

A young girl with long, light brown hair is shown in profile, looking down with a sad expression. She is wearing a dark blue jacket over a colorful patterned shirt. In the background, a chalkboard has the word "Bullied!" written in white chalk, followed by a simple drawing of a sad face with a downturned mouth.

Bullied!

Bully pulpit

By Lynne Shallcross

Counselors, and school counselors in particular, have a critical role to play both in coming to the aid of children and adolescents targeted by bullying and in promoting a culture where bullying is confronted head-on rather than swept under the rug

This year alone, 13 million kids in the United States will be bullied. Three million will be absent from school at some point each month because they feel unsafe there.

Those numbers are courtesy of the website for *Bully*, a 2011 documentary from award-winning filmmaker Lee Hirsch that comes out on DVD this month. The documentary shares the stories of five families, two of which lost children to suicide at the ages of 11 and 17. *Time.com* called the film a “punishing movie your kids must see.” A. O. Scott, film critic for *The New York Times*, noted that “Just being kids’ can no longer be an acceptable response to the kind of sustained physical and emotional abuse that damages the lives of young people whose only sin is appearing weak or weird to their peers.”

Thanks to efforts such as *Bully*, the It Gets Better Project and StopBullying.gov, public awareness of bullying is on the rise. But progress combatting the problem remains painfully slow, as evidenced by the continuing stream of news about kids being bullied, some to the point of making the irreversible decision to end their lives.

Julaine Field, a member of the American Counseling Association, consults with local school districts on bullying and co-edited the 2009 book *Understanding Girl Bullying and What to Do About It: Strategies to Help Heal the Divide*. Through her work, she has witnessed firsthand the pain that bullying can cause. In particular, Field recalls consulting with a sixth-grader, “B,” and her family. B was a high achiever academically and frequently participated in class. She

exhibited some socially immature behaviors and wasn’t outwardly feminine, preferring snakes and bugs to the interests more traditionally associated with preteen girls.

A few other girls and boys in B’s classes began targeting her. B changed her class schedule, but that didn’t solve the problem. “She was not overly impacted at first,” says Field, associate dean of the College of Education and associate professor of counseling and human services at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. “However, after consulting with a teacher and the teacher not acting upon the complaint, the students who bullied her became empowered and increased their attacks. The bullying was both overt — verbal, name-calling in class and elsewhere — and covert — using relational aggression to turn a friend on B, stealing B’s items from her book bag, spreading rumors that B was a lesbian.”

When B told her parents what was going on, her mom met with B’s teachers. It was mutually agreed that B’s mom would provide her additional emotional support at home, that B would see the counselor for support at school and that B’s teachers would undertake efforts to improve the environment for B at school. Over time, the climate became safer in some classes, but not in others.

“One of her teachers was relatively new and had difficulty with classroom management,” Field says. “This classroom in particular was very problematic. [For example], B had books thrown at her, was consistently subjected to name-calling, had her cell phone thrown on the roof of

the school, and more students seemed to participate in the bullying because the students leading the bullying had a great deal of social control in the class. To B, everyone hated her, and she started to have psychosomatic symptoms and extreme anxiety when she went to this particular class. She reported that she now ‘hated school.’”

The school counselor provided regular support to B and validated her feelings, Field says. This included helping B brainstorm different and sometimes less emotionally reactive ways of responding to the bullies, showing her alternative ways to approach the teachers and principal to report the bullying and ask for help, and teaching her various strategies for managing her anxiety.

Field says B’s mom kept up regular communication with B’s teachers and an assistant principal who was in charge of discipline for the sixth grade. B’s mom also talked frequently with the school counselor, who Field says validated what B’s mom was saying and talked with her about at-home strategies to help prepare B for school. The counselor also shared openly her own concerns regarding how B and other targeted students were treated at school, Field says.

