
School Safety

Posted by Kathy - 2007/04/19 01:42

Given the events at Virginia Tech this week and the recent reports regarding how safe students in Tracy Unified feel at school maybe we should open a dialog in this forum on this important subject.

I grew up in a different time, the 60s and 70s. Back then it was almost expected that boys at least those over age 10+/- carried pocket knives, everywhere. Nobody gave it a second thought and rarely were there problems with them at school. They also went hunting usually first honing their skills shooting tin cans with a BB gun.

Were families and children perfect and well behaved back then. No. But this was in a day when parents often spanked their children for doing wrong rather than giving them a time out. Kids knew bad behavior had real consequences in those days even if their parents did not spank them. Mom's were more often than not home rather than at work and parents took a more active roll in their children's day to day activities. Back then Tracy was small enough that if I misbehaved anywhere my parents would probably know about it because many people knew who my parents were and would tell them. Not so today. I sometimes but only rarely felt unsafe at school. I certainly never feared someone would attack me with a knife or gun at school. I know my kids did not feel they had the same level of safety I did at school and they all went to the same high school their father and I attended, Tracy High. More than once they asked to stay home because they felt they would not be safe at school. Many times they expressed a desire to be home schooled.

Many kids today have no fear they will be punished for anything they do wrong or if they are punished it will be of little consequence. Even suspension from school means little to them except a few days cooling their heals at home watching TV and playing games while mom and dad are at work. In other words 8-12 hours of solitude to do exactly as they please. That is not a punishment.

The school district's report says the children of Tracy do not feel safe. Maybe they should go back through the years and look at these reports and analyze them to try to figure out what has changed. They should listen to the kids because it is the kids who are most affected. Form a committee on each campus taking students from every ethnicity, every religion, every social circle, including those who are popular and those who may feel left out. Find out what is in their heads, what is going on and why they and their peers do not feel safe. Include the school's security personnel, in fact let them choose the kids for this committee. Also include administrators and the superintendent. Have open roundtable discussions and just let these kids open up and let it out. It may be an eye opening experience.

America's schools need to be safe places for children to learn. America's children want them to be safe places. There has to be a way to give these kids what they need and want. Smaller campuses may be the answer to both a real and a perceived sense of security. Better to find out now before Tracy Unified wastes money building another mega high school like West High, where so many kids do not feel safe.

I know Tracy school district's security personnel do an amazing job trying to keep the schools safe. They work very hard to develop relationships with the kids which helps them to do their job more easily and helps some students sense of security. However they are seriously outnumbered. Should there ever be a major incident such as the mass fighting that happened one day when I was a student at Tracy High they would not be able to contain the situation without police assistance. If a shooting happened I hate to think what the outcome might be. Let's hope none of us ever see that day.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by Doe - 2007/04/22 01:59

Bullying:, torment, torture, harassment, teasing. Call it whatever you like it hurts. It does permanent damage. To self esteem. To the physical body. To grades. It diminishes not only ones sense of self but even ones desire to live. It breeds hatred for oneself and for ones tormentor and those like or associating with the tormentor. It isolates children.

Many excuse the teasing by saying things like: "Boys will be boys." "Kids are cruel." "Ignore it and they will leave you alone." "Just deal with it." I have heard all of these excuses, these write-offs, and more.

Like many kids I spent nearly all of my childhood being teased, tormented and excluded, at school, in service & social clubs, on sports teams, at church, at home, in family gatherings. Literally everywhere. There was no place I was safe from it. I was a normal child until about age six or seven when I gained weight after a tough recovery from otherwise minor surgery, common for many children at the time. Then I apparently in the eyes of nearly everyone became some abnormal abomination that everyone had a right to attack in one way or another. My comfort was food which only caused me to gain more weight which led to more teasing.

As I grew older I matured earlier than other girls my age. This apparently made me sexually interesting. I was sexually molested several times by several different people, including a family member. I told no one. Not until many years later after my parents had died. Why? Because I didn't think anybody would believe me and because I felt my life was valued very little, even by the person I should have trusted most, my own mother. You see one of my molesters was her favorite person. She would have believed anything he said over me and I knew it. So any safety net I might ever have had no longer existed. If I told anyone else my family would have been torn apart and I feared where I, who was of little value, of little importance would end up. So I kept silent. I was the good daughter. I did what I was told, minded my manners, and tried to do as good as I could in school. In high school I joined clubs and participated in sports. The teasing had not really stopped but most people paid me little mind by that point. I had a few friends but was certainly not in the A or B list crowds. In other words I was surviving, and well behaved enough to not be noticed, to not raise any red flags. I never

