

How bullying affects all of us

By Leila Hayashida

Our islands' unique heritage includes ethnic diversity and a rich culture. In some communities people are treated differently based on their ethnicity or background. Some of these experiences have resulted in building strong bonds and friendships. Other experiences are not positive and have included someone being bullying.

One of the many non-academic aspects that the Hawaii State Department of Education focuses on is the effort towards combatting bullying in schools. It's a societal problem that needs to be addressed by the community as a whole and where parents play a vital role.

Let's be clear about what bullying is and what it is not.

- "Bullying" — any written, verbal, graphic, or physical act that a student or group of students exhibits toward other particular student(s) and the behavior causes mental or physical harm to the other student(s); and is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student(s).
- "Cyber bullying" — electronically transmitted acts that a student has exhibited toward another student or employee of the department which causes mental or physical harm to the other student(s) or school personnel and is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment.

Today, the national outcry against bullying is individuals over identifying developmentally expected arguments, tiffs, friendship breakups, or playground tussles, into allegations of "bullying."

An over-dependence on "crying bully" has negative outcomes for all of us. The overuse of the term "bullying" can hurt our children. Additionally, the misuse of the term "bullying" overwhelms the school system. When every unhappy interaction is claimed as "bullying," true bullying situations can get lost in the shuffle because staff is overwhelmed with investigating every action as an allegation of bullying.

Bullying exists and continues in the dark, in the hidden action. It takes diligence and patience to find it, to root it out, and stop it once and for all.

We've seen more misuse of the term "bullying." This has resulted in some cases where children are denied the opportunity to learn playground ethics and hone essential skills of how to get

along in a diverse world. Navigating social interactions to make friends, and get along, is a vital skill we use in adulthood.

Here are the steps we ask students to take when they witness someone being mistreated:

1. **Report it right away** to your teacher, school counselor, principal or other trusted adult at the school. Reporting may be done verbally or by phone or email.
2. **Be more than a bystander.** Bullying happens when communities of people allow it to happen.
  - a. Be a friend
  - b. Tell a trusted adult
  - c. Help victims get away from the situation
  - d. Set a good example (All adults)
  - e. Don't give bullying an audience

More and more, school officials, who want better outcomes for our children, are faced with accusations by parents for not “doing enough” in combatting bullying. School officials and teachers want nothing more than what is best for a child. As a community we need to pull together to educate and grow successful, well-rounded, well-grounded children who are kind and empathetic.

Finally, children do as adults do. When adults act like bullies, our children will too. I challenge every adult in our state to be part of the community solution by modeling respect and compassion so our keiki will do as we do.

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