“The roadblock to enforcing adequate discipline and working to shape a school culture that was not conducive to bullying was the principal,” Field says. “Unless a teacher or student reported physical bullying, the principal was reticent to take any action that was disciplinary in nature. He also did not support anti-bullying programming or other best practices for shifting the school climate. He frequently made comments related to B provoking the behavior. Ultimately, after B’s sixth-grade year, the family scraped together tuition so that B could attend another public middle school that was considered out of district for the family. This was an ideal resolution for this family. However, [it] did nothing to alter the school climate. I fear for the students who do not have the resources and support that this child did.”

Although this real-life example shows great effort and teamwork on the part of the student, the student’s parents and the school counselor, the end result was not a changed school atmosphere with drastically decreased bullying. That’s



Long-term effects

The effects of childhood bullying can linger long into adulthood, according to ACA member Julaine Field of the University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

“[Bullying] undermines confidence and being able to trust one’s thoughts, feelings and behaviors,” says Field, who co-edited the 2009 book *Understanding Girl Bullying and What to Do About It: Strategies to Help Heal the Divide*. In an attempt to shield themselves, victims of bullying sometimes adopt maladaptive social approaches such as becoming very socially isolated or, on the other end of the spectrum, becoming quite socially dominant, Field says. It is not uncommon for former targets of bullying to carry those traits with them into adulthood, she says.

Field has worked with adult clients diagnosed with major depressive disorder who cited past bullying experiences in school as the reason they didn’t currently have hope or feel positive about their life and future. “For some people, [being bullied] can be devastating for a long period of time, especially if victims don’t get support while they’re going through it,” Field says.

Field recommends that counselors use a strengths-based approach with adults who are still carrying the scars of childhood bullying, helping these clients to understand the pain they may have internalized and to explore how they use boundaries in their close, interpersonal relationships.

— Lynne Shallcross

because the path to stemming bullying requires “a whole-school approach,” Field says. In a case such as B’s, that would mean the school’s administration must be on board as well.

Field, who will present on the whole-school approach in March at the ACA 2013 Conference & Expo in Cincinnati, says counselors who work in schools where anti-bullying efforts aren’t at the top of the administration’s priority list might consider advocating for tougher policies related to bullying and surveying students, parents and teachers to collect data on the impact bullying has in their school. “Although several school districts report anti-bullying efforts, few use a multicomponent, systems-based approach involving the whole school,” Field says. “Holding one assembly, featuring one speaker or doing one health lesson is not enough.”

Bullying’s changing landscape

Bullying comes in a variety of shapes and sizes, Field says, with the five main categories being physical bullying, verbal bullying, cyberbullying, social aggression and relational aggression. Physical and verbal bullying are both overt forms of bullying, she says, while cyberbullying can be either overt or covert. In cases of cyberbullying, she explains, the target sometimes is aware of who is doing the bullying, but in other instances, the bully uses another person’s username or a phantom username so the target doesn’t know who is behind it.

Field describes social aggression as a form of bullying that normally involves one ringleader — a “social heavyweight” — who influences a circle of friends to gang up on a specific target or targets. Social aggression can be overt or covert, she says, involving physical and verbal aggression or more subtle tactics such as rumors, gossip and social exclusion. Relational aggression takes place between individuals who have a friendship that has been disrupted. “Relational aggression is often defined as specific behaviors that are intended to harm a student’s sense of belonging or connection with a friend or friends,” Field says. “Specific examples may be isolating a person, withdrawing one’s friendship [or] severing a connection because one feels ‘wronged’ by the friend, and spreading rumors to damage the

former friend's reputation, often leading to peer rejection. Some researchers contend that this form of bullying is more likely among girls — [for example], being able to be angry or mean in a covert way that maintains an appearance of being 'nice.' However, other researchers have found that boys are equally likely to use relational or social aggression, particularly in schools that closely monitor physical/overt acts of aggression."

"Not all bullying researchers separate relational aggression and social aggression," Field adds. "Instead, they lump the two together under the term *relational aggression*. Based on the research, formal and informal, that I have done, I think this can be confusing when defining different types of bullying for educational or disciplinary purposes. Historically, relational aggression was first termed *indirect aggression* [in] 1969, meaning acts that are covert and bullies could remain anonymous." Field says researcher Nicki Crick coined the term relational aggression in 1995. Separating relational aggression, which happens between friends, and social aggression, which is when a larger peer group targets someone without a relationship necessarily having existed prior to the bullying, provides more clarity, Field believes.