once dated a boy I went to high school with. Oh some of them would talk to me but date me....never. I dated out of town boys and eventually an older local boy whom I married young. We will stay married because I have no other options. Since I married young and was a stay at home mom I never earned a college degree so I have little to offer an employer. My husband is not a bad person but if I had it to do over I would not choose him. So I live my life under the radar. I am by all appearances the good daughter, wife, mother, sister, aunt, niece, cousin. I don't make waves and everyone believes I am for the most part happy. But I am not. I am a woman angry at the way I was treated as a child. I am angry at how all of my tormentors got away with making me feel like nothing. I am angry that I still have to put up with some of them and keep quiet about them because only one person in the world, my husband, knows and believes me about the abuse. I am a woman who would love to just beat the crap out of every single person who has ever caused me that kind of pain. I am a woman sick of other adults discriminating against me because of my obesity just because they can get away with it. I am a woman who is now severely obese and has medical problems related to the obesity. Sure I could diet and exercise. I am not stupid. I have just been there and done that for years with no long term success. I understand the Seung-Hui Cho's of the world better than I would like to. He was not willing to live a life of quiet desperation like so many of us teased and tormented as children do. I understand the fat kid on the living room floor playing video games at home, the one who is fat and never goes out to play with other kids because he has few if any friends. I understand the teenagers who barely talk. Pain has many faces and you can find it in probably any classroom you walk into. We as a society have to begin trying to be better than this. We cannot tolerate the teasing and tormenting if our schools and workplaces are going to be safe.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by DrMikeM - 2007/04/22 05:02

Doe:

What a powerful and striking story. Thank you for the courage to share it with us all. It is something every teenager should read. Under your words of pain are some amazing wisdom and insight. Thank you.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by TK25 - 2007/04/22 09:17

In my opinion, the incidents at V.T are proof that you should NEVER EVER pick on someone because of their race, color, accent, and disability. Whatever happened to every human being "Equal"? I mean just because someone's "shy and quiet" does that give you the right to bully him and push that person down to the ground? And just because a person can't speak "perfect" English due to his accent does that mean you're gonna tell him to "go back to China" and laugh at him in front everyone in class? Did the people who picked on him ever realize that they were hurting him? Did they ever realize that they're cruel yet harsh actions could have triggered him to do something like what he did in the first place? I think not. People need to treat each other EQUALLY and not bully one person because of his or her accent or because of his or her color or because of a disability that they happen to have. People need to THINK before they say or do such things and it's obvious to me that the people who picked on this man in middle school and in high school didn't even bother to do so in the first place.

I remember back in South Elementary I met a fellow fifth grader who happened to be in a wheel chair. When I first met him, I didn't know him. But I could called him a "cripple" or a "retard"(as people these days would refer to people like him which is sad) but I didn't. Instead, I offered to help him in a lot of things at school and I offered him my friendship. And during that year, I leaned a lot from him and I ended up being a friend for life to him as he had told me during recess and THAT right there meant a lot to me.

So don't ever pick on someone because of the race, the color, the accent, or a disability because you may end up provoking a person to commit something similar if not worst than what happened at V.T

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Re:School Safety

Posted by TK25 - 2007/04/22 09:17

Sorry for the double post... my browser is not at it's best right now.

Post edited by: TK25, at: 2007/04/22 10:24

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Re:School Safety

Posted by Kathy - 2007/04/23 13:49

"I was the good daughter. I did what I was told, minded my manners, and tried to do as good as I could in school. In high school I joined clubs and participated in sports. The teasing had not really stopped but most people paid me little mind by that point. I had a few friends but was certainly not in the A or B list crowds. In other words I was surviving, and well behaved enough to not be noticed, to not raise any red flags."

