their social rivals. This finding is consistent with recent research identifying *socially marginalized bullies* (who may be victims of bullies themselves) and *socially connected bullies* who often have many friends and strengths such as social skills, athleticism, and physical attractiveness.

**What Can Be Done?**

If the broader problem is a negative peer culture, the solution must be multifaceted enough to change that culture. An effective bullying prevention program can be one component of a culture-changing strategy. Schools must be careful to select a comprehensive program with research support (such as the positive results Sue Limber cites for Olweus, p. 5). *Educational Leadership’s* Sept. 2011 issue, Promoting Respectful Schools, reports: “In a meta-analysis of 44 bullying prevention programs, fewer than half (19) were found to be effective.” By contrast, effective programs:

- enlist the support of the entire school community, including teachers, parents, and student bystanders; include increased playground supervision and firm sanctions for bullies; and change the overall school climate through ongoing messages that help students recognize social aggression and stick up for victims. Ultimately, bullying becomes not socially beneficial but rather socially unacceptable.

But even state-of-the-art programs such as the Olweus model don’t come close to eliminating bullying or other antisocial behaviors; they just reduce them. In Norway, where the Olweus program was first developed and implemented, there were reductions in bullying of 50% or more. However, in the most recent U.S. implementations, the reductions in verbal and physical aggression thus far have been more modest, 22-23%.

So the challenge for schools is this: *What to do about the cruelty and disrespect that remain—even after implementing a good bullying prevention program?*

**Comprehensive Character Development**

There’s an old psychological principle: If you want to suppress a negative behavior, promote its psychological opposite.

For example: A junior high school in Washington, D.C. had a big problem with students vandalizing property on the way to school. As part of a 5-year character education plan, the school required all students to give service to the community in some way. Vandalism dropped dramatically. If you’re building your community up, you’re much less likely to tear it down.

The implication for combating cruel and disrespectful behavior:

**Promote their opposites: kindness and respect. This is the core of effective character education: promoting positive behavior through all phases of school life. Bring out the best in students. Teach what’s right before something goes wrong. Set high standards; hold everyone, kids and adults, accountable. Celebrate success.**

To reduce cruelty and disrespect, promote their opposites.

What would it look like if a school combined a research-supported bullying prevention program with a comprehensive character education initiative aimed at creating a culture of kindness and respect? Let’s look at 10 schoolwide strategies and 10 classroom strategies for doing this.

**10 Schoolwide Strategies**

**1. Assessment.** Schools can use two kinds of assessment tools to get baseline data and measure progress in creating a safe and respectful school: (1) a survey focused on bullying (Olweus offers one), and (2) a broader survey that assesses overall school culture (e.g., the Respect and Responsibility School Culture Survey, p. 8).

**5. Staff vigilance and support.** In a large survey by the Youth Voice Project, students in grades 5-12 said that when adults took their complaints about cruelty seriously, maintained effective supervision, gave them advice and support, and regularly checked in with them to make sure they were safe, things more often got better. Things got worse when adults said they should solve the problem themselves.

**3. A school touchstone.** This is a set of “we” statements expressing the core values school members agree to live by, e.g.:

We show respect and caring by our words and actions.

We defend those who can’t defend themselves.

Whatever hurts my neighbor, hurts me.

Involve staff, students, and parents in developing the touchstone every day.

**4. A schoolwide curriculum.** A research-supported character education curriculum can prevent cruelty and promote respect by teaching prosocial skills such as empathy, listening, and conflict resolution. *Second Step*, a K-9 curriculum, is one such program. See Resources (p. 4) and *What Works in Character Education* ([www.characterandcitizenship.org](http://www.characterandcitizenship.org)) for others.

**5. Service learning.** Studies show that meaningful opportunities for service not only improve school attendance and test scores, but also foster kindness and positive attitudes toward cultural diversity. Service with the greatest potential to produce such outcomes involves face-to-face helping relationships sustained over time.

