Bullying and Suicide: Cutting through the Hype to Keep Youth Safe

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Teen's suicide raises long-standing concerns about cyber-bullying

April 17, 2012 | By Yvonne Wenger, The Baltimore Sun

The Easter Sunday suicide of a Glenelg High School teen has raised long-standing concerns about cyber-bullying, as parents and teachers call on Howard County schools to do more to boost awareness and prevention.

Chaun Hightower, president of the Howard County Council of PTAs, said she doesn't know enough about the circumstances surrounding 15-year-old Grace McComas' death to discuss it. But she believes cyber-bullying is a pervasive issue and that the district's policy could be strengthened.

Gay Iowa Teen Takes Own Life After Bullying

by Julie Sciver

Kenneth Weishuhn, a high school freshman in Paullina, Iowa, took his own life Saturday after being bullied by classmates at school and online, and with death threats by phone.

KTVI reports on the death of Weishuhn, who was 14 and attended South O'Brien High School in O'Brien County. His sister Kayla said that friends at the school "turned on him" after he told them he was gay last month, and boys in her sophomore class started the bullying.

"She says they took their teases online, to websites like Facebook, creating a hate group against gays and adding Kenneth's friends as members," according to KTVI. "However, it was only the beginning, family say he started receiving death threats from South O'Brien.

Family: Bullying by 'wolf pack' led to Texas teen's suicide

Flour Bluff High School student, 16, faces bullying from 6th grade boys

A year after the Flour Bluff Independent School District received national attention for refusing to allow students to form a Gay Straight Alliance, the district is accused of not handling bullying that led to a former student's suicide on Sunday.

Ted Molina, 16, faced bullying since fifth grade from a group of boys who used racial epithets and threatened to hurt him. Molina's mother is Asian. The family blames the school district for not handling the bullying properly, his aunt said.

Molina played football in middle school, but quit his freshman year hoping the taunting would stop. When it continued, he withdrew from Flour Bluff High School on March 5. While he seemed to improve, he posted several grim photos of himself on Facebook hours before he killed himself.

The family claims he told his father, "It's better this way," on Facebook hours before he killed himself.
U.S. Suicide Death Rates By Year/Age

Source: CDC WISQARS Fatal Injuries Report, 1999-2009
What causes suicide?

Main Risk Factors
- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Substance abuse
- Mood disorders
- Access to lethal means

Main Protective Factors
- Effective mental health care
- Connectedness
- Problem-solving skills
- Contacts with caregivers

Precipitating Events
Bullying among Youth

Percentage of High School Students Bullied on School Property – Last 12 Months (2009)

Source: CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – 2009 (MMWR June 2010)
What are the risk factors for bullying?

**Bullies**
- Impulsivity/aggressiveness
- Harsh parenting
- Acceptance of violence

**Victims**
- Friendship difficulties
- Poor self-esteem
- Quiet, passive manner

- Family
- School Environment
Bullying and Suicide

- Bullies and victims at higher risk for suicide
- Gender differences
- Higher risk in LGBT youth
- Long-term impact on mental health
What can be done?

Bullying and Suicide Prevention share:

- Focus on the School Environment
- Family outreach
- Identification of students in need of help
- Strengthening coping strategies/connectedness
Does the media story matter?

Parents Of Gay Teen Say School Bullying Caused Suicide

What narratives are vulnerable youth hearing in the media?

Texas Teen’s Suicide Blamed on ‘Wolf Pack’ Bullies

The Real Threat of Bullycide

Teen Commits Suicide Due to Bullying: Parents Sue School for Son’s Death

Phoebe Prince “Suicide by Bullying”

Another Teen Suicide Due To Bullying

10-year-old Commits Suicide Because of Bullying
Changing the Narrative

- Respect media priorities
- Engage the media proactively with positive stories
- Spread good stories
- Be aware of impact our own efforts may have
Back to Porter: How a Toronto high school fights bullying without bullying — using restorative talking, not discipline and suspensions

April 23, 2012

Catherine Porter

A week ago, two friends at Weston Collegiate Institute had an argument.

One was a slip of a boy in Grade 9, his plaid shirt buttoned right to the Adam’s apple. The other was an 18-year-old giant — literally 6-foot-8 — with ear buds and a hoodie.

You know who won.

A few days later, the two sat in the school’s salmon-coloured “Focus on Success” centre (called the detention room in my day) in a small circle of blue chairs with their moms, the school principal and two student facilitators. They’d come to make amends.

“I told him to stop the joke. I didn’t like it. I’m a big gentleman,” said the giant. “I was immature. My first policy is no violence.”

Students At Mankato East Emphasize Respect at School Assembly

Bullying: Teens take the lead as anti-bullying mentors.

Bullying prevention starts with teens, and in communities around the country they are taking the lead as anti-bullying leaders, teen suicides have been linked to bullying.
References

Thank you!

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