Raychelle Cassada Lohmann, a school counselor at Hilton Head Island High School in South Carolina, says repetitiveness is a key component of bullying. "It's not just a one-time thing of being mean — it's continual," says Lohmann, co-author with Julia V. Taylor of the *Bullying Workbook for Teens*, which is due out this spring.

Now that technology is such an integral part of most kids' lives, Lohmann

says, cyberbullying often happens in conjunction with other kinds of bullying, which allows the bullying to cross over between the school and home environments. "Something could happen at school, and by the end of the school day, [the students are] texting about it or posting something on Facebook," says Lohmann, a member of ACA.

"Whenever kids used to get off the school bus, they could close the door [to their house] and feel safe. That doesn't happen [any longer] with cyberbullying." She also points out that students are often the ones blazing the trail with many aspects of today's technology and social media, leaving most parents, teachers and school counselors lagging behind and not fully aware of how kids are using those technologies.

JoLynn Carney, an associate professor of counselor education and doctoral coordinator in the Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling and Special Education at Pennsylvania State University, echoes Lohmann. The advent of the Internet and the concept of cyberbullying have drastically changed the landscape of bullying, she says.

"Before cyberbullying, texting, Facebook and so forth, targets were able to escape the peer abuse by leaving the school environment," says Carney, a member of ACA who has been researching topics related to bullying since 1995. "Often, home and weekends were times when targets had a safe refuge and [were] protected from chronic abuse. Unfortunately, there is a host of research and anecdotal support that highlights [today's] constant barrage of abuse 24/7, allowing no refuge for those individuals being abused."

Although the landscape for bullying

has changed, the topics that most frequently trigger bullying likely won't come as a surprise. Field says bullying generally revolves around young people trying to grasp a sense of power, control and status. Field and Lohmann agree that kids who are viewed as being "different" in some way are most often targeted — whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), take special education classes, live in the "wrong" neighborhood, are overweight or underweight, or exhibit some other characteristic that makes them stand out. When Field consults with teachers, she explains how bullying often relates to the theory of social dominance, with kids at the top level competing for the top rung on the ladder and kids farther down the ladder doing anything they can to move up a rung or two.

Jealousy is another prime motivator for bullying, Lohmann says. For example, a new student who is talented in drama might come to school and nudge the former drama star to the No. 2 spot. That student might feel jealous, sensing that his or her status is being threatened, and "launch an attack" against the new student, Lohmann says.

One-third of bullying targets are also bullies themselves, Field says. Sometimes that has to do with social status and belonging, she explains. For instance, a target of bullying might think, "If I bully this student like this other person bullies me, then I'll earn status and a sense of belonging." Other times, Field says, it has more to do with the target projecting his or her feelings on to someone else. Someone who is the target of bullies might turn around and focus his or her anger on an easier target, such as a student with lower social status.

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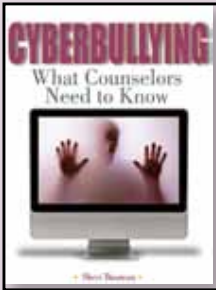
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Deep impact

Two years ago, Field was talking with a student, “E,” who had experienced bullying by one of her close friends. E had begun to be recognized for her musical talents and was starting to attract attention from some of the boys. E’s friend, who was accustomed to being more popular, grew jealous.

Among other tactics, Field says, E’s friend told her she should stop playing music and stop drawing attention to herself. She criticized E relentlessly, mocking her physical appearance, clothing and musical abilities. “When [the friend] became really angry,” Field says, “she would shun [E] — disinvite her to a slumber party or other social event — or isolate her — get up from her seat in the cafeteria and move away from E after she sat down — to send the message that she was displeased.”

The paradox of having her “best friend” treat her that way was very confusing to E, Field says. The two girls had a long history together, having been friends since elementary school.

E smartly realized the friendship was no longer healthy and described to Field a process of having to “break up” with her friend, which involved untangling herself emotionally and psychologically. The deep emotional impact the friend’s bullying had on E grabbed Field’s attention and has stuck with her.

