

**GCCHM Leadership Certification
Level IV, Course #5**

**HELPING PARENTS OF TEENS COPE WITH BULLIES
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(Presenter's Notes)**

Illustration: Dave and Kay Conner receive a message from their daughter's school: "Come to the office immediately." Every thought imaginable races through their minds. Is she sick? Is she hurt? Is she in trouble?

As they enter the school parking lot, an ambulance pulls away. Rushing into the principal's office, they see another student's mother bent over in a chair ... sobbing. Mrs. Harper's daughter, Dana, is the "flyer" atop the human pyramid on the school's cheerleading squad.

The principal solemnly greets the Conners. "It appears that some of the other cheerleaders are jealous of Dana. So they 'accidentally' failed to catch her during a stunt this morning. Dana's collarbone was shattered. She'll be sidelined for the season. This is a malicious, premeditated act, intended to 'eliminate the competition.' And it was spearheaded by ... your daughter."

Dave and Kay are horrified – reeling with disbelief that their fun, popular Polly could be involved in such a dark plot, and deeply saddened by for Dana and her family. Tears of anger, shame, and frustration stream down their faces. Still in shock, the Conners drive home and immediately call You, asking, "How do we handle this horrible situation?"

What Can Parents Do?

- When counseling parents about bullying – whether their child is the victim or the perpetrator – first provide education about the problem, in general, and then help create a strategy to address specific instances of bullying.
- Explain that bullying is a deliberate hostile physical or verbal activity intended to harm, induce fear, and create terror." Those who are bullied live with continual fear and expectation of future harassment ... or they themselves become bullies to stop the pain.

Recommend that Parents:

- Educate themselves about girl bullies, who are typically:
 - *Perceived as fickle "bully-princesses" seeking power
 - *Physically aggressive and mean-spirited
 - *Emotionally manipulative and deceptive
 - *Socially willing to seek and destroy anyone considered weaker, superior, threatening, or disliked
 - *Eager to pressure and coerce in order to control others

Educate themselves about boy bullies, who are typically:

- *Perceived as “bully-gangsters” seeking power
- *Physically violent
- *Lacking emotional empathy, yet possessing a sense of entitlement
- *Socially ready to hurt anyone

Initiate immediate intervention

- Speak with the school counselor about bullying policies and procedures
- Speak with police regarding intervention programs available for teens

Set a zero-tolerance level for bullying by holding teen(s) accountable for offensive behaviors

- Establish boundaries that are unquestionably fair and clearly communicated.
- Administer repercussions when bullying occurs – discipline that relates to the offense, and that helps reprogram behavior... consequences that are restorative in nature, and are relative to the degree of repentance.

Provide opportunities for teen perpetrators to make restitution

- Establish requirements for what to do and how to do it.
- Reinforce responsible behavior by rewarding it with verbal acknowledgements, praise, and increased responsibilities and privileges.

Establish a safe, bully-free environment in the home by cultivating a family spirit that communicates, “I love you, hear you, value you, respect you, believe in you, and am here for you.”

- Monitor and restrict inappropriate, aggressive video games, movies and television programs, social relationships, music and music videos.
- Model kindness, consideration, active listening and unconditional love.

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- Bullying can escalate quickly. A parent’s goal is to train their children to handle conflict constructively, ask for help in addressing serious situations, and develop compassion and empathy.
- “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4).

Be mindful of cyber-bullying (intimidating others through e-mail, instant messaging, texting, and social networking)

- Use parental controls and filtering, software, and/or online tracking programs.
- Offer to look at the teens' communications with them, make copies of threatening correspondence, and delete harmful content together so the teen feels supported.
- Before "deleting," communicate all cyber-bullying to the school.
- Talk and pray together about bullying.

Since bullies have typically been victims of bullying, watch for signs that their teen is currently being bullied

- Wanting to miss school
- Withdrawing from social activities
- Changes in eating patterns
- Experiencing general anxiety, fear, and/or depression
- Engaging in extreme self-destructive behaviors
- Receiving threatening e-mails or visiting suspicious websites

Look for signs that their teen is bullying others

- Pay close attention to conversations the teen has with friends
- Be aware of changes in the teen's demeanor
- Notice the kind of clothing being worn. (All one color is often a sign of involvement with a clique, posse, or gang-all black may represent the occult and/or Satanism.)

More Signs to look out for ...

- Pay attention to the way the teen wears a hat. Some hat positions may be associated with gang activity or intimidation
- Watch for symbolic marks on the teen's body
- Note any unusual, recurring doodling or drawings (e.g., occult signs, "666," upside-down cross)
- Check out e-mails, text messages, and website participation.

Enforce repercussions if their teen is a bully

- Find a time and place to talk with their teen in private
- Pray, ponder, and plan what to say
- State the concerns in a calm manner
- Make repercussions specific, swift, and relevant to the offense.
- Prioritize the condition of the teen's heart. If there is sincere remorse with a repentant heart, a plan of restoration can include restitution with those being bullied.

Enforce Repercussions ...

- Arrange a meeting with the perpetrator, the injured teen, their parents, and you. Meeting with the injured person face-to-face – rather than communicating by phone or e-mail – gives the bullying teen an opportunity to see the victim’s pain, and begin to develop sensitivity and empathy.
- Help the teen make a list of specific acts of kindness that can be done for those who have been offended

More Repercussions

- Reward godly attitudes and actions with words of praise, appreciation and encouragement, and with increased trust.
- Help teenage boys learn how to use words to resolve conflict rather than to create more conflict with physical aggression.
- Long-term mentoring can help both girls and boys break patterns of gossip, meanness, cliques, and aggression.

Proverbs 20:5

“The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.”

Dealing with the teen perpetrator

- Parents should confront teen perpetrators with the truth and the need to change. Since bullies almost always were, themselves, bullied at some point in their own lives, parents might start a conversation by saying:

Parent conversation with teen

“Years ago, my heart went out to you because I knew you were being bullied. It was completely unjust. Later, I saw you learn to resist pressure and develop endurance. But now you’ve reached a point in your life when you are doing to others what was done to you. You don’t want to be hurt, so you’ve chosen ways to hurt others. If you continue to hurt others, you’ll never have peace within your heart, or experience God’s purpose for your life.”

What can parents say?

“I love you too much to stand back and do nothing. I’ve arranged for us to talk with someone who understands the kind of pain you’re in ... and how to bring true hope to your heart.”

“This situation is very serious because you have literally brought harm to others. The meeting I’ve arranged is essential. If you should think about not attending, you’ll be choosing to give up all of your privileges: no car, no allowance, no phone, no after-school activities—no nothing. Our first meeting is Saturday morning at 10. Although this will take real work, I’m genuinely grateful for the healing that is available to you, and the future God has for you. I love you.”

Share Wisdom from God’s Word

Teens can be either bullies or bullied in various ways. Regardless, their role always begins in their hearts. Parents can help their children understand their words and actions come from the overflow of their hearts. When their hearts are right with the Lord, everything else will follow.

Wisdom from God’s Word will remain with young people long after human words are forgotten. Here’s a suggested prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps. 139:23-24 ESV).

With effective guidance and decisive intervention, an insightful counselor can be a powerful force to stop bullying, and ultimately change the entire course of a young person’s life.