**6. Peer support.** In most cases, bullying occurs with an audience of peer bystanders who either do nothing or encourage the bullying. Hence the need to develop what Jonathan Cohen and colleagues call “upstanders,” students who intervene (“Hey, leave him alone”); see Resources, p. 4.

Other research indicates that onlookers can help without necessarily “standing up” to the bullies. In the *Youth Voice Project* survey ([www.youthvoiceproject.com](http://www.youthvoiceproject.com)), victims of peer cruelty said that other students who became their allies—spending time with them, listening to them, giving...
them advice, helping them get away from the bullies and tell an adult—were actually a bigger help to them than peers who directly confronted the bullies. Bullying victims who get this kind of peer support, studies show, are less likely to become anxious and depressed.

7. Reporting options. Telling a trusted adult is one way to report peer cruelty, but students also need an anonymous hot line, drop boxes around the school, and annual anonymous surveys.

8. Participatory student government. Psychologist Kurt Lewin found that victimization and scapegoating were highest in an autocratic group atmosphere and lowest in a democratic group atmosphere. Schools can create a democratic peer culture by maximizing opportunities for student voice—e.g., by designing a student government that gets the whole student body involved in solving real-life problems.

Birch Meadow Elementary School (MA) set up a Little SAC (Student Advisory Council), with two delegates elected from each K-3 classroom and a Big SAC, with two delegates from each 4th-6th-grade classroom, plus officers elected by the whole student body. The elected vice-president of Big SAC served as chair of, and link to, Little SAC. Both groups meet weekly with the principal over lunch. He comments:

In one Little SAC meeting, classroom delegates complained that the older kids were “hogging the playground equipment” and generally not being very nice to the little kids. The 5th-grade boy who chaired Little SAC subsequently conveyed the younger students’ complaint at the next Big SAC meeting.

Big SAC delegates then sought suggested solutions from their respective classrooms, brought those ideas to the next Big SAC meeting, and formulated rules for fair use of the playground equipment. The new rules were then presented to Little SAC by the 5th-grade liaison for their consent. The playground problem was thereby solved.

See Smart & Good High Schools (www.cortland.edu/character) for high school examples of increasing student voice.

9. Involve students in welcoming new kids. At one high school, freshmen had been hazed—humiliated and harassed—during the first two weeks of school. Determined to change this, the school’s new principal showed all of his seniors a documentary about the Columbine High School shootings that took the lives of 12 students and a teacher, and that stemmed from a culture of peer cruelty. He asked the seniors to create a new tradition that would make every freshman feel welcome. He explains what they came up with:

Every senior was given the names of 3 freshmen and asked to write them letters with tips on how to succeed at the school. In a half-day ceremony before the first school day, seniors served the freshmen breakfast in the school hall, the football team and cheerleaders did funny routines, and freshmen were called up individually to receive their welcoming letters on a personalized foam board. This new tradition has redefined who we are. There is no more hazing.

Peer allies help victims to withstand cruelty.

10. Respect diversity. A school must be safe for all, regardless of sexual orientation or other differences. To prevent anti-gay bullying, some educators have urged schools, in their curricula, “to promote positive attitudes toward gay families, celebrate Gay Pride week,” etc. Critics of this approach have raised two objections: (1) a school does not have to affirm the sexual identities of its students to defend their dignity as human beings and their right to go to school without fear of harassment, and (2) affirming homosexuality does not respect the views of students, staff, and parents who, as a matter of conscience, hold traditional moral and religious beliefs regarding sexuality.

A public school should respect diversity of convictions about homosexuality by not promoting a single ideological perspective. It should instead require respectful behavior, rather than “correct attitudes.” A school can do this by teaching:

We uphold standards of behavior which honor the dignity and worth of all individuals regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, age, physical or mental abilities, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background.

10 Classroom Strategies

1. Two-minute interviews. Students are more likely to be respectful and kind when all classrooms promote positive peer relations. Award-winning, former high school teacher Hal Urban, author of Lessons from the Classroom, explains how he helped his students get to know each other:

I used the first 4 minutes of every class during the first two weeks of school to have students do paired 2-minute interviews. They each asked their partner several questions and recorded their answers. What’s an achievement you’re proud of? A special interest you have? A goal you’re working on? Who is a hero for you? We did this until every student interviewed every other student in the class.

