



Columbine Five Years Later: Are Our Schools Safer Now?



By **Steven W. Edwards, Ph.D.**
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April 20 marked the fifth anniversary of the tragedy at Columbine High School. As we look back on the events of that dark day, we ask, are our schools safer now than they were before Columbine? There is no question that the Columbine tragedy drew unparalleled attention to the safety and security of our public schools and the over 80 million children who attend them. But often the horror of an event such as this eventually fades, and parents and teachers in communities across the country begin to believe, "It can't happen here."

And yet *it has* happened. There have been many school shootings since then, but because they were on a smaller scale, they did not receive the same amount of media attention as Columbine. Nevertheless, they did result in the deaths of children and adults.

In recent weeks, newspaper, radio, and television reporters, focusing on the anniversary of Columbine, have asked me, could it happen again? Without reservation my answer is yes. We *must* challenge ourselves to address the issue of school safety and security. We *must* do all we can to prevent these tragedies in our schools.

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Are our schools safer now? In order to answer this question, each school must be committed to continuous evaluation of its safety and security procedures, assessing the hardware and technology—how they are being used and what else is needed. But examining hardware and technology is not enough. Every school must also assess school climate and culture. A combination of effective hardware and technology and a positive school climate and culture will go a long way toward maximizing school safety and security. In addition, schools need to take advantage of all the internal and external resources available to them. The expertise of professionals can enhance the efforts to make our schools safe and secure.

Are our schools safer now? This is a question every parent, school administrator, policymaker, and community member should ask every day. But until we put school safety at the top of the community agenda, our schools—and our children—will continue to be vulnerable. The *Be Safe and Sound School Safety and Security Toolkit* is a resource that can help parents, school administrators, and all who care about school safety work together to make schools safer and more secure. Schools and communities across the country have already put this toolkit to good use. They believe that protecting our children as they learn to be the leaders of tomorrow must be one of society's top priorities.

For more information about *Be Safe and Sound*, contact the National Crime Prevention Council at 202-466-6272 or besafe@ncpc.org, or visit our website at www.ncpc.org/besafe.

View the "School Safety and Security Toolkit: A Guide for Parents, Schools, and Communities" online at www.ncpc.org/besafe, or call 800-NCPC-911 to order a copy.

In the Spotlight: The Ophelia Project

By Susan Moffitt

Intern, Be Safe and Sound

One way to make our schools safer is to curb and prevent bullying. Bullying can cause long-term psychological damage and was said to be an important cause in the Columbine shooting. While bullying has traditionally been viewed as aggressive male behavior, bullying is a female behavior as well. When girls bully each other, however, they are more likely to inflict "emotional violence" (gossip, rumor-spreading, and exclusion) than physical injury. In response to this problem, the Ophelia Project works to "create a culture that is emotionally, physically, and socially safe, where girls are respected and nurtured." Several of the project's initiatives promote prevention and intervention strategies.

Creating a Safe School (CASS) seeks “to positively impact the social norms in a school community by recognizing the hurtful, covert behaviors of peer aggression, teaching intervention strategies, and identifying a more positive set of normative behaviors for all.” CASS has six major components: consulting, awareness building, strategic planning, mentor training for high school students, social skills training and problem solving, and evaluation. CASS trainers work side-by-side with schools to see that these components are fulfilled.



The goals and objectives of the Ophelia Project have gained national recognition. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association recognizes the Ophelia Project as an “Idea That Works,” while the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reports that it is one of the few successful anti-bullying campaigns designated for girls.

For more information about CASS and the Ophelia Project, visit www.opheliaproject.org.

Bullying: What’s New and What To Do

By **John Rosiak**

*Director of Initiatives for Children and Youth
National Crime Prevention Council*

Schools are not safe when students are bullied or are in fear of bullies. Bullying affects school climate and interferes with student learning. It creates a climate of fear and disrespect. The key to dealing with bullying in our schools and communities is first to understand it—what it is, who does it, and why—and then implement strategies to deal with it.

What Is Bullying?

