



© Godfer/Dreamstime.com

## Back to School...Back to Bullying

By Lynda Haschke

**IN A JULY 27, 2008 EDITORIAL** in the *Dallas Morning News*, staff columnist Rod Dreher let it all hang out about his experience at the hands of teenage bullies when he was 14 years old, more than 25 years ago. The title of his piece said it all, “Bullying Marks You for Life.”

Here’s his experience from that editorial, “...it happened to me on a school trip, chaperoned by two classmates’ mothers. Some older boys decided to make an example of me to impress the girls. They jumped me in a hotel room, pinned me down and tried to take my pants off. I kicked and screamed and pleaded. The two moms literally stepped over me, despite my begging them not to leave and shut the door behind them. Somehow, I wriggled free and ran off without having had my trousers removed.”

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of his searing account of almost being “de-pantsed” on that school trip was what

the adults involved in the situation did – nothing. And, while the abuse itself is at the core of Mr. Dreher’s lingering anger, the betrayal of those two adults fuels it as well.

“It was deeply instructive to me to see the two people who had the power to stop the mob that attacked me refuse to do so,” says Mr. Dreher. “What would it have cost them? Nothing but the temporary ire of their own kids and their kids’ friends.”

Today, nearly one in three kids is involved in bullying – either as the victim or the perpetrator, this according to research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Why is the AMA so interested in bullying? Because it has serious health implications for children. Studies have shown that children who are bullied are more likely to be depressed, lonely and anxious, experience more physical ailments and have more suicidal thoughts.

### BULLYING STATISTICS

Adults are often unaware of bullying. In one study, 70 percent of teachers believed that teachers intervene “almost always” in bullying incidents; only 25 percent of students agreed.

25 percent of teachers surveyed saw “nothing wrong” with bullying or verbal insults.

Students often feel that adult intervention is unhelpful and fear that telling adults only results in more harassment.

### WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is intentional aggressive behavior and can take many forms: physical (hitting, punching), verbal (teasing or name-calling), emotional (social exclusion) or cyberbullying (posting and/or sending insulting messages). The U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services website, [stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov), reports that boys are more likely than girls to bully others and that girls frequently report being bullied by both boys and girls. But, boys report they are most often bullied by boys and that verbal bullying is the most common form of bullying experienced by both genders.

## BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

The National Education Association (NEA) is on record as stating bullying creates a climate of fear and disrespect in schools and has a negative impact on learning. The Frisco Independent School District (FISD) Student Handbook specifically prohibits bullying in its list of General Conduct Violations. It defines bullying as, "written or oral expression or physical conduct that a school district's board of trustees or the board's designee determines to have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property; or to be sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to create an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student."

How pervasive is bullying in Frisco schools? Rick Burnett, executive director for Student Services at FISD, puts it this way, "With over 30,000 students in the system, there are bound to be incidents. In our view, one is too many, which is why we focus on prevention and intervention."

Brenda Russell, FISD director of Guidance and Counseling, says the district will be introducing a new program called "Rachel's Challenge" to middle and high school students this year. Named for Rachel Scott, the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999, Rachel's Challenge is a program that teaches students how to "start a chain reaction of kindness." A peer mentoring program called "Friends of Rachel" will also be introduced in all Frisco middle and high schools to reinforce the lessons of Rachel's Challenge throughout the year.

Ms. Russell noted that FISD also offers an online "tip line" at [ChooseToCare.com](http://ChooseToCare.com) that allows students, parents, teachers and community members to report incidents without fear of reprisal. The website is available in English and Spanish and is an independent national service to which

FISD subscribes.

But what if the bullying is happening outside of school? One former Frisco resident, Cortni Bagby, says her 10-year-old son was being bullied so frequently in their neighborhood that it eventually became a major reason for their relocation to Fort Worth.

"It was continuous and it got to a point where I had to videotape my son every time he went out to play so I had proof of the bullying," says Ms. Bagby. "There were two brothers who lived on our street and since one had been a preemie, the parents taught the older brother to protect him. I guess my son said something they didn't like and they started punching him. Their father did nothing to stop it, even after seeing the videotape. Every time my son would go outside and play with his friends, these brothers would show up and start harassing him. I called the police once, but since the older brother wasn't 12 years old yet, they couldn't take him to juvenile hall. It was miserable."