2. Compact for Excellence. Students are more likely to follow rules when they share responsibility for creating them. At The Shipley School (PA), every teacher begins the school year by involving the class in creating a Compact for Excellence that includes rules for best work and rules for treatment of others. Fifth-grade teacher Wendy Eiteljorg explains:

I set up stations with magic markers and a large sheet of paper with one of the following headings:

To help everyone feel welcome and respected, STUDENTS will . . .

To help everyone feel welcome and respected, TEACHERS will . . .

To help everyone do their best work, STUDENTS will . . .

To help everyone do their best work, THE TEACHER will . . .

After students write their suggestions at their station, they rotate at my signal to another station, read the entries there, and write others they think are needed. Then we have a class meeting, look at all the ideas, and synthesize them into our Compact for Excellence. At the end of each week, we evaluate how we’re doing on our Compact.

High school chemistry teacher Marc Hermon has all of his students sign their Compact for Excellence, posts it prominently, and reviews it daily.

3. Character-based consequences. When students are mean to others, the disciplinary consequence should include restitution: doing something positive to set things right. Teacher Molly Angelini says:

If a student calls someone a name or is unkind in any other way, I ask that child to write a sincere letter of apology to the person he or she has offended. They show it to me first.

Behavior contracts have proved helpful with kids who bully. For example:

I will not hit or hurt anyone. If I do, I will have to call my parents and report what I did.

4. Class meetings. Weekly class meetings play an important role in sustain-
ing a positive classroom culture. In an effective meeting, the teacher creates guidelines for communication (“What rules do we need for good talking and good listening?”); invites students to describe a problem (“What’s been happening lately when we line up for lunch?”); encourages shared responsibility for finding a solution (“How can we, working together, solve this problem?”); and plans a follow-up meeting (“When shall we meet again to evaluate how our solution is working?”).

5. Cooperative learning. Studies show that well-designed collaborative learning—having kids work in pairs, 3s, or 4s in interdependent ways—increases academic achievement and fosters empathy, friendships across racial and ethnic groups, and appreciation of others’ talents.

6. Anonymous compliments. Teachers can give kids regular opportunities to affirm each other. Says teacher Rick Mansfield:

Every Monday, my students draw a classmate’s name and have the week to think of a sincere compliment. They show it to me; I sometimes help them make it more meaningful. Then they write it, unsigned, on a colored strip of paper and put it in our Compliments Box. On Friday, I post all the compliments on the bulletin board. They love this activity.

7. Critique circles. In An Ethic of Excellence, Ron Berger shows how to foster performance character (best work) and moral character (best behavior) simultaneously through peer feedback on academic work. Students bring an essay, science project, or piece of art work to the critique circle. There are three rules: “Be kind. Be specific. Be helpful.” Berger explains:

First, the presenting student says what he or she would especially like feedback on.

Then, classmates offer comments on what they see as strengths of the work.

Next, students then offer suggestions. They do this respectfully, asking, for example: “Have you thought of doing this . . .?” “Would you consider doing that . . .?”

Along the way, I make suggestions, pose questions, and teach relevant skills.

Students then revise their work based on the feedback. Through this process, classmates have ongoing opportunities to help each other do their very best work.

8. Good Deeds Journal. To develop the habit of kindness, build opportunities for practicing it into the school day. St. Rocco’s, an award-winning K-8 school in Rhode Island, has all students write in their Good Deeds Journals:

At the start of each day, students enter a good deed they did the day before (in their class, school, neighborhood, or family). Teachers reinforce the good deeds theme by commenting on good deeds performed by someone in the news or by a character in a story.

Says one mom: “My kids now shovel snow for an elderly neighbor without expecting or accepting payment in return.”