A bully may be bigger, stronger, more popular, speak English more fluently, or in some way be perceived by himself or herself *and* the victim to be more powerful. A bully’s repeated and systematic harassment and attacks on others can take several different forms:

- Physical violence
- Verbal taunts, name calling, and putdowns
- Threats and intimidation
- Extortion or stealing money and possessions

- Exclusion from a peer group
- Technological harassment (via email, text messaging, etc.)

Who Bullies?

Individuals or groups may bully to attain power. They use others to get what they want. Bullies can be from any economic, cultural, or religious background and may have average or above average self-esteem. Not surprisingly, they also have a positive attitude toward violence, a quick temper, and difficulty conforming to rules. Boys usually bully through physical and verbal attacks, while girls are more likely to bully through “emotional violence”—excluding others socially and spreading rumors to make the victim look stupid. (See “In the Spotlight,” page 2, for more about bullying by girls.)



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Who Is Bullied?

Children and youth are often bullied because they are seen as “different” for a variety of reasons:

- Appearance (overweight, the “wrong” clothes, a disability, etc.)
- Intellect (too smart or not smart enough)
- Racial or ethnic heritage
- Socioeconomic background
- Cultural or religious background
- Sexual orientation

What To Do About It?

- Take the problem seriously.
- Learn to identify potential bullies.
- Learn to identify signs of bullying.
- Support prevention efforts.

Good bullying prevention programs help children understand what they can do to deal with a bully. They teach children to respond to bullying in the following ways:

- Tell an adult.
- Walk away with their heads held high.
- Avoid bullies.
- Stick with friends.
- Stand up for others being bullied.
- Distinguish between tattling and telling — tattling tries to get someone into trouble, while telling tries to get someone out of trouble.

And, perhaps most important, bullying prevention programs teach children not to be bullies themselves!

Parents Play a Key Role

Surveys indicate that children face bullying much more than their parents realize. Parents can take several steps to prevent their children from being bullied or to help them when they are being bullied:

- Ask children how their peers treat them and listen to their response.
- Take complaints seriously.
- Teach children to be assertive and to stand up for themselves.
- Increase positive social opportunities for their children.
- Work with the school to implement anti-bullying programs.

What Teachers, Counselors, and Caregivers Can Do

- Ensure that students understand what bullying means, what behaviors it includes, and how it makes people feel.
- Develop and post class rules against bullying. For example, “Treat others as you would like to be treated.” “Don’t let your friends be bullies.”
- Use appropriate negative consequences (bullies pay for damaged belongings, forfeit privileges, etc.).
- Encourage students to discuss bullying behavior and positive ways to interact with others.
- Take immediate action when bullying is witnessed or reported.

What Schools Can Do

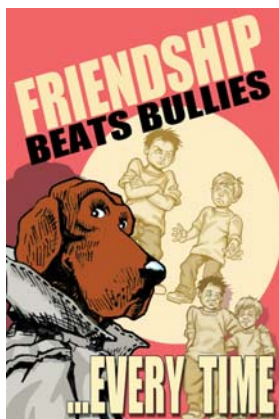
- Form a Bullying Prevention Committee.
- Administer a bullying survey to all students.
- Offer training for all school personnel.
- Develop and post school rules against bullying.
- Have immediate consequences for aggressive behavior, and apply them consistently.
- Praise prosocial and helpful student behavior.
- Increase supervision at recess, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways.
- Involve parents through PTAs, home-schooling associations, and other avenues.
- Take problems seriously, and investigate any incidents.
- Interview bullies, victims, and witnesses separately.
- Hold serious talks with parents of both bullies and victims.

Learn More About Bullying Prevention

Several important new campaigns support bully prevention efforts with good messages and resource materials.

“Take a Stand, Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!”

This new national campaign, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, raises awareness about bullying in order to prevent and reduce bullying behaviors and identify appropriate interventions for teens, youth 9 to 13 years old, and other target audiences. “Take a Stand, Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!” fosters linkages between education, public health, and other partners. For more information, visit www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov.



