

# PSI PARADIGM<sup>®</sup>

A PSI Communique for the Educational Community

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## In THIS Issue

Nearly every week I receive calls and emails from school administrators seeking help for bullying in their schools. The theme is always the same: frustration with efforts that don't work, concern about the welfare of students, stress from the pressure of parents to "fix" the problem, worry over too much academic time, energy and resources spent on a problem that only seems to be worsening. Administrators worry about the severe and far reaching legal ramifications of bullying.

PSI has published this issue of **Paradigm** to provide additional ideas for you to consider. Included are columns by national experts on bullying and suicide. Also included are examples of schools implementing comprehensive PSI anti-bullying programs that include staff, student and parent components. Also included are ideas for cost-conscious and easy to implement effective approaches.

Contact us at [karenmckelvey@psi-solutions.org](mailto:karenmckelvey@psi-solutions.org) for further information.

# Prevention Matters!

A Prevention/Intervention Newsletter for Educators

## Role-plays Teach Positive Ways to Stop Bullying

Recently at St. Hilary Elementary School in Fairlawn, Ohio, PSI's Karen McKelvey and Bob Murray role-played before fourth-grade students the most common forms of bullying. Karen is Coordinator of Prevention and Intervention Programs, while Bob is Coordinator of School Psychology Services. The role-plays were part of a nine-week REACT program, which teaches positive and effective ways to deal with anger and conflict.



PSI's Bob Murray and Karen McKelvey play the roles of bully and victim. — photo by Martin Siegel

Bullying typically involves three people: the bully, the victim and the bystander. Bob played the bully, Karen the victim, and the class collectively was the bystander.

### Verbal abuse

The beginning role-play dealt with the most common form of bullying: verbal abuse and name-calling. Bob heaped ridicule on Karen's name and height. In turn, she responded in anger, stomping her foot. "Stop it! I'm telling!"

When it concluded, Karen asked the class if this response really worked or, rather, if it ignited the bully's quest for power over the victim.

In the follow-up, Karen let the abusive comments bounce off, as if of no concern. She made Bob appear as a comedian, turning a negative into a positive: no intense body language, no raised voice, no confrontation—just calmness.

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## New Ohio Law on Cyber-Bullying

### Expected to Be Signed by Kasich

A bill that advocates say would strengthen efforts to prevent online and offline bullying in Ohio schools is now heading to Gov. John Kasich's desk. HB 116, the Jessica Logan Act, requires school districts to establish cyber-bullying policies and to annually teach students and teachers and inform parents about their overall bullying policies. It's named for a Cincinnati teenager who committed suicide after being harassed over nude photos she sent to a former boyfriend. HB 116 would require school districts to include bullying committed using a cell phone, computer or other electronic communication device in their anti-bullying policies.

The Ohio House approved Senate amendments to the original bill on a 91-4 vote. Cincinnati TV station WLWT reports that Kasich plans to sign HB 116 into law as of January 26, 2012.

Nationally, 28 percent of students age 12 through 18 reported being bullied at school in the 2008-09 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics under the definition of bullying described in this presentation. About 6 percent reported being the victim of online bullying.

The national statistics showed that students who reported being bullied at school were more often the victims of name-calling or rumors rather than of threats of harm or actual physical attacks. And reports of bullying tended to decrease as students got older.

Ohio state law defines bullying as "any intentional written, verbal, or physical act that a student has exhibited toward another particular student more than once and the behavior both causes mental or

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## Role-plays suggest positive ways to handle bullying

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In discussion with the class, it was made plain that in reality this is hard to do. However, there is always a choice away from anger. By using strategy, *Karen was the one in control.*

### Physical abuse

The second role-play was at a make-believe locker. Adding to his taunts, Bob physically pushed Karen around. Again Karen got mad, raising her voice and uttering typical responses like threatening to tell the teacher or his parents. But would this really matter if the bully got in trouble? What hurt Karen most were her feelings, not her arm being shoved.

