



# Reaching Out

Norristown Area Communities That Care for Youth

Keeping Youth Safe & Drug Free

Winter 2010



## Spotlight on Teen Drinking

### What is BMI?

Brief Motivational Interviewing (BMI) is a client-centered counseling model that has been proven effective in dealing with the issue of underage drinking. CTC is working closely with district justices to make BMI an option for first time underage drinking offenders. It will be an alternative to traditional penalties when the district justice feels it is appropriate.

The goal of these sessions is to identify and resolve discrepancies between current behavior and broader values and goals. It is a widely held belief that youth are more likely to change their drinking behaviors with this intervention and not suffer the harm associated with the traditional penalties, such as outstanding warrants for unpaid fines and limitations on their ability to attend certain colleges or enter certain professions.

## NASD Schools Take Bullying Prevention Very Seriously

By Diane Vella, MA, Certified Trainer, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

Everyone is aware of the potential violent consequences that unchecked bullying can have on students—April 20, 1999, in the suburban town of Littleton, Colorado, the Columbine High School massacre and the suicides of two middle school students who had been bullied. Most recently, Oprah had a show about bullying in May 2009.

Did you know that up to 60 percent of Norristown Area School District (NASD) truant children named being bullied as one of the reasons they do not want to go to school? NASD grades 4-8 (the ages of greatest bullying) have completed the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program questionnaire to assess the extent of the problem in Norristown.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, founded by Dan Olweus, Ph.D., is the most researched and best known bullying prevention program available today and has been proven to reduce bullying in schools by 50 percent. The NASD recently passed a district-wide bullying policy as mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Norristown is ahead of the curve



by completing the assessment questionnaires in all elementary schools in the spring of 2008. The three middle schools completed the questionnaires in the spring of 2009. The surveys were completed by students so that we can get a clear picture of the bullying problem in NASD. We have reliable information on the differences between how boys and girls participate in bullying, as well as the rates of bullying that is racial, gender or sexual orientation based and where the bullying is taking place.

Olweus has been named a Blueprint National Model Program from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence and has been recently endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

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## The Eye of the Bully

By Oglatha S. P. Ingram, Parent Outreach Specialist

We generally look at the bully as the one who should be avoided. But how does the bully view themselves? Let's take a fictitious look at the self-reflection of a reformed bully.

### Dear Community Friends,

I am a math teacher at a local public school who just left a Bullying Prevention Training meeting. It was at this meeting that I revealed that about 22 years ago, I was a bully.

My father was a truck driver and away often. My mom was unavailable; she was either sleeping or at work. I was left to mind my younger brother. I didn't like taking care of him. One time I poured cold water on him while he was asleep and dared him to tell. I took that same aggressive spirit to school—pushing kids out of lunch lines, making the smart kids do my homework. My dastardly deeds would be done without a teacher watching. So when a kid "told on me," it was the abused child's word against mine. At 12 years of age, I felt superior.

I wasn't an insecure pre-teen. I had o.k. grades and a family who cared about me. The problem was my controlling spirit and my aggressive urges were powerful. But it took a strong determined parent to start the change in me—Pinkney Brown's mother.

Pinkney Brown was a fourth grade nerd. He studied constantly and did not socialize with his classmates. The last time I bullied him, he told on me! Pinkney's mother demanded a conference with my mother and the principal. What followed that conference were two life-changing decisions: an ultimatum and an intervention plan with the school social worker.

The key to my changed behavior was not just a "no nonsense" principal who gave me an ultimatum or an understanding social worker, it was Pinkney's mom who cared enough about her son to address and resolve my abusive actions.

We must understand that not all bullies are insecure, nor are they coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. A bully could look like me or you with varying histories. Research shows that bullies have an uncertain future. They may become high school drop-outs, develop criminal records and may experience jail time. Help for the bully starts with a supportive family who is emotionally and physically available and supplemented with loving, strong discipline at school and in their community.

As coordinator of the Bullying Prevention Program, I want to redirect the negative energy of the potential bully and create a safe school environment. "No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should worry about such things happening to his or her child!" (Quote taken from *Bullying at School* by Dan Olweus.)

