

BULLYING BEHAVIOR: PREVENTION & INTERVENTION

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The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander

"I find myself sometimes curious, often times irritated, and occasionally astonished by the whole concept of bullies, bullied, and those who are witness to the activity and remain silent. That we lack the skills of dealing with bullying in peacefully effective ways screams at us from the news headlines. And there is a line crossed all too often where the bullied becomes the bully. The idea that being excluded, shunned, ridiculed, ostracized, and physically assaulted by the bullying faction merits vengeance and violence is but one of those self-degrading ideas that we embrace, creating a cure that is worse than the disease." --- Dianne Reeves

Bullying Behavior: What Is It?

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberate hostile activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror. ---Coloroso (2008)

Relational Aggression

According to Dellasega (2005), Relational aggression (RA) is the use of relationships to hurt another, a way of verbal violence in which words rather than fists inflict damage.

Some women never grow out of these behaviors – the same game that started in grade school is still being played as older adults – women continue to interact in aggressive ways reminiscent of high school hallways where girls jockeyed for social status.

Difficult vs. Bullying Behavior

A Difficult Person:

- Experience reality differently than you do
- Make untrue accusations
- Blame you for things that aren't your fault
- Criticize you all the time
- Put you in a no-win situation
- Deny the effects of their behaviors on family members

Behaviors of Bullies

A Bullying Person:

- Likes to dominate other people
- Likes to use other people to get what they want
- Finds it hard to see a situation from the other person's perspective
- Is concerned only with their own wants and pleasures and not the needs, rights, and feelings of others

Characteristics of Bullies Continued

- Tend to hurt others when authority figures are not around
- View weaker peers as prey (bullying is also known as relational aggression or predatory aggression)
- Project their own inadequacies onto their target
- Refuse to accept responsibility for their actions

Characteristics of Bullies Continued

- Lack insight – they lack the ability to consider the short-term, long-term and possible unintended consequences of their current behavior
- Crave attention

How to Become a Bully

“Mean girls grow up to be mean women, make no mistake about it.” – anonymous caller to a radio talk show

Bullies have learned to be bullies...someone has taught them!

Different Kinds of Bullies

- The **confident** bully – This person feels good only to the degree that he feels a sense of superiority over others
- The **social** bully – Uses rumor, gossip, verbal taunts, and shunning to systematically isolate selected targets and exclude them from social activities
- The **armored** bully – Appears cool and detached and shows little or no emotion

Kinds of Bullies Continued

- The **hyperactive** bully – Has trouble making friends
- The **bullied** bully – Is both a target and a bully – this person strikes out at those who hurt him/her and targets those weaker or smaller
- The **group** of bullies – A group of people who collectively do something they would not do individually

Anger vs. Contempt

According to Coloroso (2008), bullying behavior is about contempt and not anger.

- *Contempt is a powerful feeling of dislike toward somebody considered to be worthless, inferior, or undeserving of respect*

Contempt

Bullies can harm others without experiencing empathy, compassion or shame due to an apparent:

- **Sense of entitlement** – the privilege and right to control, dominate, subjugate, and otherwise abuse another human being
- **An intolerance toward differences** – different equals inferior and thus not worthy of respect

Contempt Continued

- **A liberty to exclude** – to bar, isolate, and segregate a person deemed not worthy of respect or care

Bullying is arrogance in action!

Bullying Behavior and Hate

- The greatest acts of hatred – The Holocaust, genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia, Sudan – were carried out in very efficient and calculated manner
- A hostile attitude is central to hate
- Anger that is not experienced in a healthy way can persist and develop into hate

Hate Continued

- One who hates strives to remove and destroy the thing he/she hates
- Hate involves an extreme type of intolerance and opposition to diversity
- Hate involves psychological distance
- When physical elimination is not possible, **verbal aggression** takes its place

Hate Continued

- The wish to avoid/eliminate the hated one is contrary to the wish to understand – **understanding is what underlies genuine communication**
- Communication is in conflict with a basic desire involved in hate -- destroy

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

- Any behavior that is designed to control another person through the use of **fear, humiliation, and verbal or physical assaults**
- Is a lot like brainwashing in that it wears away at the victim's self confidence

TYPES OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

According to Shankle (2001):

1. Territorial Aggression – An individual's boundaries are crossed
2. Male-to-Male Aggression – Ritualized responses to establish dominance
3. Aggression induced by fear – Any situation perceived as threatening
4. Aggression and aggravating stimuli – chronic pain

REJECTION

A person who experiences a great deal of rejection may become a bully:

- Rejection may be as much of a problem as neglect
- Rejection is more immediately shaming
- When rejected, you know that you have been found **defective and deficient**
- Self-worth is threatened

PERSONALITY PROBLEMS

- Adults who lash out at you may be consumed with their own needs
- Expressions of rage and anger may be a result of abuse they suffered in the past
- They may be trying to control their own lives not yours
- Blaming and criticizing may become verbal abuse
- **Do not abandon** them if at all possible

The Narcissistic Spouse or Partner

- A major cause of excessive anger in marriages or partners – this occurs in both heterosexual and same gender relationships
- These individuals overreact in anger when they cannot have their way
- They overreact when their partners do not give in to their selfish demands

