

# Middle Ground

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### What's Your Legacy? Combating Bullying

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We all know how the drill goes when a student dies as a result of being bullied. There are memorials that get regional and perhaps even national attention. The bereaved family makes the heart-wrenching call to stop bullying among young people. Then a councilman, state senator, or other politico jumps on the bandwagon and starts an anti-bullying campaign that may or may not slightly reduce the incidents—for a little while.

How many more times must we hear from a school that has experienced an incident involving bullying "we have an anti-bullying policy in place"? If your school's anti-bullying policy consists of nothing more than a few paragraphs on page 4 of a "Code of Conduct," a few banners around the school, and a drop box near a guidance counselor's office, you do not have an anti-bullying policy or program.

Unless your program includes students, faculty, and especially parents, it will not succeed. Programs that build from within schools and work with both victims and bullies are more successful than programs that ridicule bullies from the outside. It is time we take most of the pressure to stop bullying off the students and put it where it belongs: on the adults.

#### What's Your Legacy?

As adults, we advise our students to tell their parents or teachers if they are bullied or if they see someone being bullied. We tell them that silence is not acceptable.

Do we really expect young adolescents to step in to stop bullying when they see it occurring? I doubt many 12- or 13-year-old students have the maturity to confront a verbal assault on another student. There is too much at stake—most notably friendships and social standing.

The key to combating bullying is to get students to think about their legacy.

Challenge students with the question, "How do you want to be remembered? When you come back in three years to visit your former teachers, what do you want their reaction to be? Do you want to hear, 'Oh lord, here he/she comes?' or do you want to be greeted with a smile and handshake? What do you want your legacy to be?"



This attitude of "my legacy" should extend to students' relationships with peers. All students have the ability to remove themselves from a situation. A simple commitment to themselves and others, such as "I will not make fun of anyone or criticize anyone," stops bullying before it starts.

Not all students will be willing to commit to this promise, but if we can impress upon the majority that a positive legacy is possible and preferable, we are making progress.

## Leading by Example

And while we are talking about legacy and commitment, take a good look at yourself.

How many times have you directly intervened in a case of a student being picked on or made fun of in school? Do you have a student in class who you know will be taunted when he or she gives an answer, regardless of whether the answer is right or wrong? How do you react when the snickers begin?

The way you handle those situations affects the way students behave not only in your classroom, but outside your classroom as well.

What example are you setting for your students and your colleagues? Have you bad mouthed another teacher? Have you made a nasty comment regarding the ideas of one of your colleagues? Have you heard a snide comment from a colleague and remained silent?

How can we expect young adolescents to treat each other with respect if we don't set the example?

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