Thanks Doe for shaeing your story. The words I quoted above just help to prove that even the kids who seem okay may be hiding a lot of pain.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by bc76 - 2007/04/25 22:27

gosh, i dont really know how to go about this. i want to separate what i am going to say with what DOE said; i do not want to disrespect her at all.

that being said...bullying will never stop. in an ideal world, everyone is equal and 12 year olds act like mature adults. however, we are not living in an ideal world. my nephew was horsing around with his cousin the other day, him being 15, her being 9. he accidentally knocked out her tooth (which was already loose). she is screaming bloody murder, he is laughing hysterically. i had to yell at him to stop laughing at her and he didnt know what to do, he couldnt help it. he is immature, as are most kids his age. there are laws protecting those under 18 for the sole reason that they are not able to comprehend what a rational adult is supposed to. soooo, why should we expect kids to be mature enough to understand the long term effects of bullying? parents and adults can only talk to their kids and try to explain the rights and wrongs of the world. as for the ones being bullied, if they are not able to talk with their parents or other authority figures, i suspect that there are more problems in their life other than being bullied. i know that a lot of kids are not strong enough to go forth and protect themselves, like i said, they are immature. the only good end to this as far as i can tell is that parents need to communicate more effectively with their children. as for the VT shooter, i read an article where his grandfather stated he was diagnosed as autistic. while he was bullied, like DOE, bullying was not the only contributing factor to his anger.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by Kathy - 2007/04/26 23:37

bc76 - You are right parents can only talk to their children and try to educate them about the harm teasing and bullying causes. Parents sadly are the ones who first need to be educated because children tend to learn their behavior from their parents. They learn racism from them also as was pointed out in another fourm thread. Just today I had to get onto a neighbor child for animal cruelty and was yelled at by his grandmother who gave him the BB gun in question for stopping him from shooting at a young rabbit with it. She said he didn't know nothing about animal cruelty because he was too young to know. Bull! At 9 years old he is plenty old enough to know hurting an animal is cruel and if he does not know then it is long past time he was taught and I told her so. No child should be given a BB gun if they do not understand that and even if they do they should not be using it unsupervised as he was.

Bottom line any form of cruelty be it physical or emotional is wrong. Children have to be taught this by their parents or guardians and if they cannot be responsible enough to do so then maybe we need to reopen the debate about schools having classes on morals and values. I don't feel our schools should do the parenting in our society but if the parents will not then somebody has to or we will continue to see more young people harming others as the young man in Virginia did so recently. Maybe we need a dual class for parents and their children that both must attend if their children are teasing, bullying, harrassing or abusing others. A sort of three stikes and they have to go rule. Maybe if they are caught early enough we can begin to undo the harm such behavior is causing our society.

We may not be able to change everyone into decent human beings but we have to start trying. We have to try to make our world a better place. We have to evolve beyond our more animalistic behaviors if we can.

As you said Cho's problem was not only the bullying. Obviously he had other underlying problems. Many who are teased

do have underlying problems of some sort. That is usually why they are teased, because they are different in some way. Knowing something of the Korean culture I feel badly for his family, they probably did the best they could. In a perfect world had he not been teased maybe he would have led a quiet life and he and all of his victims would have died of old age.

Post edited by: Kathy, at: 2007/04/27 00:40

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Re:School Safety

Posted by bc76 - 2007/04/27 16:49

kathy...well said. can you imagine how it would be if parents were held responsible for everything their kids did? for example...kid acts up at school, say a fight, the parent would then have to attend a class or pay a fine. i grew up on a military base and the officials there made it clear that if your kids act up, the parent will be held responsible. after so many instances, the family would have to move off of the base. sounds like a good plan for tracy.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by Kathy - 2007/05/02 19:32

My brother was in the military so I do remember him mentioning those rules. Actually as parents we are responsible for what our children do. The problem is too often parents are not held responsible for their children's actions by whatever entity is in charge, such as a school. When this happens over and over situations can and will get out of hand.

In thinking of the issue of teasing I'm reminded of that song sung by Mark Wills and also Brad Paisley and written by Allen Shamblin & Steve Seskin, called "Don't Laugh at Me." The lyrics are so powerful. I cried the first time I heard it.

Below is just part of the song:

I'm a little boy with glasses, the one they call a geek
a little girl who never smiles cuz I got braces on my teeth
and I know how it feels to cry myself to sleep

Don't laugh at me, don't call me names
Don't get your pleasure from my pain
In God's eyes we're all the same
some day we'll all have perfect Wings
Don't laugh at me

Post edited by: Kathy, at: 2007/05/02 20:34

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Re:School Safety

Posted by RobT - 2007/07/14 17:09

The schools can only do so much. I think the parents are the only ones who can stop there kids from being punks.If a child is suspended for graffiti or vandalism have the parent or parents help clean up befor the kid is let back into school. If a kid is being a bully, make the parents be there when he or she has to apologise befor going back to school. Maybe we need to start thinking more about the rights of the victim than the little punks.

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Re:School Safety

Posted by GTkitkats - 2008/08/04 18:46

lulz