## CYBERBULLYING

In recent studies of middle and high school students, the most common way children reported being cyberbullied was through instant messaging. Somewhat less common ways involved chat rooms, emails and messages posted on websites. A study of younger children (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006) showed they were most often bullied through email, comments on a website or in a chat room.

What makes cyberbullying so insidious is its ability to be spread instantaneously to a wide audience. One 17-year-old student calls it "black ops bullying," where someone will utilize a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook to post a malicious message or create a web page with photos of the victim and false information and direct others to it. Not surprisingly, girls are twice as likely to be involved in cyberbullying.

The most recent extreme case of cyberbullying that gained national attention involved an adult posing as a teen boy online, courting and then cruelly dumping a young Missouri girl named Megan Meier, who committed suicide shortly thereafter. Since there are no laws dealing with cyberbullying, authorities decided to prosecute the perpetrator – the mother of the victim's former

friend--under a federal Internet hoax law. Many states are now considering passing legislation so cyberbullies can be prosecuted in the future.

As with most forms of bullying, preventing it means being aware of your child's activities online. Keep computers in plain view. Talk with your child about their online activities and encourage them to tell you if they have become a victim. You can also install parental control filtering and tracking software, especially if you suspect your child is a victim.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

Unfortunately, most kids don't tell anyone they're being bullied. But if you pay close attention to your child's behavior, you may be able to tell if a bully has come into your child's life. Here are the typical warning signs (from [stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov)):

- Comes home with torn, damaged or missing clothing or belongings
- Has unexplained cuts and bruises
- Has few, if any, friends
- Is afraid of going to school, riding the bus, walking to school or taking part in school activities
- Takes a long, illogical route to school
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly starts to get poor grades
- Appears sad, moody, teary or depressed when returning home from school
- Complains frequently of physical ailments or loss of appetite
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Seems anxious and has low self-esteem.

If you suspect that your child is being bullied, experts recommend that you talk with your child, tell them of your concern and express your desire to help. You can ask directly: "Are there any kids at school who are picking on you?" Or, your child may respond better to a more indirect approach: "Are there any kids at school you don't really like? Why don't you like them? Do they pick on you or leave you out of things?"

You should also meet with your child's teacher or other adults who interact with your child when you're not around to see if they have observed your child being picked on or ostracized. If you don't get satisfactory answers, make an appointment to see the school's counselor or

# GO BACK TO SCHOOL WITH PERFECT TEETH



## NORTH TEXAS ORTHODONTIC ASSOCIATES, P.A.

DONALD J. COPENHAVER, DDS • ROBERT J. LUGO, DMD • CARLOS NIURKO, DDS • JEROME S. SCHECHTER, DDS

### OUR BRACES MAKE SMILING FACES

[www.ntoabraces.com](http://www.ntoabraces.com)

- FREE Exam & Consultation
- Convenient Hours (7am-7pm)
- Interest-Free Finance Plans
- Most Insurance Accepted & Filed
- 30 Years Treating Children & Adults
- Se Habla Español
- Invisalign • Adult Friendly!



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS!

Allen, East (972) 727-5781  
400 N. Allen Drive  
Allen, West (972) 727-4221  
201 N. Alma Drive  
Frisco (972) 712-3962  
7500 Stonebrook Pkwy.  
McKinney (972) 548-7005  
5601 Virginia Pkwy.  
Plano (972) 867-1222  
5501 Independence

The American Association of Orthodontists recommends that children see an orthodontist by age 7.

# fall into learning

AT THE SUNSHINE HOUSE



You want the best for your child. At The Sunshine House, we're committed to quality early education that prepares children for school success. Our professional team of educators offers developmentally-appropriate learning in safe, nurturing environments. Most importantly, serving families with quality child care and education services has been our tradition and mission since our beginning in 1975. Call today to learn more about The Sunshine House or visit our website at [www.sunshinehouse.com](http://www.sunshinehouse.com).

