

Stand up

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It is easy to look at any system and find errors; anyone can pick apart a structure and exploit its flaws with little trouble. It takes focused, determined, and assertive people to decide which flaws are most detrimental and even more determined people to implement a plan of action and find a solution.

Some would argue that within the United States school system the main issue is funding, or a lack of appropriate teachers, or low test scores. While these aspects are obviously important to the functioning of schools, none surpass the ever-present issue of bullying. Though it does not appear to directly affect learning at first glance, closer inspection reveals that bullying often leads to major problems within the school environment. Bullying affects the mindset of all parties involved, and therefore leads to hindrances regarding learning and life as a whole. It needs to be shunned from schools once and for all; someone just needs to accept the challenge. The numbers linked to bullying within US schools are shocking and shameful.

A study performed by ABC News indicated that almost a third of students are involved in bullying, either as the recipient or as the aggressor (Bullying Statistics 2009). Another study exhibited that approximately 3.2 million students between the ages of eleven and sixteen have admitted to being bullied on a daily basis (Jessup 2009). Keep in mind that these are only the children who have the confidence to speak about their victimization. The actions behind these numbers should be clarified; bullying is not just physical fights alone.

It encompasses verbal, psychological, and physical attacks that occur regularly and often targets people who lack proper defense mechanisms (Sampson 2002). Being preyed upon evokes fear, an appropriate response to threats and hurtful actions. 160, 000 US students avoid attending school each day because they are afraid of what will happen to them if they do. Bullies create an unsafe environment that causes other students to feel uncomfortable. Almost any person would agree that if a child is not comfortable in their learning space they will become introverted and will not actively participate. Even if the bullying does not reach the level where a student does not want to step foot in the school, it still affects how they learn – as participation is key to a child's development.

A study of a sample of American students revealed that ninety percent saw a significant lowering in their marks (Glew et al. 2005). The tally of victims is far too high and should be enough to conjure the desire to change the lives of students across the country, yet so many stand along the sidelines. This allows the situation to progress even further. While bullying can impair the learning ability of students, the psychological affects that it has on them are far more damaging.

The extent of the bullying's impact can be directly related to the amount of interference from people of authority – or lack thereof. A study showed that an adult intervened in only four percent of cases investigated (School Bullying Statistics 2004). When people of power neglect the students it not only allows the victimization to continue, it can also encourage the aggressor. If said aggressor feels that they are able to harass other students without consequence their motive may become more of a game – what can
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they get away with? The ability of bullying to escalate so easily in school settings is accompanied by the pressures that kids face in today's society. It is a well-known fact that the images portrayed through the media influence the perspectives of adolescents and young adults.

The combination of these two major pressures can lead a person to a breakdown. I have witnessed the aftermath of such a breakdown. A girl who I played ice hockey with was the daughter of an ex National Hockey League player and current assistant coach for an NHL team. She had a younger sister, who we will refer to as Sara. Sara not only faced the pressure of living up to her father's name both on and off of the ice, but she was also teased in school for being a 'spoiled brat'.

It is my opinion that these accusations were not true, however jealous kids can be unkind. Sara neglected to tell her parents about how she felt, and eventually she decided she could not take it anymore. Just over one year ago her mother came home to find Sara hanging in the basement. This is a morbid account that I regret having to tell, but I feel that too few people understand what bullying can lead to. Yes, poor grades in school are a concern, but when injuries are inflicted by an external party or by one's self more people should be willing to get involved.

Pressure is everywhere, but repetitive embarrassment and harassment can only be withstood for so long. Someone needs to step in to help the victims fight. More and more schools are implementing anti-bullying programs across the country, a necessary action, however more authoritative figures need to get involved. With proper support, more studies can be conducted

and more effective programs can be implemented. One type of anti-bullying program that has been used is the “ whole-school approach,” also referred to as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

Essentially, it consists of informing students, parents, and communities about bullying. Topics of discussion include how to promote a violence-free environment and communication techniques. This method also involves instating curricular activities that focus on promoting teamwork and togetherness. Results of studies performed on whole-school interventions showed a “ reasonable rate of return” (Ananiadou et al. 2004).

Further research regarding bullying in the United States school system and raising awareness regarding the issue are necessary for diminishing the number of victims in schoolyards. More programs like the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program need to be offered for the security of students. Bullying is a pressing issue in schools nationwide – one that has been allowed to intensify for too long and that necessitates a firm defense. Think of the millions of children who hide within themselves because they are afraid of their peers. Think of all of the opportunities that they miss out on and the moments that they waste because they feel threatened and helpless.

Think of how this could change if the people that they look up to – that their country looks up to – showed that they cared and that they were willing to help. Together we must make our classrooms impermeable to bullying.

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