

October is National Bullying Awareness Month! As Bullying Awareness Month approaches, the hope is to: 1) Teach kids how to respond when they encounter bullying; 2) Equip parents to support their kids when they experience bullying; and 3) Raise awareness that bullying is a widespread problem that must be addressed.

A Kansas 2013 Session adopted House Bill No. 2222 by the Committee on Education stating, “An act concerning school districts; relating to policies against bullying . . . “Bullying” means: (A) Any intentional gesture or any intentional written, verbal, electronic or physical act or threat either by any student or staff member towards a student or by any student towards a staff member that is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive that such gesture, act or threat creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment that a reasonable person, under the circumstances, knows or should know will have the effect of: (1) Harming a student or staff member, whether physically or mentally; (2) damaging a student’s or staff member’s property; (3) placing a student or staff member in reasonable fear of harm to the student or staff member; or (4) placing a student or staff member in reasonable fear of damage to the student’s or staff member’s property; (B) cyberbullying; or (C) any form of intimidation or harassment prohibited by the board of education for the school district in policies concerning bullying adopted pursuant to this section or subsection (e) of K.S.A. 72-8205, and amendments thereto. (2) “Cyberbullying” means bullying by use of any electronic communication device through means including, but not limited to, email, instant messaging, text messages, blogs, mobile phones, pagers, online games and websites.

But, what about prevention? Why can’t we focus on preventing bullying instead of “celebrating” awareness of bullying?

The US Legal definition of “Bullying” is: Bullying is generally defined as an intentional act that causes harm to others, and may involve verbal harassment, verbal or non-verbal threats, physical assault, stalking, or other methods of coercion such as manipulation, blackmail, or extortion. It is aggressive behavior that intends to hurt, threaten or frighten another person.

Let’s start by teaching KINDNESS and COMPASSION!!! Somewhere along the line, the importance of kindness has been lost. According to Boys Town, as each generation has taught and influenced the generation to follow, it seems kindness has become a lower priority. Most young children have an innate sense of compassion, but the development of this important feeling must be nurtured if it is to survive into adulthood. This is where parents come in.

Whatever happened to The Golden Rule that was so ingrained in me during my school years – Do unto others as you would have them do unto you! Allow your child to routinely experience compassion in their lives. Set examples when an opportunity arises – call a relative you haven’t talked to in a while. Involve your children in kind acts. Let them go with you to visit shut-ins, or nursing home residents who don’t have family close by. Be genuine as children can see through fake behavior. Make compassion a part of your daily family routine.

We used to laugh when we heard about dads yelling at umpires during little league baseball games, but isn’t this a form of bullying? Preventing bullying begins with examples set by parents! According to research conducted by Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders, there is an expanding trend occurring among adults today. Adults are modeling poor behavior for our children and students, and it explains why kids are acting the way they are. It’s adults who bully.

Tim Elmore states, if we don’t get a handle on the bullying issue in schools, we must remember: bullies grow up to be adults. And adults who don’t know how to lead, manage others, or even be civil are quite dangerous. If a kid doesn’t learn the fundamentals of positive interaction with others, the consequences can be enormous later. Increased bullying in high schools...in colleges...at work...in politics...in sports. The list goes on.

Kids don’t easily outgrow the pain of bullying according to a new study that finds people bullied as kids are less mentally healthy as adults. It’s not only the victim, but the bully who is at risk. The study is one of the first to establish long-term effects of childhood bullying, which is still considered a typical part of growing up. Study researcher William Copeland, a clinical psychologist at Duke University Medical Center states, “To my surprise at least, there were some very strong long-term effects on their risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, a whole host of outcomes that we know just wreak havoc on adult lives.”

Our 4-H program focuses on 5 C’s - Confidence, Competence, Character, Connection, and Caring which leads to the sixth C of Contribution. These traits all lead to Compassion and Kindness for others. As parents, let’s make an effort to give our youth every advantage possible to avoid the bullying trend. Teach Kindness and Compassion.

October also celebrates the beginning of our 4-H Program Year and National 4-H Week which encourages parents to enroll their youth in the 4-H program building a strong base with abilities to cope with situations later in their adult lives. Research has proven that participation in 4-H has a significant positive impact on young people. Recent findings from the Tufts University 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development indicate that, when compared to their peers, young people in 4-H are: 1) Nearly four times more likely to contribute to their communities, 2) Two times more likely to pursue healthy behaviors, and 3) Two times more likely to engage in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs in the out-of-school time.

4-H, the nation’s largest youth development and empowerment organization, cultivates confident kids who tackle the issues that matter most in their communities right now. In the United States, 4-H programs empower six million young people through the 109 land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension in more than 3,000 local offices serving every county and parish in the country.

Now is the time to get your child involved in your local 4-H program! Membership is open to youth from ages 7 to 18 as of January 1, 2019. Youth 5 and 6 years old as of January 1, 2019 are eligible for participation as a Cloverbud member.

Contact Patsy Maddy at pmaddy@ksu.edu or any of your local Twin Creeks Extension District offices in Norton (785-877-5755), Decatur (785-475-8121), Sheridan (785-675-3268) or Graham (785-421-3411) to get your youth involved.

Information in this article has been adapted from Dr. Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders and Boys Town.

-10-

Article Header

“Stomp Out Bullying with Kindness”

“Chasing Clovers”

By Patsy L. Maddy

Twin Creeks Extension District

4-H Youth Development Agent