With the follow-up, Karen coolly walked away. This allowed her to stand her ground in a non-aggressive way, making Bob appear awkward as he stumbled after her. *The key element was no aggressive eye contact.* By seemingly ignoring his heckling, the bully's power was diffused.

### Rumors

The last role-play was about gossip and rumors. Bob ridiculed the fact that Karen made the school's basketball team. He scoffed that she was too small, couldn't play well enough and had made the team only because her father was the coach. Taking anger as her cue, Karen only made the accusation more dramatic and juicier.

In the second version, Karen used two tactics without getting angry. The first asked the bystander (the class), "Do you believe it?" The second was a neutral statement: "You can believe it if you want." *This got the situation defused, made less important, less dramatic and less accusatory.*

PSI's nine-week REACT program shows there is always a way out of bullying confrontation, though it may not seem so at first. Thinking can take the place of impulse; good to know since nearly everyone will get bullied at some point in life.



ABOVE: Students of St. Hilary Elementary School learn effective ways to deal with these bullying situations. One girl turns her view away from the drama.

—photo by Martin Siegel

# Bus Driver Training Needs To Be More Comprehensive

**The bus driver overheard John a middle school student state as he was walking off the bus at the end of the day, "I am going to get several of you tomorrow on the bus and blow you away for making fun of me".**

The above scenario illustrates the complexity of driving a bus in today's world. What should the driver do in this situation and what training have they received that ensures that they know their role in school safety? What if pilots were expected not only to fly the plane but also to ensure that passengers were given the meals they ordered, stayed in their seats during times of turbulence, wore their seatbelts at required times during the flight, and behaved appropriately? Ironically, this is similar to what we expect of school bus drivers. The driver must focus attention on the highly complex task of driving the bus while at the same time monitoring and managing the behaviors of 40 or more students who are visible only through a rear-view mirror. This is coupled with the fact that most of the training that bus drivers do receive is focused upon mechanical and safety issues. While these are important training areas, more needs to be done to educate bus drivers in the important areas of effective discipline management and administrators must begin to look at the school bus driver as an important partner in the educational process.

Almost all school districts provide continuing education to bus drivers. Coupled with this training should also come the message that drivers are the

important "eyes and ears" of the school because drivers are often the first person a student interacts with in the morning and the last at the end of a school day. Overall goals for this additional training should include:

- **Principles of Assertive Discipline**— Drivers need to learn that the non-assertive bus driver and the hostile bus driver will exacerbate discipline issues. Losing control of the behavior on a bus is just as dangerous as losing control of the bus on the highway. The goal is to have Assertive Drivers who clearly and firmly tell students how they want them to behave; who stay calm and use a normal tone of voice; who have a plan of action when students do not behave and reward students who do behave.
- **Importance of Building Relationships with Students**— Drivers who know the names of their riders, greet all children as they enter the bus, and build a strong bond with their daily passengers will see reduced behavior problems and discover that even those challenging behaviors that occasionally do emerge can usually be dealt with quickly and easily.
- **Warning Signs of Youth Violence and Suicide**-- Bus drivers who are connected with their students may also be the first to sense when a threat of school violence exists or a student is despondent enough to attempt suicide. Students often "let down their guard" in the environment of the bus. Transportation personnel can be trained in both of these emotionally charged areas so that they can recognize

the warning signs and know how to respond properly to these signs.

- **Dealing with Bus Crisis Situations**— There should always be a coordination of transportation crisis plans and district-wide crisis plans. Drivers should receive training in First Aid and CPR as well as psychological first aid. There should be a plan for methods of communication with all drivers as well as a code word for danger. Bus drivers will be alone and in charge during the first minutes of any crisis situation and will need the skills to deal with it properly.

Education and training of transportation staff in prevention/intervention techniques will provide a safer busing environment for students. Bus drivers must be viewed as educational partners by school administrators and frequent communication needs to take place between drivers and administrators. The shifting of gears in our training of bus drivers will ensure that we take advantage of this vital extension of the school environment.

Scott Poland and Karen L. McKelvey, of PSI both have a long history of training bus drivers. PSI is an educational services company that trains transportation personnel in the above areas in a program entitled "Shifting Gears: Remove the Bullies, Add the Discipline."