While physical bullying sometimes leaves a visible trail of bruises and cuts, Field says nonphysical bullying often leaves scars below the surface, such as decreased self-esteem and a damaged self-concept. Numerous researchers have described how various types of bullying can affect the mental health of those who are targeted, Field says. For example, she points to research from Crick, a professor at the University of Minnesota who passed away recently after years of studying relational aggression. Crick linked relational aggression with symptoms of both depression and anxiety.

A child’s academic performance can also suffer as a result of being bullied, Field says. If students don’t feel safe at school and are spending most of their time worrying about what other kids are saying about them or what will happen to them in the lunchroom, that doesn’t

leave much room for focusing on what they're supposed to be learning, Field says. Ultimately, Lohmann adds, students who are targets of bullying might try to avoid going to school at all, leading to high absentee rates.

Some children who are being bullied will go to a school counselor or parent for help. Other times, a faculty member or another student will witness an instance of bullying and report it. But many instances of bullying go unnoticed or unreported. Lohmann says statistics indicate that children who are targets report bullying only about one-third of the time.

"Victims of bullying often do not share their experiences with parents or a school counselor because they are embarrassed by how their peers are treating them and they do not want others to know they are experiencing peer rejection," Field says. "Denial and avoidance are also defense mechanisms that children may use in order to not feel the impact of the bullying or think about their status among their peers. Some victims may fear how an adult will react to the disclosure and may worry about what the adult may do in response [that] could make the situation worse, be more embarrassing than the bullying experience or cause additional isolation from peers. Victims who have disclosed to an authority figure at school may not choose to do so again based on how the person responded — no response or [a] 'wrong' response that made matters worse with no follow-up plan."

Because children often choose not to speak up about bullying, counselors can — and should — be on the lookout for warning signs. Children who are being bullied may change their behavior suddenly, Field says. For instance, they may attempt to change how they look or dress, become more withdrawn, try desperately to hang out with other groups of kids or show increased signs of anxiety about going to school.

Lohmann says other warning signs can include a decline in grades, psychosomatic effects such as headaches and stomachaches, spending a significant amount of time in the nurse's office, unexplained injuries, self-destructive behavior, pulling away from friends or activities, a visible change in weight and panic attacks.



'Do something'

However the bullying is discovered, if there are threats of serious harm and safety is an issue, school counselors must report the situation to the school administration immediately, Lohmann says. As a first step with the child or teen being bullied, Field says counselors or parents need to listen and respect the student's perspective on how to handle the situation. It is important not only to understand what has been going on and to demonstrate care and concern, she says, but also to ask the student what he or she would like to see happen or thinks would help. A parent's first inclination sometimes is to call the parents of the bully, Field says, but taking action without first asking for the child's input can further complicate the situation for the child.

The most important thing to do as a counselor, Carney says, is to act. "Do something," she says. "This something may be to assist the person being targeted to find his or her own unique strengths, to bring witnesses/bystanders into the dynamic in some way that reduces the abuser's power [or] to engage the abuser with the ultimate goal of enhancing the abuser's empathy for his [or] her current target."

Field says some measured self-disclosure on the part of the counselor or parent can also help. Hearing that an adult went through a similar situation can normalize the experience for the student and provide hope that a person can successfully persevere despite being bullied.

After ensuring that the targeted student is safe and protected — which might include changing the student's schedule if he or she has classes with the individual instigating the bullying — Lohmann says the school counselor can acknowledge to the student how much courage it takes to talk about being bullied. In time, the counselor might also help the student work through any related anxiety and stress and identify a group of friends where he or she can be embraced and find a sense of belonging, Lohmann says.

