

St. Simon Parish School

Educating Children to Know, Love and Serve God and His World

September, 2011

Dear Parents:

The curriculum for the *Bully-Proofing Your School (BPYS)* program is being taught in each of our classrooms (K-8) during the week of September 19 and beyond. We teach this curriculum because we wholeheartedly believe in its purpose, which is to make the school environment safe for your children both physically and psychologically. Our goals are: 1) to stop bullying behavior, 2) to teach strategies to help students decide what *they* will do to help bullying to stop, and 3) to emphasize inclusiveness and kindness in how students treat one another.

Our schoolwide learning expectations (SLEs) are very recognizable in this curriculum, particularly the expectations of being spiritual, neighborly, trustworthy, and strong. Meeting these expectations on a daily basis can be challenging, but this is exactly what we are asking our students to do. We all know that it takes courage to stand up for one another and for ourselves when there is social pressure to join in or to ignore that something wrong is happening. Our hope is that, as parents and teachers working together, we can enable students to find this courage within themselves and take action when needed. Below are three documents which may be helpful in talking with your son or daughter about any bullying that s/he experiences or observes:

1. HA-HA-SO and CARE Strategies

These are the strategies that are taught as part of the *BPYS* program. They can be used by victims and by the majority of students who are the bystanders in a bullying situation. They are intended to stop bullying behavior and to help create a caring and inclusive community. Each strategy might not work in every situation nor be a fit for every child. Several strategies are taught so that students have options. When one strategy does not work please encourage your child to try another. If your child has difficulty understanding or using any of these, perhaps you could role-play situations at home so that s/he gets practice.

2. Strategies to Use in Support of Inclusiveness

All of us have a need to belong. It is important to every child to have other students with whom they feel accepted and comfortable. As we know, some children are very skilled socially, some not so skilled, and most are in between. Just as with academic subjects, children grow in these skills as they learn, grow, and mature. Whether particularly skilled or not, all students are expected to be respectful, caring, and helpful with each other. The behaviors listed give three levels (low-risk, medium-risk, and high-risk) of strategies that students can use to take a stand for respect and inclusiveness. The risk level refers to the social cost of taking action. Behaviors which are less “public” are lower risk; behaviors which are very public and assertive are higher risk.

3. Samantha's Bully-proofing Tips (*adapted from netfamilynews.org*)

These are tips recommended by a girl who was National American Miss Teen 2005. These are included in particular for our older students since they sometimes hear things differently from others closer to their age. Please note that the comments about technology will need to be updated to "texting" and "twitter." www.netfamilynews.org is a website that you might want to check periodically for information about technology and your children. It has a balanced perspective and good advice, including the point that research has shown that children have used technology even more for positive, supportive communication with peers than to bully them.

As in the past, our Gr. 7 and 8 students will participate in a sexual harassment workshop given by speakers from the YWCA. This year the workshop will occur during the week of October 10 and will include additional time being given to cyber-bullying. For the first time, Gr. 6 will participate in this workshop on cyber-bullying. More information will follow for the parents of Grs. 6-8 students.

All of us -- students, parents, teachers, and administration -- need to continue to work together to make the school environment one in which every student feels safe and supported. We would appreciate your help in achieving this goal by 1) helping your child to feel that he/she has the ability to solve problems on his/her own using learned strategies, including those described above and 2) encouraging them to talk to you and/or another adult when the problem continues or becomes too serious to handle alone. Sometimes it is confusing as to when they should tell their teacher and they will need your help in figuring this out; we need to teach children to be resilient and self-reliant but also to know that they can come to adults for support or intervention. We encourage you to use your judgment and not to hesitate to let us know if a situation needs to be addressed. We will do all in our power to respect a child's need for confidentiality, while working with all involved to solve the problem and help them learn those life skills which are so important for their future.

If you have any questions about our Bully-Proofing Your School program, please feel free to ask your child's teacher or to contact me directly by phone at (650) 988-9307 or by email at rhead@stsimon.org.

Thank you for all of your support in our mutual endeavor to create the healthiest environment possible for our students.