- Infant, Toddler, Pre-Kindergarten, and After School Programs
- Convenient hours for working families
- "Casa del Sol" – Spanish foreign language program
- "Seeds of Literacy" – early literacy program
- An employee-owned company
- Nationally-recognized curriculum

**50% off the first week with a paid registration\*.**

5925 Hillcrest Road • 972-335-7070 • Frisco

200 Lobo Lane • 972-294-5626 • Little Elm

7417 Davis Boulevard • 817-498-2599 • North Richland Hills

\*Discount good for one child per family. New enrollment only. Not valid with any other offer.



18 months 0% Interest

## Kathryn Wood, M.D., F.A.C.O.G.

Attentive and Focused Gynecology  
& the Most Affordable Advanced Clinical Aesthetics

### ❖ MedLite Laser...

a 30 minute State of the Art laser facial that improves scars, wrinkles, brown spots, skin texture and rebuilds collagen with little to no downtime! Try it for only \$99!

### ❖ Customer Appreciation Month

Existing Patients Can Enjoy 15% off all Skincare Products

972-769-SKIN (7546)  
972-769-WOOD (9663)  
5575 Warren Pkwy Suite 208, Frisco, TX 75034



[www.dermalase.net](http://www.dermalase.net)

Medical Director, Kathryn J. Wood, M.D. is certified as a laser safety officer by the American Board of Laser Safety and a fellow in the American Society for Lasers in Medicine and Surgery.





© Monkey Business Images/Dreamstime.com

principal to voice your concerns. Here are some additional tips:

- Keep a written record of all bullying incidents, including the names of the children involved, where and when the incidents took place.
- In a nonconfrontational way, ask the teacher about his or her observations. Have they suspected bullying is taking place? Have they noticed your child being excluded from activities?
- Ask the teacher what he or she plans to do to investigate and help stop the bullying.
- Set up a follow-up appointment or telephone conference with the teacher to discuss findings and progress.
- If there is no improvement, speak with the school principal.
- Keep notes from your meetings with teachers and school officials.

What should you expect school staff to do? First, investigate and report back to you immediately, within at least one week. If there is evidence of bullying, they should also tell you what they plan to do about it. School staff should never have a joint meeting with your child and the child who is bullying them. Bullying is a form of victimization, not a conflict and should

not be mediated.

Staff should meet with your child to learn about the bullying and develop a plan to help keep your child safe. They should assure your child that they will work hard to make sure the bullying stops. Educators and parents should also be careful not to “blame the victim;” bullying is never the fault of the child who is being bullied and they should not be made to feel responsible for it.

If bullying continues, write to the school’s principal or administrator and include your written evidence to back up your complaint. Most educators are responsive to bullying concerns, but if they are unable or unwilling to stop the bullying, go to your school superintendent for help. If the problem still continues, you may need to consult an attorney.

#### WHAT IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY

Face it, somebody’s kids are doing the bullying and if the bully is yours, you need to take action immediately to stop it. Bullying is often an early warning signal that a child is headed for an adulthood full of problems.

There is no one single cause of bullying behavior. Studies have shown that children who bully are more likely to live

in homes where there is a lack of warmth and involvement from parents, overly-permissive parenting (no boundaries), lack of supervision by parents, harsh physical discipline or has a family member who also exhibits bullying behavior.

Myths surrounding bullies are that they are loners and have low self-esteem. In fact, research indicates that children who bully are not socially isolated, usually have a group of friends who support or encourage their bullying and have average or above-average self-esteem.

If your child is bullying others, make it clear that you take bullying seriously and you will not tolerate the behavior. Develop clear, consistent rules within your family for your child’s behavior. Praise your child for following rules and use non-physical, non-hostile consequences for rule violations. Carefully supervise and monitor your child’s activities, learn who their friends are and how they spend their free time. Develop your child’s talents and encourage their involvement in social activities. And, if necessary, get professional help.

---

*Lynda Haschke is a freelance writer living in Little Elm. Website references are also listed on page 84.*