9. Teaching empathy through literature. A good story can be a compelling way to show the suffering caused by cruelty and the compassion and courage of persons who try to stop it. Teammates, for example, tells how Brooklyn Dodgers captain Pee Wee Reese stood by Jackie Robinson when Jackie faced racism, even from some of his fellow Dodgers, for being the first black man to play major league baseball. See Joy Mosher’s article (Recommended Resources) for many more such books.

To get the most behavioral impact from a good book, teachers can use the 4 KEYS:

1. Other-Study (“What can we learn from the actions of the characters?”)

2. Self-Study (“Has this ever happened to you? “What will you do the next time you see someone being excluded?”)

3. Public Presentation (“Share your goal with a partner.”)

4. A Community That Supports & Challenges (“Be prepared to report progress on your goal next week. We’ll share our experiences.”)

10. Daily self-assessment & goal-setting. At the day’s end, students at Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter School (MA) use their Character Record Book to answer 3 questions regarding the week’s focus virtue, e.g.:

How did I show kindness today?

How did I not show kindness today?

How will I show kindness tomorrow?

See Mark Schumacker (p. 6) for examples of weekly character goals. See Michele Borba (p. 7) for what parents can do.

Taken together, these strategies can make schools what they ought to be: ethical learning communities where respect and kindness are the norm—and where every student is able to learn in a safe and supportive environment.

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Recommended Resources (click on red text for hot links)

www.pacer.org/bullying
Digital-based resources
http://www.stopbullying.gov/
Tip sheets and assessment tools
www.wiredsafety.org: cyberspace safety

PUBLICATIONS/CURRICULA:

Building an Intentional School Culture (touchstone resource), C. Elbot & D. Fulton

Character Matters, Thomas Lickona

Character Quotations, Tom Lickona & Matt Davidson (Kagan Publishing)

“Children’s Literature and Character Development,” Joy Mosher; http://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/199292.pdf

“Creating a Climate of Respect” (developing upstanders); J. Cohen, R. Cardillo and T. Pickeral; http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept11/vol69/num01/Creating-a-Climate-of-Respect.aspx

Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility, Thomas Lickona

Educational Leadership, Promoting Respectful Schools, Sept. 2011 issue

Kagan Cooperative Learning www.kaganonline.com

Lessons from the Classroom, 20 Things Good Teachers Do; www.halurban.com

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program support materials [www.olweus.org]:
Class Meetings That Matter (K-8) Cyber Bullying Curriculum (6-12 ) The Peaceful School Bus Program (K-12)

Power2Achieve (high school curriculum; see units on relationships and communication) www.excellenceandethics.com

School-Connect (high school curriculum for social, emotional, and academic skills) www.school-connect.net

Second Step Violence Prevention (K-9 curriculum); www.cfcchildren.org

Smart & Good High Schools (100 promising practices); www.cortland.edu/character

Social-Emotional Learning Assessment Measures for Middle School Youth; Kevin Haggerty, et al; http://raikesfoundation.org/Documents/SELTools.pdf

Heartwood Institute: Teaching Life Lessons Through Literature; www.heartwoodethics.org/

Think, Care, Act: Teaching for a Peaceful Future, Susan Gelber Cannon
Dr. Susan Limber ([SLimber@clemson.edu]), is the Dan Olweus Distinguished Professor at Clemson University’s Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life and director of the U.S. Olweus program (www.olweus.org).

Tom Lickona: How does the Olweus program define bullying?

Sue Limber: Our survey states that a student is being bullied when one or more students: (1) say mean and hurtful things or make fun of someone; (2) completely ignore or exclude someone; (3) hit, kick, push, shove, or lock someone in a room; (4) tell lies or spread false rumors about a person, or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike that person; or (5) do other hurtful things.

TL: According to your studies of U.S. schools, what percent of students say they’ve been bullied 2 to 3 times a month or more?