**Sources:** The Ohio Department of Health, The Central Ohio Bed Bug Task Force and The Cuyahoga County Board of Health

**PSI customizes Prevention Programs to meet the needs of your students.**

## **KASICH** (Continued from page 2)

physical harm to the other student and is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student." Violence within a dating relationship is also considered bullying. Students who are bullied are more likely to be absent, perform poorly, have trouble

making friends, have declining mental and emotional health and act violently, according to the Ohio Department of Education. Under existing state law, Ohio school districts must adopt policies prohibiting bullying, as well as harassment and intimidation. State law also requires

districts to have formal procedures for investigating and reporting complaints about these behaviors. Each school district is supposed to post an annual report on all reported instances of bullying and related behaviors on its website.

# The Bullies to Buddies™ Victim Prevention Program

## The *Alternative* to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

By Izzy Kalman

Anti-bullying laws are requiring schools to protect students from bullying by other students. Research as well as practical experience has shown that most anti-bullying programs are not effective in reducing bullying and often result in its increase. A popular anti-bullying program is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Dan Olweus, the Norwegian psychologist who created the program, was the person who created the definition of bullying that's being used by the academic bullying experts and by state laws and policies.

To help you consider the differences between the Olweus approach and Bullies to Buddies™ consider the brief comparisons shown (at right):

### Olweus Approach or BULLY-Proofing

- Victims rely on school staff and student bystanders to protect them from bullies
- Staff side with victims against bullies, and reward students for thinking and acting like victims—promoting a victim mentality that handicaps them for life
- Punishes bullies, making them angry and vengeful, leading to more intense bullying
- Requires school staff to spend more time as anti-bullying law enforcement officers
- Categorizes people into “virtuous victims” and “evil bullies”
- Teaches students to blame bullies for their problems
- Violates Freedom of Speech
- Violates the Golden Rule by bullying bullies

### Bullies to Buddies™ or VICTIM-Proofing

- Victims learn to solve their bully problems by themselves
- Gets rid of the victim mentality—students become more resilient, independent and emotionally mature
- Defuses bullying, so there is less chance of retaliation
- Allows staff to spend *less* time enforcing laws and *more* time teaching
- Shows students they determine whether people are their bullies or buddies
- Teaches students to take responsibility for their own problems
- Promotes Freedom of Speech
- Promotes the Golden Rule by treating bullies as buddies

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PSI is ready to assist you through our professional staff of psychologists assigned to your school, our PSI Crisis Team (<http://psi-solutions.org/SchoolCrisisManagement.html>), and our Expert Partners, including Scott Poland, EdD (<http://psi-solutions.org/experts/polands/>). PSI professionals are also ready to assist you in your communications with parents or your local school community.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have.

PSI provides a wide variety of school health, special education, ESL, foreign language and intervention services.

Contact us for more information.



# Prevention Matters!



## Break the code of silence now!

The Chardon and other school tragedies present us with an urgent call to become more vigilant, active and sensitive at school, with parents and in the community. Perhaps lost in the overwhelming grief and dismay is the fact that *schools remain one of the safest places for children.*

Parents, teachers and students must be comfortable discussing their uncertainties and worries about school safety. Establishing this dialogue is paramount. More than any other variable, teachers, parents, and most importantly students need clear administrative support and permission to initiate these vital conversations.

When staff raise the issue of possible school violence, the door opens to begin a valuable dialogue that can save lives and prevent unnecessary violence. Whether it's in the hallway, on the bus or in the classroom, staff need to repeatedly demonstrate that it's "OK" to discuss this topic and that student concerns will be taken seriously and treated respectfully. This Culture of Openness needs to start at the top so that everyone in the system (including bus drivers, non-certified staff, custodians, etc.) becomes an active listener. In almost all cases of school violence, clues had been manifested but not 'heard.' Administrators who pursue a Culture of Openness will be well rewarded with a safer school environment.