Fondly,  
A reformed bully

# Is the Internet the New Playground for Bullying?

By Cassandra M. Iannetta, Life Skills Training Facilitator

Big and tough, stealing lunch money, or stuffing kids in the trashcan. We all know *that* kid. Or the “mean girl” who spreads rumors or makes fun of other people’s clothes. Yeah, we all know *that* girl.

Those are common profiles or perceptions of a bully. However, the times have changed and while the classic bully still roams the halls, a new bully has emerged. You probably



know this kid too—it’s the lively student in school who owns a cell phone or has access to the Internet. Bullying has taken a new form; a form where it is anonymous and can be done at anytime of the day.

This new threat—the **cyber bully**—uses the Internet, cell phones or other technology to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person. The idea that bullying now can be so anonymous makes it easier for the student who is too shy to stand up for themselves able to wreak emotional pain on others without being caught or the bullying to be reciprocated.

Some teenagers say that they are not bothered when they receive a nasty text message or threat through the Internet, but the research shows that many teenagers are hurt deeply by

these incidents and don’t know how to stop them. School shootings, teen suicides, and physical fights are only a few ways that some students chose to handle the bullying.

Both traditional bullying and now cyber bullying have proven to have negatives effects on a child’s life. As parents it is important to be able to communicate with your children to help prevent this from happening to them.

## **Tips to use when helping your child deal with cyber bullying:**

- **Set rules for Internet use and cell phone use. For example, set time limits on computer use allowing them only to use the Internet for 1 – 2 hours per day.**
- **Place your home computer in a central location, such as the kitchen or living room.**
- **Talk to your child about cyber bullying.**
- **Save the evidence by keeping copies of messages and web in any cyber bullying incident that they have been a part of.**

## **Warning signs that your child may be a victim of cyber bullying:**

- **Child is visibly upset or angry after Internet use or cell phone use.**
- **Withdrawal from friends or activities.**
- **Drop in academic performance.**
- **School avoidance.**
- **Child appears depressed or sad.**

Every child will deal with some type of cyber bullying. Why is this? Since most children own cell phones with Internet access, most of them have access to the Internet from home, from school, or a friend’s house. As parents, it is important to become educated and aware of this new threat because it may prevent your child from becoming a victim of cyber bullying or even becoming a bully themselves.



**Who can find the time to keep up with their kids lives?**

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**Communities That Care (CTC)** is a risk-focused approach to reducing adolescent problem behaviors through community mobilization and planning. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and enhance the protective factors that can shield youngsters from problems. The risk and protective factors are used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of the problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions.

For more information, visit our website at [www.NorristownCTC.org](http://www.NorristownCTC.org).

## Norristown Schools Take Bullying Prevention Very Seriously

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Whitehall and Cole Manor Elementary Schools were trained and are the first to implement the Olweus Bullying Prevention school-wide model. Several other elementary schools are looking into starting an Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in the future.

What makes Olweus so successful is it not only stops the bullying on the spot and supports the victim, it empowers the bystanders to intervene. The bystanders are by far the majority of students. By empowering the greatest number of students, you not only greatly reduce bullying you also improve the atmosphere of the classroom and increase student satisfaction with school life. Bullying happens when kids don't have the eyes of adults on them, so kids must be empowered if an impact is to be made.

According to the new policy, bullying and any other type of abuse, like name calling, physical attacks, cyber attacks, rumor spreading and

*Bullying in schools will be solved if parents, teachers, and students work in partnership with the community to find solutions.*

leaving kids out, will not be tolerated in the NASD, and exemplary programs like Olweus can provide the tools to make all Norristown schools safe. What is so interesting about the survey results is we now know where, when, how, and what kind of bullying happens in the NASD. We also know what areas are above the national average bullying rates, so we know where to concentrate our efforts. Note: There are areas where NASD is well below national average bullying rates as well!

If your child is being bullied, take it seriously. Listen and be supportive. Reassure them it is not their fault and contact your child's school. Do not call or contact the bully or their family. If you think your child is bullying, stay calm. Don't minimize their behavior. Explore why your child is behaving this way.

Teach your child to put themselves in the bullied student's shoes. Contact your child's school for help.

If you would like more information on what to do if your child is being bullied or you think your child is a bully, contact Diane Vella at Family Services at [dvella@fsmontco.org](mailto:dvella@fsmontco.org) or 610-630-2111 ext. 244.