Narcissism Continued

- Narcissistic people are reluctant to change
- Some narcissistic people will not give up their self-centered behaviors
- They believe that they can only be happy with individuals (including professional helpers) who support their narcissistic lifestyle

What the Helper Can Do—Know Something About Narcissism

- Narcissism emerges as the typical form of character structure in a society that has lost interest in the future
- Features of personality problems become more entrenched as people age
- Men and women begin to fear growing old before they even arrive at middle age
- This irrational terror of old age and death is associated with the emergence of the narcissistic personality

Narcissism Continued

- With few inner resources, the person with narcissism looks to others to validate his sense of self
- An aging partner can trigger aggressive and violent behavior in the partner with narcissism who wishes for eternal youth and wants to abolish symbols of old age
- Misuse of alcohol/drugs can be part of the picture

Prevention & Intervention

Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness – James Thurber

Preventing Bullying Behavior

- Official policies and complaint procedures are a first step in the process.
- These “official” policies tend to hang on walls and not in people’s hearts
- There needs to be a shared sense in terms of “this is the way we do things here”
- There needs to be a safe and caring climate in which residents, staff and visitors treat each other with respect, caring and compassion

Prevention Continued

- To prevent bullying behavior, a person, a family, an institution must be aware that bullying exists
- Bullying can exist in boardrooms, offices, dining rooms, recreation areas, and hallways
- Administrative staff, line staff, homemaking staff, maintenance – everyone must buy in to the prevention of bullying behavior
- Bullying behavior is learned; we must unlearn it

Empowering Intervention

If an older person is being bullied, you can teach this individual to:

- Ignore the bully
- Persist despite the fact that the bully exists
- Find alternative routes to get to places you go to in the facility
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Connect with others who understand

Create Healthy Relationships

- Healthy relationships are not emotionally draining
- Healthy relationships are not exploitive
- Healthy relationships thrive as a result of mutual respect, boundaries and honesty

Intervention Techniques

We can teach those who are being bullied to learn techniques to increase self-esteem and assertiveness

- Practice saying NO to a pushy resident
- Invite the bully to meet with you and a staff member to initiate conflict resolution
- Remain calm; breathe; do not “react” in a hostile manner; “respond” in a positive manner and leave the situation

Stop Profanity

- Profanity instantly intensifies any discussion or disagreement
- Profanity can not only be an expression of aggression but it can intensify aggression
- Practice other ways of communicating without the use of cuss words

WHAT STAFF NEEDS TO KNOW

- Awareness – Be mindful of your limits and boundaries
- Acknowledge – Your feelings of stress, frustration and powerlessness
- Limit-setting – Become an expert at saying “NO”
- Asking for Help – Utilize your resources
- Self-care – Give up professional perfectionism

What Organizations Can Do

- Provide training for staff
- Provide support networks
- Show respect and empathy for staff
- Provide breaks in working with complicated residents
- Management needs to avoid being part of the problem
- Encourage meaningful conversations among staff

DEALING EFFECTIVELY

- Give the aggressive resident your undivided attention
- Do not downplay the seriousness of their complaints
- Make an empathic statement
- Establish rapport
- Take control of the situation

Leadership

- Invite residents to be part of a leadership group to increase positive relationships and decrease aggressive/bullying behavior
- Inform residents that bullying behavior **will not be tolerated**
- Create opportunities for residents to learn how to manage their emotions in positive ways

Do What Is Right

Cowardice asks the question: is it safe?

Expediency asks the question: is it politic?

Vanity asks the question: is it popular?

But conscience asks the question: is it right?

And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular -- but one must take it because it is right – Martin Luther King Jr.

Reading List

Craig Nakken – The Addictive Personality
Steven Farmer – Adult Children of Abusive Parents
Thich Nhat Hanh – Anger
Gloria M. Davenport – Working with Toxic Older Adults: A Guide to Coping with Difficult Elders
Melody Beattie – Codependent No More
Mary Pipher – Another Country
L. John Mason – Guide to Stress Reduction
Marc Ian Barasch – Field Notes on the Compassionate Life: A search for the Soul of Kindness

Reading List Continued

Jacqueline Marcell Elder rage: How to survive caring for aging parents.
W. Robert Nay Taking charge of anger: How to resolve conflict, sustain relationships, and express yourself without losing control.
T. Real I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression
Patricia S. Potter-Efron et al The secret message of shame.
June Tangney & Ronda Dearing Shame and guilt.

Reading List Continued

- K. Van Wormer & D. Davis Addiction Treatment: A Strengths Perspective
- K. Redfield Jamison Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide
- E. Kubler-Ross On Death and Dying
- S. Cochran & F. Rabinowitz Men and Depression: Clinical and Empirical Perspectives

Reading List Continued

- D. Jacobs Guide to Suicide Assessment and Intervention
- M. Greenspan Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair
- I. Yalom Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death
- B. Hooks The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love

Reading List Continued

- B. Coloroso The bully, the bullied, and the bystander.
- C. Dellasega Mean girls grown up
- T. Harbin Beyond anger: A guide for men
- R. Potter-Efron Rage: A step-by-step guide to overcoming explosive anger