Sincerely,

Ms. Roberta Head
School Counselor
BPYS Coordinator

BULLY-PROOFING YOUR SCHOOL
STRATEGIES

HA-HA-SO

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|-------------------------------|--|
| <u>H</u>elp | • seeking help from peers and/or an adult |
| <u>A</u>ssert yourself | • using assertiveness; there are time when it is wise to be assertive and times when it is not |
| <u>H</u>umor | • using humor to de-escalate a situation |
| <u>A</u>void | • walking away in order to avoid a bullying situation |
| <u>S</u>elf-talk | • using self-talk to maintain positive self-esteem during a bullying situation |
| <u>O</u>wn it | • “owning” or agreeing with the put-down or belittling comment in order to defuse it, e.g. “Yeh, I don’t like this dress either, but my mother made me wear it.” |

CARE

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| <u>C</u>reative problem-solving | • deciding how to address a bullying situation through creative problem-solving |
| <u>A</u>dult help | • learning when and how to seek help from an adult to keep things safe, keeping in mind the difference between “tattling” and “seeking adult help” |
| <u>R</u>elate and join | • learning how to join with and support the victim, remembering that there is strength in numbers |
| <u>E</u>mpathy | • empathizing with the feelings the victim might be experiencing |

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE INCLUSIVENESS

Adapted from Cliques by Charlene Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, Broadway Books, 2001; and How Cliques Make Kids Feel Left Out, reviewed by Michelle New, PhD, September 2007 at kidshealth.org.

Look for friends everywhere.

The most well-liked kids are the ones who are friendly to everyone. Do your best to let everyone feel welcome to talk to you. Look for chances to meet, talk with, and play with plenty of different kids. Is someone sitting alone at lunch? Why not ask her to sit at your table? Or maybe you noticed the kid standing by themselves while you're playing ball. It's time to invite him into the game. Who knows — maybe the two of you will really click (which means to get along really well). That's a much better kind of click than a "clique!"

Everyone feels left out by friends once in a while. Friends are people just like us — they make mistakes and usually we can forgive them (after all, we make mistakes too!). Sometimes friends fight and make up again. But sometimes kids form groups that they won't let other kids belong to. A "clique" is a group of kids who hang out together and won't let others join in. Sometimes kids in the clique are mean to kids they think are on the outside. Below are things you can do to help yourself or others who might be left on the outside.

Low Level Intervention

- **Don't watch.** When people are being mean or exclusive they often want an audience. Don't give them one. Walk away.
- **Don't react.** If it's not possible to leave, refuse to laugh or endorse someone's mean action with words.
- **Don't gossip.** Passing on rumors -- in notes, whispers, or e-mails -- can hurt feelings and may escalate the conflict.
- **Offer verbal support in private.** If you do not feel courageous enough to confront the person in public, you can still talk with the victim in private later on and let him/her know you care.
- **Align with the victim.** If a student is being picked on for being unlikable, or too shy, or not "cool", or a poor athlete, put yourself in the same category. For example, "People think I'm not cool either; why don't we play together and not worry about it." "I sometimes feel shy too and don't know what to say; if you want, just stick with me and you'll know that I understand." "I'm not the best athlete either; let's play anyway and I'll stick up for you if they make fun of you."

Mid-level Intervention

- **Combat gossip with the truth.** Gossip can take on a life of its own and damage a student's reputation. Challenging the gossip-monger (e.g. "That's not true.") will stop the rumor mill.
- **Offer other support.** "I saw so-and-so making fun of you. Why don't we play together today." (or eat lunch together, or study together...)
- **Gather others.** A person will find it more difficult to exclude if several students come to the excluded student's defense by standing with and joining him/her. For example, "Hedy is always leaving Mona out at lunch. Let's all eat with Mona today."
- **Create a distraction.** If a student is making fun of another student, say or do something to change the subject and divert the attention.
- **Extend an invitation.** Reach out to the person being excluded. "Some of us are doing _____ this weekend. Do you want to come?"
- **Work with the victim.** Sometimes students are excluded for irritating behaviors that bug the other students. You could say to the student: "I know you feel badly when they tell you they don't want you to play. They do that because you argue whenever you're called out. If you could stop arguing, I think they'd really enjoy playing with you."