Although Carney would never contend that bullying "caused" someone to commit suicide, she does believe that "being a target of chronic abuse can be one of the major factors in suicidal ideation, attempts [and] completions." The warning signs that someone may be considering suicide are the same regardless of the issue, Carney says. Among kids, these signs include suicide ideation; writing about or drawing images

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of death; looking for ways to die, such as shooting, overdosing or hanging; expressing having no reason to live or no meaning in life; exhibiting abnormal changes in mood; experiencing significant disturbances in sleep habits; withdrawing from loved ones and activities; exhibiting uncontrolled anger or atypical impulsivity; and showing a decline in academic performance. Warning signs should be taken seriously, Carney says, with every effort made to reduce stressors on the child.

In recent years, Field says, bullying has garnered more and more media attention. Although that increased exposure has put pressure on schools to be accountable when it comes to anti-bullying efforts, Field fears it may also have produced a sort of copycat effect among students who didn't previously know anything about "bully-cide." Upon seeing post-bullying suicides highlighted in the media, Field says some children and adolescents might come away with the impression that suicide is an appropriate way to show others how much pain they have been experiencing.

"There are benefits to the current media attention on bullying," Field says. "However, suicide or bully-cide has also been introduced — and revisited repeatedly — as a final coping strategy for many young people. Counselors should be prepared to explore how students are coping with bullying, what their resources [and] social supports are and how severe the students' thinking and emotional states are related to what is happening to them. Counselors who suspect that a student has limited coping skills and resources should closely monitor the student and determine if the student has engaged in suicidal ideation or behavior. A suicide risk assessment should be used if the counselor has any suspicion that the student is suicidal."

Group work can also prove helpful with targets of bullying, Field says, but she notes that current victims and perpetrators should not be placed in the same group. "Peers are incredibly important to children and adolescents," she says. "Groups permit students to engage with one another on a common developmental level — cognitive, psychosocial, etc. — and explore their reactions, behaviors, goals and steps toward change. When student groups establish trust, productive norms, cohesion, etc., sensitive topics can be explored in a meaningful manner. Groups that work with victims of bullying can help to normalize what they are experiencing, validate their thoughts and feelings, and assist group members in creatively discovering new strategies for coping and assertiveness. This group can also serve as a much-needed social support and circle of belonging."

The question of how best to help in situations involving bullying is complex, Carney says, but a list she uses when conducting workshops and courses on bullying prevention breaks advice into two categories: situations a bully must create in order to abuse and ways the counselor can work to intervene. Abusers create isolation, Carney says, so appropriate counseling interventions should promote support and connections. Abusers create dehumanization; counselors can offer empathic involvement. Abusers create powerlessness; counselors can help targets of bullying to develop assertiveness. Abusers create insignificance; counselors can offer attention and significance. Abusers create inevitability; counselors can advocate for positive change.

Field says school counselors are the ideal candidates to provide oversight and interventions connected to anti-bullying efforts, but she adds that community counselors are also in good position to

work with targets of bullying. Among possible topics of exploration, she says, are self-confidence, development of assertiveness skills, understanding what can be ignored and what is too harmful to ignore as it relates to bullying, and development of pro-social skills to strengthen other peer connections.

Bullied adolescents may end up in a community counselor's or private practitioner's office when parents become alarmed by a change in the adolescent's behavior or emotional responses, particularly if the parents are unaware of the bullying. Ideally, Field says, counselor practitioners who have skills and training to address issues surrounding bullying should let schools know they can serve as a resource or referral when appropriate.

Help for the bully

Lohmann calls attention to new research presented at the national conference of the American Academy of Pediatrics that says children with mental health disorders are three times more likely to be identified as bullies. With that statistic in mind, Lohmann believes counselors, while still empowering victims and bystanders of bullying, need to also focus some of their efforts on the children and adolescents who are doing the bullying. "They should be seen as kids we need to reach out to and help," she says. Teens who bully others are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, Lohmann says, and they are also at increased risk for drug and alcohol abuse. Field adds that Crick's research suggested that those who bully also have higher rates of depression.