SL: Baseline Olweus surveys, completed by 524,054 students in grades 3-12 from 1,593 schools in 45 different states, find that:

- 17% said they had been bullied 2-3 times a month or more. This included 23% of elementary students, 17% of middle school students, and 11% of high school students.
- 10% of all students (grades 3-12) said they bullied others 2-3 times a month or more.
- Girls’ bullying peaks in 8th grade, when 10% say they bullied others 2-3 times a month or more. Girls’ bullying then declines steadily through 12th-grade. Boys’ bullying increases until grade 8, when 14% of boys say they bullied others 2-3 times a month or more, and stays fairly steady through 12th-grade.

TL: What else does your survey assess?

SL: We ask students where the bullying occurred, by whom, whether and whom they told, and how they usually react if they see or learn that a student their age is being bullied. More than half of students either say they try to help in some way or at least feel that they should help. Schools can build on that feeling of obligation by teaching them how to translate empathy into effective action.

TL: What do you recommend students do when they see someone being bullied?

SL: If they are comfortable doing so, they should calmly tell the child who is bullying to stop—that what they’re doing “isn’t cool.” They shouldn’t get into a physical altercation. If they witness the bullying at school, they should tell their teacher, school counselor, principal or other adult they trust. They also can show kindness to students who have been bullied—by saving them a seat on the bus or in the cafeteria, telling them that no one deserves to be bullied, including them in activities, or simply listening to them.

TL: What are the characteristics of the typical school bully and typical victim?

SL: There’s no single profile, but youth who frequently bully often have dominant personalities, positive attitudes towards violence, difficulty following rules, little empathy for their victims, skill at talking themselves out of difficult situations, and a kind of “top-dog” popularity among peers, even if they’re not particularly well-liked.

Children who are bullied are much more likely than non-bullied peers to be anxious and withdrawn, depressed, and have low self-esteem. Students who bully and are also victims of bullying often show many of the characteristics of children who bully and characteristics of children who are bullied.

Reducing bullying requires a comprehensive effort.

TL: What can schools do to help bullies stop bullying and victims be less vulnerable?

SL: Reducing bullying requires a comprehensive effort involving all adults and students in the school. Much effort should be placed on prevention through building a culture of community and respect; setting clear rules for behavior; and giving students knowledge, skills, and resources to prevent and address bullying. When bullying occurs, there should be non-hostile but consistent consequences for youth who bully and support to help them change their behavior. Kids who are bullied need support and protection to ensure that the bullying doesn’t continue.

TL: How successful has the Olweus program been in reducing bullying?

SL: Most recently, we’ve conducted a study of more than 18,000 students in Pennsylvania schools, elementary through high school. After 2 years of program implementation, there was a 22% reduction in students’ reports of being verbally bullied and a 23% reduction in reports of being physically bullied. We strongly encourage schools to repeat our survey annually to see what progress they are making and where there’s a need for further improvement.

TL: What affects a school’s success in using the Olweus program to reduce bullying?

SL: Clear school rules about bullying and class meeting time both appear to be especially important. Weekly class meetings are important for discussing and role-playing what bystanders can do.

TL: How has your program changed as a result of your experience with schools?

SL: Feedback from teachers and students has helped us refine our training, consultation, and supportive materials. Our class meeting manuals and videos, for example, were developed in response to some teachers saying, “I need extra help in this area.”

TL: If a school wishes to use your program, what options do they have?

SL: Schools can purchase print and video materials including a schoolwide guide and teacher guide. But we strongly recommend, for fidelity of implementation, that they also receive training and ongoing consultation.

Schools can opt to hire a certified trainer to provide a 2-day training for their school’s coordinating team and monthly phone or in-person consultation for that team. Alternatively, a district can have one of its own staff become a certified, in-house trainer. That person receives an initial 3-day training and a 2-day training later in the year, as well as ongoing consultation with us.

TL: Where can readers find your research?


TL: Are there other bullying prevention programs with research support?

SL: Because the Olweus program began in the 1980s, it is the most researched, but web sites such as www.stopbullying.gov provide information on other programs and their research base.
I teach 7th-grade math. I try to promote kind behavior in my classroom and beyond through a daily character quotation and a weekly character challenge.

