Framing Bullying for Educators

You don't need counseling training to sit and hear the story and really listen for what is getting at this student, and have a tolerance for the fact that that story may change and evolve over the telling because the student is coming to understand their own perspective.
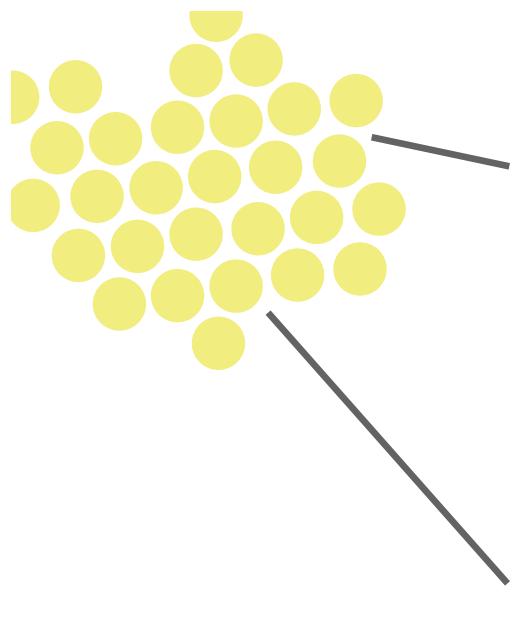
-ANNA NOLIN, middle school principal

PREVENTING BULLYING AT SCHOOL

In 2011, two-thirds of middle school faculty and staff reported that they witnessed bullying frequently in their schools. A few years earlier, 89% of middle school students interviewed had witnessed an act of bullying and 49% said they had been a victim of a bully. In 2009, 20% of high school students reported being bullied at school during the previous twelve months. The National Association of School Psychologists estimates that over 160,000 students miss school each day because they fear being bullied.

Preventing bullying is our schools and communities will not be a quick fix or simple solution. Stopping it needs to go far beyond alarming media headlines, completing surveys, and distributing zero tolerance policy reminders – as important as all of that might be. In the best schools, every adult, no matter what the position or job title recognizes and accepts the responsibility of role model and educator. Every adult takes the matter of bullying seriously, and sees it as a responsibility to prevent it when possible and intervene if it arises. The entire school community is alert to signals and warning signs and everyone finds a way to "upstand" on behalf of the safe and respectful learning and living environment that every young person deserves.

The BULLY Project

What are some of the challenges that teachers, administrators, and school staff members face in their efforts to learn the truth about instances of bullying and ensure safety and fairness for all students? What factors might leave students feeling like the adults did not listen carefully and understand their perspective?

CREATING A SAFE AND REFLECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Recent research suggests that bullying is less prevalent in school communities and classrooms that have democratic cultures and value student voices. It stands to reason that in order to facilitate meaningful discussion, improve school climate, and reduce bullying, we must foster the characteristics of a reflective, democratic learning community.

As you plan your approach to viewing and discussing BULLY with your school community, faculty and staff, or students, it is essential to nurture a reflective environment by:

• creating a sense of trust and openness
• encouraging participants to speak and listen to each other
• making space and time for silent reflection
• offering multiple avenues for participation and learning, *and*
• helping students appreciate the points of view, talents, and contributions of less vocal members.