Counselors can work with bullies in a couple of different ways, Lohmann says. She first recommends reaching out to these students one-on-one. Understanding an individual student's situation and background can sometimes shed light on his or her motivations for

bullying, Lohmann says. Second, she says, teach these students how to identify what they are feeling and offer them positive ways to cope. Guide them in working through any anger or frustration they are feeling, and help them obtain a different perspective on how their words and actions affect others. Lohmann cautions not to put the bully and victim together for a meeting. "Since bullies victimize, putting the bully and victim together can be extremely upsetting to the victim," she says. "The bully or aggressor needs to be spoken to alone and independently. ... It's important for school counselors to let the victim know that the bully will not find out who is doing the reporting. It takes a lot of courage for victims to ask for help. They need to feel accepted and empowered and not threatened when they seek it."

When working one-on-one with bully perpetrators, Field recommends that counselors demonstrate care and concern, discuss bullying behaviors and how they affect others at school, discuss the consequences of bullying, work on empathy and perspective taking, and discuss social power and how it can be used in both constructive and destructive ways. Field also notes that counseling interventions should be kept separate from disciplinary actions for bullying and that school counselors should never handle discipline for bullying.

Small groups can be helpful for bully perpetrators, just as they are for those targeted by bullies, Field says. "Groups that work with perpetrators permit a clear focus on empathy, perspective taking and mentalization related to bullying," she says. "Mentalization ... uses thinking prompts that encourage students to consider their own beliefs, wishes and feelings when engaging in bullying and to consider the beliefs, wishes and feelings of the victim or target. This process fosters mindfulness about the students' internal states and also cajoles students toward empathy for the victim, if the student is capable of empathy."

It takes a village

These counselors agree that the battle against bullying involves much more than simply working with one bully and one target. The solution takes a whole-school approach, as Field promotes, and sometimes even a whole-community

approach. On the basis of her research with a colleague and the research of others, Field offers a number of best practices for anti-bullying campaigns. Among them:

- A comprehensive anti-bullying policy with clear expectations of how students should treat one another
- A student code of conduct that addresses all types of bullying and outlines consequences
- A school counseling program advisory committee that can support and evaluate anti-bullying programming or school climate initiatives
- Vigilant monitoring, a complaint process to report bullying, and teacher, staff and parent training
- Anti-bullying orientations for each class, character education initiatives and bystander training
- Teacher and/or peer mentors for bullied students and anti-bullying classroom guidance lessons

A key component of any bullying prevention program is involving

Coming next month



The instances and impact of bullying do not automatically cease once individuals exit adolescence. Next month, in the second article of our two-part series, *Counseling Today* looks at how bullying can also rear its head on college campuses and in the workplace.

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bystanders in productive ways, Carney says. “Bullying can never truly be eliminated, but by training bystanders, including school personnel — teachers, administrators, custodians, bus drivers — and students, to be better active participants, bullying can be dramatically reduced. Counselors in any setting can assess the community to clarify the particular cultural components that need to be taken into consideration for developing a prevention program; conduct comprehensive assessment to identify problematic components in the community that allow or at least make bullying easier in the environment; and develop an ongoing programmatic approach that can be implemented in the particular community in a manner that has all stakeholders/individuals gaining the skills necessary to move from being a ‘bystander’ to ‘standing by’ and competent to assist any person who is suffering from chronic abuse.”

Successful bullying prevention programs tend to move through a handful of progressive stages, Carney says, including:

- Initial awareness building
- Policy development, in which the most diverse group of school and community participants possible works to create agreed-upon values, rules of behavior, activities and enforcement
- Skill development, where everyone is taught a wide variety of social skills that encourage abusers, targets and bystanders alike to implement the social and behavioral values and policies
- Ongoing action taking, in which time is made available for continuing discussion of climate, problems and necessary actions
- Assessment and adjustment, during which a continual process of evaluation takes place

Field says most schools have yet to involve parents as part of the solution to bullying in schools. She suggests numerous ways that parents can be engaged in the process, including serving on a school counselor program advisory committee, volunteering to monitor areas of the school particularly at risk for bullying behaviors, educating other parents on their rights regarding bullying, serving as guest speakers for classroom

guidance lessons and organizing parent workshops on supporting and empowering students who are bullied.