High Level Intervention

- **Offer support in front of the person who is excluding.** Sometimes, just standing by the person being targeted can be helpful. Other times, it would help to say something. For example, say aloud: "He/she can join us. C'mon, we're talking about..." or "We're playing ...; you'll have fun." or "I've done silly things like that too. C'mon, join us."
- **Use humor.** "Gosh, you don't like how s/he acts. Wait 'til you see how I ... (dress, eat, talk, etc.)"
- **Appeal to the clique leader or member.** "I heard you say something mean to _____. I've gotten to know him and I think you'd like him if you knew him too. I'm having him over to my house this weekend. Do you want to come?"
- **Confront the bully.** Be cautious with this approach, but it can work. "How you acted toward _____ was mean and made a lot of us mad. We don't want you to keep acting like that."
- **Get a teacher involved.** If the exclusion or meanness is on-going or is extremely severe, it is important to involve your teacher so that this behavior can be stopped.

Samantha's Bully-proofing Tips

*Adapted from "Bullying and Cyber-bullying: Samantha's Bully-proofing Tips"
shared with reporter, Anne Collier, from netfamilynews.org*

Here are some practical tips for kids and teens when confronted by a bully. Samantha Hahn, National American Miss Teen 2005, shares these pointers, learned from her own multi-year experience with bullying when she speaks at schools throughout her state....

1. Always tell an adult - get help from people you trust.

"That's the most important thing you can do," Samantha said she always tells students. "I took it for a long time before I opened up," Samantha said, "so I tell people, 'Respect yourself enough to tell an adult, no matter how small the situation is, because, if it hurts you, that is enough reason to tell an adult. You are important.'"

2. Know that it is not your fault.

3. Use humor to deflect bullying.

"Bullies soon grow tired of bullying if they see they aren't getting to you, and humor is usually the best way to show they aren't. I always tell kids that if they really want to bother someone who's picking on them, they should just be nice to them - the ol' 'kill them with kindness' really works."

4. Tell the bully to stop.

"Something I suggest is to write three things you can say, when faced with a bully, on a school notebook or textbook cover. This way, you program these points in your head - for example, 'Why are you calling me that?' 'Does it make you feel better to put me down?' Make them think. Stand up for yourself by saying things like, 'I really don't appreciate the way you're treating me.' I know when I was younger, my nerves would get the best of me, and I would never be able to think quick enough to stand up for myself - this way you're ready."

5. Remove yourself from the situation. If someone else is being bullied, be a "good bystander."

"Bystanders play a huge role in this as well," Samantha says. "There are two types of bystanders: good ones and bad ones. Good ones enter the conflict without becoming part of the fight. They may make something up, like saying a teacher needs to speak with the victim, just to get that child out of the harmful situation ... or asks if s/he wants to join in a game. Instead of rooting a fight on, good bystanders will go get help from an adult. Bad bystanders do nothing or encourage the bullying. I stress to victims: Be the better person. Don't add to the fight. If you choose to fight back or name-call back, you are only lowering yourself to their level and becoming a bully yourself."

6. Keep records. Save IMs* and emails (*now texting and twitter) - evidence of bullying that occurs online.

"I also suggest keeping a descriptive journal. Description is key, especially when the bully is denying what s/he has done. Involve the school. Verbal abuse can quickly turn into more extreme abuse, such as physical and cyber-stalking. It is important for schools to stress that this behavior is not acceptable."

7. Don't become a bully yourself! (See her comment after No. 5.)

8. Hang out with people who let you be you.

Samantha told me it was her parents who taught her to "prove that I was the better person" and not stoop to the level of the person bullying her - something she always tries to leave with her student audiences. "If one victim chooses not to fight back and just walks away, she is becoming a better person. If the next victim chooses the same, he too is becoming a better person. This continues on until we have a better school environment filled with kids who know the importance of being strong and better people who care about how others feel."