A school safety team should be created. This presents an inclusive opportunity to link with the community through outside professional volunteer help. Since almost all acts of violence are revealed to friends in some manner beforehand, *students have to believe they will be heard.* The code of silence will be broken only if there is a belief that teachers (and parents) will pay attention to and genuinely consider what they have to say. Too many times signs, clues, anonymous reporting and suspicious behavior have been ignored.

Most often teachers will recognize student symptoms of depression, anxiety, fear and anger. Whether physical or emotional, they may indicate that the student, while not directly discussing the tragedy, is still affected by its aftermath. It is imperative to have a caring, professional environment where they can give voice to extremely personal feelings. Unexpressed negative feelings need a constructive outlet, which can take the form of words, music and art.

An important first step occurs however, when clear communications between

students, teachers, parents and the community is initiated. It can be a difficult and lengthy process, especially in larger schools. But with diligence and care, the Code of Silence can be broken, saving lives and mending relationships.

PSI is ready to assist you through our professional staff of psychologists assigned to your school, our PSI Crisis Team ([http://psi-solutions.org/school\\_crisis\\_management.html](http://psi-solutions.org/school_crisis_management.html)), and our expert partners, including Scott Poland, EdD (<http://psi-solutions.org/experts/polands/>). We are also ready to assist you in communications with parents or your local school community.

Please contact us with any questions or concerns that you may have at [karenmckelvey@psi-solutions.org](mailto:karenmckelvey@psi-solutions.org).

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*Pictured at right: Each of PSI Expert Partners Karen McKelvey, Ed.S., and Scott Poland, Ed.D., are recognized nationally for their work on suicide and bullying prevention in schools and communities.*



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## Classroom Lessons: The Aftermath of Chardon



*Scott Poland, Ed.D., internationally recognized for his work on suicide and bullying prevention in schools and communities, is interviewed on Cleveland's NBC affiliate WKYC-TV. He is a PSI Expert Partner and Co-Director of the Suicide and Violence Prevention Office of Nova Southeastern University. Contact him at [scottpoland@psi-solutions.org](mailto:scottpoland@psi-solutions.org).*



Although planned months in advance, it was barely a few days after the Chardon tragedy that Dr. Scott Poland presented a PSI seminar on of suicide and bullying prevention. Titled 'Suicide and Bullycide,' Dr. Poland said that bullying exists in every school, no matter the demographics or locale.

Victims of bullying typically project their feelings outward or inward. If outward, it becomes the behavior of the bully, perpetrating the cycle. If inward, thoughts of suicide may occur. It is critical to remember that **almost always there are warning signs of suicide (and school violence) beforehand.**

As with the Chardon tragedy and those that preceded it, the media sensationalizes the perpetrators at the outset, only paying heed to the victims afterward. Students affected by a traumatic event will likely suffer sleep deprivation, regressive behavior and difficulty in concentration. They almost always need long-term help. This is especially true on the anniversaries of the shootings, the birthdays of the victims, and for students who have suffered other losses in their lives.

Typical school counselors and psychologists are already spread thin and assigned substantial clerical duties. Ironically, after a tragedy outside professional volunteer help is usually met with a dismissal along the lines of 'We've got it covered.' Sadly, the opposite is too often true.

Bullying frequently takes place in areas of transition, such as the playground, bathroom, hallways and school buses. All personnel who supervise those areas including bus drivers can be instrumental in bullying prevention!

In spite of the media's relentless coverage of the violence and endless details about the perpetrators, it is crucial to remember the positive side: schools are the safest places in America. **Less than one percent of violent deaths occur at school, but the media coverage often makes us forget how safe schools are!**

To improve bullying and suicide prevention efforts, schools need to create a task force, which includes parents and community. Crisis prevention requires a team approach starting with the very important task of changing the 'code of silence.' This code allows violence to erupt. Dr. Poland emphasized that many tragedies could have been prevented if students had recognized warning signs of suicide or violence and told the nearest adult. He also stressed that schools need to promote the national suicide hotline that is available 24 hours a day: 1-800-SUICIDE.

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