When counselors are working with the parents of a bullied child, Carney says the goal is to encourage them to believe that their child can develop the skills needed to deal with the abuse on his or her own. “Counselors can work to put the parents in an empowering role with their child,” Carney says. “Often, involved parents of targets end up inadvertently disempowering their child by ‘taking care of the problem as the adult.’ I’ve seen kids become very disempowered, with almost a sense of learned helplessness, thinking that only adults can deal with the ‘powerful’ abuser.”

If parents of a targeted child suspect that a bullying situation is ongoing, Field suggests they request a meeting with a school administrator. She tells parents they should start from a place of collaboration, ask for what they want and know that it is appropriate to discuss a variety of points — including the anti-bullying policy at the school, the specific reporting methods being used, the disciplinary consequences in effect, how areas in the school vulnerable to bullying are supervised, what social and emotional support is available to students, how teachers are trained to address bullying and how parents can get involved in the school’s anti-bullying efforts.

Making a difference

These professionals say school counselors have an important role to play in anti-bullying efforts at every stage of their careers.

Field encourages newer school counselors to work with their administrative teams early on to clearly define the role of the school counselor in bullying incidents. School counselors should emphasize the need for prevention through psychoeducational opportunities, as well as the necessity of both punitive and educational responses, she says.

New counselors must identify bullying for what it is — a chronic form of abuse, Carney says. “Often, beginning professionals identify physical bullying easily and can recognize verbal [bullying] but miss the more insidious, and I’d say impactful, forms of the chronic abuse — emotional, social [and] relational. I’ve done empirical research supporting this

point. New professionals miss these more subtle forms of abuse simply because they are so hard to identify, are difficult to understand with a one-time viewing of the exchanges and really are about identifying the pattern of abuse that’s occurring.”

Field adds that new professionals should always remember that empowering students to make good decisions is essential. “Counselors should be sensitive to the desires of the students who have been bullied and not act without discussing both choices and potential consequences with the victim,” she says. “New counselors may believe they are advocating for the student when they are really making matters worse by acting without consulting with the student.”

“Do not become disheartened if all administrators and teachers do not take this topic seriously,” Field continues. “It is incumbent that the school counselor remain steadfast in helping the adults see how students both experience and are impacted by bullying. Helping the administrators and teachers understand the importance of psychological and emotional safety at school — as well as physical [safety], of course — and how it directly impacts the learning environment is essential.”

When patterns of bullying behavior are noticed, Field challenges more-seasoned school counselors to be brave about also engaging the parents of children who are bullying others. “Research has demonstrated that teachers and parents infrequently talk directly to perpetrators about their behavior,” Field says. “Often the ‘intervention’ is conceptualized as aiding the victim. Take time to join with the parents [of the perpetrator], understand their perspective, express your concerns regarding the student who is perpetrating bullying behavior and emphasize your willingness to collaborate on how to set up new behavioral expectations.”

“Explore and know your community resources,” Field adds. “Who are the community mental health practitioners who are best suited to do therapeutic work with victims, perpetrators, bully/victims and their parents? Know who you are referring students and families to.”

It is also important for counselors to

understand the relationship between students who are identified as having special needs and bullying, Field says. "These students are often the targets of bullying, particularly when a physical or mental challenge is visible," she says. "Collaborate with administrators, teachers, parents and students to promote inclusionary practices schoolwide, respect for diversity and social justice for students who may be vulnerable with their peers."

Carney adds that even experienced counselors may not realize how deeply bystanders and witnesses to bullying are also affected. "We've published findings from several studies that showed bystanders experience physiological and biological reactions very similar to targets," she says. "So, not only do bystanders self-report being distressed in environments where they're exposed to chronic bullying, but their nonsubjective physical reactions support that distress."

Regardless of the efforts counselors undertake, the important thing is simply doing *something* to stand against bullying, these professionals say. "When adults are not vocal or do not intervene in bullying, it sends an unfortunate message that these acts and demeaning victims are OK," Field says. "Such a message compromises the school environment and student engagement and impedes student learning and development. Much of a student's self-worth is sustained by satisfying relationships with peers. Counselors, administrators, teachers and parents must not underestimate the significant short-term and potential long-term psychological and emotional impacts of being bullied or attending a school with a bullying culture."



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