Daily Character Quote

No act of kindness, however small, goes unnoticed. —Aesop

I share a quote like this at the start of each class period, along with a photo of the quote’s author and relevant biographical information. First, I ask students, “What does the quote mean?” After they share some of their ideas, I offer my own.

Then I challenge them to think about how they will apply the quote to their own lives. We discuss ways to do that. Later in the week, I ask them to share examples of how they actually did apply the quote.

Weekly Character Challenge

Each week I challenge students to perform a kind act over the course of that week. During Week 1 of this school year, this was the challenge:

Try to give a good compliment to three different people this week. Your kind and uplifting words make more of a difference than you could possibly imagine.

After I introduce the Weekly Character Challenge, we discuss (1) why it’s important and (2) how to meet it. With the Compliments Challenge, I give examples of what a good compliment is and is not.

A good compliment focuses on behavior shown by another individual. For example: “I think you are an amazing listener. Whenever I have a problem, I know I can come to you and you will always listen and give me support.”

At the week’s end, I have the kids journal about their experience. “What did you like about this week’s challenge? How successful were you in meeting it?” I then collect the journals to check for completion and understanding. To increase accountability, I give a completion grade on the journal at the end of the quarter.

After the Courtesy Challenge (see box), a student named Austin told me that he and his family went out to eat, and he practiced using “please” and “thank you” with the waiter the whole time they were there. At the end of the evening, the waiter came to their table and asked Austin how old he was. The waiter then told him most kids his age don’t use such wonderful manners. I said to Austin, “People really do notice when you use your manners.” He smiled and said he appreciated the lesson.

Weekly Character Challenges

1. The Gratitude Challenge: With all of the new gadgets that are available, the gift everybody still enjoys most is gratitude. This week, I’d like you to say “thank you” to any person who does anything for you. You’ll be surprised at the amount of gratitude you can give in one day!

2. The Courtesy Challenge: We often forget to say the most valued word in the English language: please. The word please tells others that you are thoughtful, not demanding. This simple word can take you far.

3. The Encouragement Challenge: Everybody struggles and needs encouragement from time to time. This week I’d like you to offer some encouragement to one person that looks like he or she could use it. This person can be a friend or foe, or somebody you wouldn’t normally talk to.

4. The Teacher Appreciation Challenge: Show your teachers that you value their efforts, the lesson they are teaching, and the other students in the classroom. You can do this by participating in class, raising your hand when you want to speak, and listening when a teacher or another student is speaking.

5. The No-Complaints Challenge: This may be the hardest one so far: to go for the entire day without complaining. You and everybody around you will appreciate your effort!

However, students’ first efforts lacked detail, for example, “Thanks for always being there for me.” I realized I needed to be a part of the process. Now we always brainstorm examples together. Once students have their own statements ready, they show them to me, and I approve them. The quality has gone way up. One girl wrote to her father:

Dad, you are the person who picks me up and dusts me off after I fail. You give me hope when I have none left. You help me with my math even though I get mad easily. Thank you for everything, and I love you.

He was blown away.

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

To reduce bullying in our schools, we have implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (see p. 5)—first in the middle school in Jan., 2009, and then districtwide in Aug., 2011. To get baseline data, we administered the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire in May, 2008, and are now planning to administer it every other year. Students and staff can be heard using the Olweus terminology. Whenever a bullying incident is reported, our counselors take one of more of the following steps:

1. Discuss the incident with the alleged harasser; review Harassment Policy.
2. Harasser completes Reflection Form.
3. Harasser signs Conduct Statement.
4. Conduct mediation with the students.
5. Contact the parent(s).

If a student continues to bully, the principal becomes involved and may take steps such as detention, demerits, loss of privileges, Saturday school, suspension or expulsion, or referral to police. All incidents and consequences are e-mailed to the whole staff.

By combining classroom efforts to promote kindness with schoolwide efforts to reduce bullying, we’re working to create a culture of character in our school.

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Dr. Michele Borba is the parenting expert on NBC’s “Today” show. Her 23 books include Building Moral Intelligence and The Big Book of Parenting Solutions. Her proposal, “Ending School Violence and Bullying,” was signed into California law in 2002. See www.micheleborba.com.

