

Bullying?

by Joe Krause, Superintendent & Principal

Back in 1975 I was walking home from school with Richie Davis. We were both in 6th grade and Richie was one of those kids who was always willing, and seemingly eager, to pop someone in the nose. For some reason, I had a knack for making folks laugh, so I wasn't ever bothered by kids like Richie. However, I still recall watching Richie in action with Carl.

Richie made habit of picking on Carl. On this day, Richie went up to Carl, made Carl hold his books, and then punched Carl in the nose. Carl gave him his books back, Richie went toward his house, and I went toward my house wondering what the heck was going on. I asked Richie the next day why he punched Carl. Richie told me that he just didn't like Carl. I wish I could say I came to Carl's defense, but I was an average, kind of thoughtless kid who didn't want to be the next one to get punched.

Richie's behavior with Carl was a classic case of bullying. Richie was tougher and stronger than Carl. This is typical of an unequal balance of power. Bullying always involves an imbalance of power...whether physically, emotionally, or socially. Sometimes it's the popular kid picking on the not-so-popular kid. Popularity is a form of power. The following questions can help us figure out whether bullying is taking place:

- Is someone being attacked physically, socially, and/or emotionally and has it happened *more than once over a period of time*?
- Is there an unequal balance of power?
- Is someone being hurt on purpose?

In today's educational climate the term "bullying" is used quite often. Sometimes kids simply have a *mean moment*. Mean moments are NOT good, but they are isolated events (they do not happen regularly). Someone is hurt on purpose during a mean moment, but it's not a Richie versus Carl type of scenario. The victim does not need to constantly worry about being picked on. A good example would be the student who purposely passes the basketball too hard during recess and the ball smashes another kid in the face. The one who passed the ball is not usually mean and the victim is not usually the victim. The offender often quickly apologizes and both parties continue with their daily lives without worry or conflict.

Sometimes *conflict* is confused for bullying. The typical school day is filled with conflict. Nobody is having fun during a conflict, there *is* a possible solution to the disagreement, and there is NOT an unequal balance of power. Conflict happens everywhere and is simply a part of life...and every good book or movie!

When I was a principal in one district, the superintendent who hired me liked to tease people. However, while I knew he was teasing, most other staff members thought he was being serious. No matter how I tried to run interference and explain his "humor", others just didn't get it. The problem was rooted in the fact that there was an imbalance of power, everyone was NOT having fun, and feelings were getting hurt. That superintendent didn't last long. When *appropriate teasing* is taking place *everyone* is having fun, nobody is getting hurt, and everyone is participating equally.

At Terry Schools, we want all students to feel safe. Bullying is NOT acceptable. I hope this short article helps to clarify what bullying is...and is not. Terry Schools will strive to make sure we are proactive at addressing challenges as we discover they exist. Please, let us know of any challenges in the bullying realm of which we might not be aware. My cell phone number is: 907-799-6774. Thank you for entrusting Terry Schools with your children!