The recent suicide of two teen girls in Minnesota has brought more attention to bullying in schools as well as cyberbullying on the Internet. In the April edition of the NAD Adventist World, NAD vice president for education, Larry Blackmer, wrote an article called "The 'Art' of Bullying." In the article, Blackmer shares the long-term effects of bullying and warning signs to look out for if your child is being bullied. Click here to check out the article on pages 34-37.
I remember it clearly: The fear of walking to the bus stop, having my lunch money forcefully taken, being tripped in class, and being punched until my nose bled. It was a daily nightmare.

The common denominator in this habitual stream of events was Art. Art was a year older than I was and lived near me. It seemed as if his life revolved around making my life miserable—and my life revolved around avoiding Art. I would walk blocks out of my way in order not to pass his house, and rush to be the first person out of the classroom so I could arrive in my next class with the teacher before he got there.

All this took place when I was in fourth grade. Even now, some 45 years later and hundreds of miles from my hometown, I can still visualize that bus stop and Art’s face; I can still feel that fear. It will always be a part of my life that I will look back upon with pain.

Sometime during our high school years together, Art apologized to me and told me how much he regretted those activities. He said he had come to hate who he had become and decided he wanted something better for his future than becoming a perpetual bully. His attitude toward life and other people changed, and he grew into a kind, caring person. We became friends. Not every story like this has a happy ending, however.

Bullying has made headlines recently. We’ve heard about bullying in the classroom, on the playground, and on the Internet that had devastating results. Some young adults felt so demoralized by the callous treatment from others that they saw no way out of the situation but to take their own lives. We shake our heads in disbelief and say a heartfelt prayer for the families involved, but let’s not fool ourselves: bullying happens not only in public schools but in Seventh-day Adventist and other Christian schools as well.

**Bullying Hurts Everyone**

Bullying hurts everyone involved and can have long-term effects. Statistics indicate that children who are bullied have a much greater risk of becoming violent themselves, and children who see violence in the home are more likely to bully others. Everyone—parents, teachers, and students—must work together to stop this growing epidemic.

The increase of social media and almost universal access to e-mail, texting, twitter, and other electronic media have led to cyberbullying. This makes it easier to victimize someone, because you can do it without having to look that person in the eye or immediately see the damage being done.

Age does not discriminate when it comes to bullying. We have become a society—and in some circumstances a church—that often loses sight of civility. It’s easy to use the Internet, Web sites, and blogs to take sides on all sorts of issues and to “destroy” one another in the name of being “right.” The opposite of bullying is civility; when civility is absent, bullying naturally occurs.

Bullying comes in many forms. Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, or damaging someone else’s property. Verbal bullying can include name-calling, teasing, racist remarks, threats, and intimidation—even gossip is a form of bullying. Children and youth use bullying to destroy and manipulate relationships, damage someone’s reputation, intimidate, humiliate, embarrass, or exclude someone. The rise of digital communication has seen an increase in negative text messages, e-mails, voice mails, and Internet messages.

**Long-Term Effects**

A growing number of children and youth participate in bullying, and even encourage bullies to victimize others. The results of this can be devastating. Bullying:

- results in lawsuits and criminal cases.
- creates a fearful school climate.
- causes students to worry that they may become victims. Twenty percent of students are scared throughout much of the school day.
- results in a child’s lack of trust in oneself to cope appro-
By Larry Blackmer

Warning Signs of a Child Being Bullied

- Sudden decrease in school attendance; skipping of certain classes
- Decline in quality of academic performance
- Sudden lack of interest in school-sponsored activities and events
- Seems happy on weekends but unhappy and preoccupied or tense on Sundays
- Frequent illness or faked illness
- Comes home with unexplainable scratches and bruises
- Angry, irritable, disruptive, aggressive, and quick-tempered
- Cautious, clingy, nervous, anxious, worried, fearful, and insecure
- Frequently asks for extra money, saying it's for lunch or school supplies
- Sudden change in behavior (bed-wetting, nail-biting)

What Can We Do?

If your child is a victim of bullying, it is vital to be supportive of them. The following suggestions will help you to know how to deal with the situation effectively:
- **Take the problem to God.** Help your child to realize that God cares about them and the hurt they’re experiencing, and that He is always there to guide us through these issues.
- **Never tell your child to ignore the bullying.** What the child may “hear” is that you are going to ignore it. If the child were able to simply ignore it, they likely would not have told you about it. Trying to ignore bullying often allows it to become more serious.
- **Don’t blame the child who is being bullied.** Don’t ask, “What did you do to aggravate the other child?”
- **Listen carefully to what your child tells you about the**
bullying. Ask them to describe who was involved and how and where each bullying episode happened. Ask your child if they can name other children or adults who may have witnessed the bullying.

- **Empathize with your child.** Tell them that bullying is wrong, that it’s not their fault, and that you are glad that they had the courage to tell you about it.
- **Don’t encourage physical retaliation as a solution.** Hitting another student is not likely to end the problem, and it could escalate the situation or get your child suspended or expelled from school.
- **Check your own emotions.** A parent’s protective instincts stir strong emotions. Although it’s difficult, a parent is wise to step back and consider the next steps carefully.
- **Contact your child’s teacher or principal.** Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the help of adults. Give factual information to school officials about your child’s experience of being bullied, including who, what, when, where, and how. Emphasize that you want to work with the staff at school to find a solution. This provides an opportunity for school officials to encourage parents of those doing the bullying to find help for their child as well.
- **Do not contact the parents of the student or students who bullied your child;** it can make matters worse. School officials should contact the parents of the child or children who did the bullying.

**Increase Resilience**

Until the bullying issue can be resolved, attempt to increase your child’s resilience to bullying. Develop the talents and positive attributes of your child. Suggest and facilitate music, athletics, and art activities. This may help your child to become more confident among their peers. Other ways to increase resilience include:

- **Encouraging your child to make contact with friendly students in their class.** Your child’s teacher may be able to suggest students with whom your child can make friends, spend time, or collaborate on work.
- **Helping your child meet new friends outside of the school environment.** A new environment can provide a “fresh start” for a child who has been bullied repeatedly.

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Teaching your child safety strategies, such as seeking help from an adult when feeling threatened by a bully. Talk about whom they should go to for help, and assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.

Asking yourself if your child is being bullied because of a learning difficulty or a lack of social skills. If your child is hyperactive, impulsive, or overly talkative, the child who bullies may be reacting out of annoyance. This doesn’t make the bullying right, but it may help to explain why your child is being bullied. If you believe this might be the case, seek help from a counselor so that your child can better learn the informal social rules of its peer group.

Making sure your child has a safe and loving home environment where they can find shelter both physically and emotionally. Always maintain open lines of communication with your child.

Bullying is a destructive behavior that can be difficult to change, but when we put our trust in God and work together as a parent-teacher-student team, we can make a difference.

*not his real name

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**Warning Signs That a Child Might be Bullying Someone**

- Enjoys feeling powerful and in control
- Seeks to dominate or manipulate others
- May be popular with other students who envy their power
- Exhibits low tolerance of frustration
- Seems willing to use and abuse other people to get what they want
- Defends their negative actions by insisting that others “deserve it,” “asked for it,” or “provoked it”; often describes a conflict as someone else’s “fault”
- Is more likely to get into trouble, smoke, drink, and fight
- Exhibits little or no emotion when talking about his or her part in a conflict
- Is generally defiant or oppositional toward adults
- Has difficulty fitting into groups; may experience loneliness

(http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing)

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