"15+ Make Time To Listen . . . Take Time To Talk"

This campaign is part of the School Violence Prevention Initiative of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The campaign encourages and assists parents and caregivers to spend at least 15 minutes every day really listening and talking with their children. For more information, visit www.mentalhealth.org.

Friendship Beats Bullying Every Time

NCPC's newest Bully Prevention Advertising Campaign will be launched this summer. The goal of the campaign is to equip 7- to 11-year-olds with ways they can help someone who is being bullied. This campaign supports

NCPC's previous TV spots on bullying. For more information, visit "Problem Solver" at www.mcgruff.org.

NCPC Resources

Several NCPC publications offer parents and educators resources to prevent bullying and help children and youth deal with conflict. To learn more or to order a copy, visit www.mcgruffstore.org.

- *Caregivers' Guide to School Safety and Security*
- *Community Works: Smart Teens Make Safer Communities*
- *Get the Message! McGruff's Tool Kit*
- *Giving Youth a Voice: Involving Teens in Crime, Drug, and Violence Prevention*
- *Helping Kids Handle Conflict*
- *Keeping Kids Safe Kit*
- *School Safety and Security Toolkit*

Be Safe and Sound Welcomes New Partners

The Be Safe and Sound campaign was developed in 2000 by the National Crime Prevention Council and three of its corporate partners, The Allstate Foundation, ASSA Abloy, and Security Industry Association. The campaign focuses on engaging and educating parents and caregivers, school administrators, policymakers, law enforcement, and students on issues of school safety and security. Be Safe and Sound is pleased to welcome two new partners to the initiative, National PTA and Nextel Communications.

National PTA Advocates for Safe and Secure Schools

National PTA is pleased to partner with the National Crime Prevention Council on the Be Safe and Sound campaign to encourage parents, schools, and students across the nation to take action to enhance school safety and security in their communities. National PTA recognizes that making our schools safe places where all children can learn is essential to ensuring their long-term success, health, and happiness.

With six million members, National PTA is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the United States. National PTA has prided itself on being a powerful voice for children, a relevant resource for parents, and a strong advocate for public education since its founding in 1897.

For over a century, National PTA has remained a strong proponent for the health and safety of all children and has worked with organizations such as NCPC to ensure that every child feels safe in his or her school community. By collaborating on the Be Safe and Sound campaign, National PTA aims to educate parents, students, and schools about safety issues and enable communities to work together to prevent violence in schools.

For more information about National PTA or about starting a local PTA, visit www.pta.org or call 800-307-4PTA (4782).

Nextel Communications: Connecting Schools and Communities

Nextel Communications, a FORTUNE 200 company based in Reston, VA, is a leading provider of fully integrated wireless communications services and has built the largest guaranteed all-digital wireless network in the country covering thousands of communities across the United States. Today 95 percent of FORTUNE 500 companies are Nextel customers.

Nextel offers a host of differentiated products and services to meet the needs of more than 13 million enterprise and public-sector customers. Nextel's voice products, including digital walkie-talkie service, provide instant communication capabilities to users across the country. Wireless solutions also allow Nextel customers to manage their business needs wirelessly, saving time, money, and resources. In education in particular, Nextel is focused on delivering wireless solutions that promote safety and security for students, parents, teachers, and school administrators.

"Nextel is proud to work with the National Crime Prevention Council and the Be Safe and Sound campaign to help ensure that our nation's schools are as safe, secure, and prepared as possible," said Chris Hackett, vice president for education at Nextel.

At Nextel, we respond to emergency and disaster situations with communication solutions on a regular basis. In primary education, though, we're focused on being a part of the solution before an incident occurs. Informing schools, parents, and law enforcement agencies, as well as the students themselves, of the value of communication is of paramount importance to us. Having a well-connected community in a primary education environment is the best defense for avoiding unfortunate incidents, and it's also one of the best assets an organization can have if an emergency does occur.

To learn more about Nextel products and services, visit www.nextel.com.



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