Tom Lickona: What are three things parents can do to raise kids who are kind?

Michele Borba: First, consciously model kind behavior. Whenever you do a kind act, tell your child how good it makes you feel.

Second, be explicit about your expectations: “Unkindness is hurtful. I expect you to treat everyone kindly.”

Third, look for opportunities for your child to be kind and then acknowledge it: “That was a very kind thing to do.”

How can parents help schools reduce bullying?

MB: Go to your school’s website or handbook and review the rules on bullying with your kids. Ask them to teach you the bullying prevention skills they’re learning at school, for example, what to do when they see somebody being bullied. If the school has a speaker about bullying, try to be there and then discuss at home what you learned.

What if your child is accused of bullying?

MB: Don’t be quick to say, “Not my kid!” Get the facts. Ask your child to describe what the behavior in question looked like. What type of behavior are you dealing with—fighting, put-downs, excluding, threatening, racial slurs?

Set up a conference with the teacher or counselor. Talk to people who see your child in different settings. Are they observing the bullying behaviors?

If you conclude that your child is bullying, get expert help—the school counselor, a psychologist, or an outside person. You need a specific plan to stop this behavior. Your child needs to know you will be monitoring him or her.

Most of all, take it seriously. Norway’s Dan Olweus found that 60% of males who were bullies in grades 6–9 were convicted of at least one crime as adults. Nearly four in ten had three or more convictions by age 24.

What about cyberbullying?

MB: As soon as kids are going online, teach them to communicate with other people online in the same way they would face-to-face—with respect. That’s the way they would want to be treated. As one mom said, “The difference between right and wrong is the same on the Internet as it is in real life.” Teach kids the repercussions of whatever they say on the Internet. An offhand comment can be instantly forwarded to dozens of classmates with the click of a button.

If kids think they’re being cyberbullied, they should share this information right away with a parent, teacher, or other adult they trust.

How can parents monitor their kids’ use of social media?

MB: Get educated about your child’s virtual world. Take a course or workshop or ask the school’s technology expert. You can’t monitor what you don’t understand.

Parenting Practices That Foster Bullying

- Lack of warmth and involvement
- Permissive attitude toward child’s abusive behavior
- Reliance on physical punishment


Know all family passwords, user/screen names, and accounts. Know how to log onto your kids’ sites, create personal profiles to “friend” them, and use the browser so you can visit and check their online world.

Microsoft recommends that with kids under 10, you sit with them when they use the Internet. Their recommended age to sign up for social web sites is usually 13 and over.

With kids using the Internet on their own, announce up-front that you will check their online activity. Tell them to let their friends know this. When kids know that they’re being monitored, they’re less likely to engage in hurtful behaviors.

What specific rules or guidelines would you recommend to parents?

MB: These are my “6 P’s of Internet Safety”:

1. Parental Presence: A parent will check your online activity.
2. Public: The computer is public; anyone and everybody can see what you write. You are representing yourself and our family online by where you go and what you say. Your password and accounts will be public to your parents, and we will monitor your online presence together.
3. Posts: There are no “take-backs,” so don’t click unless you want the world—including Grandma—to see your post.
4. Privacy: Insist that your children not share personal information such as their real name, address, phone number, or passwords with people they meet online. Encourage kids to keep their passwords secret—even from friends. Don’t store passwords in your backpack, wallet, or on a file in your computer. Criminals look there first. Never provide your password over e-mail.
5. People: NEVER physically meet anyone offline that you’ve met online. In real life, people may be very different from what they seem like online.
6. Please tell: If you ever feel uncomfortable about something online, please tell me.

How can parents hold kids accountable to family rules about the Internet?

MB: Have kids sign a pledge to follow the rules. Have frequent chats to follow up.

Daily Internet time limits. Give Internet freedom based on your child’s past trustworthiness and age. Increase those limits slowly as you verify trust.

“Walk-By” Rule. Announce that if at any time your child covers the screen, closes programs, or quickly turns off the computer, Internet privilege is lost. Do walk-bys as often as needed.

“Collect and Drop.” Have your teens drop personal cell phones, iPads, laptops, etc. into a designated basket each night. Review personal posts, texts, or emails periodically—reading only enough so your teen knows you’re checking often and that you will limit or remove online privileges if warranted.

Axe the page. As a last resort, you can contact the social website your child uses and ask them to remove the page. Check out Internet filtering tools, such as Windows Live Family Safety, as a complement to parental supervision.
Respect & Responsibility School Culture Survey
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For each item below, fill in the circle that best describes your experience.

Agree/Disagree Items (1 - 21)

Respect: Honoring the rights, dignity, & worth of every person; courtesy: not hurting others physically or emotionally.

1. Students treat other students with respect, regardless of differences.  1 2 3 4 5
   1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree
   If you wish, write the item number on the back and explain the reason for your rating.

2. Students treat teachers with respect.  1 2 3 4 5
3. Students treat other adults at school with respect.  1 2 3 4 5
4. Students respect others’ property.  1 2 3 4 5
5. Teachers treat students with respect.  1 2 3 4 5
6. Other adults at school treat students with respect.  1 2 3 4 5
7. Teachers don’t allow students to treat each other disrespectfully.  1 2 3 4 5
8. Teachers don’t allow students to treat them disrespectfully.  1 2 3 4 5
9. People in this school are generally polite (say please, thank you, excuse me, hold the door).  1 2 3 4 5
10. The school has clear rules against hurting other people physically (hitting, pushing, kicking, tripping) or threatening to hurt.  1 2 3 4 5
11. The school has clear rules against hurting other people emotionally (name-calling, mean teasing, excluding others, spreading rumors).  1 2 3 4 5
12. The school has effective disciplinary consequences for hurting people in any way (physically or emotionally).  1 2 3 4 5
13. I feel respected at this school.  1 2 3 4 5

Responsibility: Helping or supporting others; standing up for their rights; taking positive action to solve a problem.

14. Students are willing to help other students, even if they are not friends.  1 2 3 4 5
15. Students solve conflicts without insults or fighting.  1 2 3 4 5
16. The school encourages students to perform kind actions.  1 2 3 4 5
17. When I see or hear about a student being bullied or hurt in any way, I try to stop it or report it (to an adult or through an anonymous reporting system).  1 2 3 4 5
18. When I see a student being bullied or treated unkindly in any way, I try to comfort them, be their friend, give them advice, or help them tell an adult.  1 2 3 4 5
19. If a student reports bullying or any kind of hurtful behavior, a teacher or the school does something right away to try to stop it.  1 2 3 4 5
20. The school teaches students specific things they can do when they see someone bullying others.  1 2 3 4 5
21. When students do something hurtful, they are required to do something positive to make up for it (apologize or do something nice to or for the person).  1 2 3 4 5

Students should answer items 22-29. Staff and parents, answer only those items that apply to you.

22. How often have you been physically hurt (hit, pushed, etc.) or threatened by other students at school?  1 2 3 4 5
   1 = Never; 2 = Once or twice a year; 3 = About every other month; 4 = About once a month; 5 = Two or 3 times a month
   If you wish, write the item number on the back and explain the reason for your rating.

23. How often have you been emotionally hurt (called names, excluded, been the victim of rumors, etc.) by other students at school?  1 2 3 4 5
24. How often have you seen students physically hurting or threatening others at school?  1 2 3 4 5
25. How often have you seen students emotionally hurting others at school?  1 2 3 4 5
26. How often have you been put down or disrespected in some other way by a teacher or other adult in the school?  1 2 3 4 5
27. How often have you intentionally hurt another student, either physically or emotionally, at school?  1 2 3 4 5
28. How often have you been the victim of cyberbullying (mean behavior on Facebook, texting, e-mail, etc.)?  1 2 3 4 5
29. What else do you think the school should know about bullying at our school? For example, where does it happen? When? Who is doing the bullying? Who are the victims? (Write your answer on the back.)