



Defeating the Dangers of Bullying Through Building Peace

*Written by Michelle Molina
October 12, 2010*

<http://www.publicceo.com/index.php/local-governments/151-local-governments-publicceo-exclusive/2162-defeating-the-dangers-of-bullying-through-building-peace>

As a former teacher and school administrator, the beginning of a new school year is one of the most exciting times I can imagine.

All across the nation and here in California, parents send their children off to school with both hope and anxiety. They hope that they will be in a safe learning environment; but they're anxious that something beyond their control might happen to their child.

For our children, school days should be a time of exploring, nurturing, learning, making new friends and preparing themselves to take their place in society.

Unfortunately for many children, school can become a nightmarish place where bullies taunt them, verbally and sometimes physically, making their school experience miserable. The bullying has even taken on a more sinister form, as the tormentors use the internet to spread vicious lies about their victims.

In some extreme cases, youngsters who have been bullied and feeling they have nowhere to turn and have run out of options, have taken their own lives. There is no word strong enough to describe these tragedies.

Bullying is not something new to this generation. Most of us can remember people who were either bullies or victims in school. Some of us can remember being a bully's target.

In days gone by, children were told that they must stand up to the bully no matter what the consequences. Standing up to bullies was considered part of growing up and learning to cope in the world.

But bullying is no longer limited to that one schoolyard thug who stole your lunch money. Groups of kids now gang up and prey on their victims.

Some chilling statistics tell the story.

- Every 7 minutes a child is bullied on a schoolyard.
- Statistics show that 77% of students are bullied mentally, verbally or physically.
- Adult intervention only happens in 4% of the cases and peer intervention only 11%.
- And a disturbing 85% of cases, there is no intervention by anyone.



A recent victim of the bullying epidemic was Seth Walsh, a 13-year-old middle school student. Seth endured taunting and bullying for years, until he died in the hospital days after he attempted to take his own life.

Bullying will never be stopped if we approach the problem by just focusing on the bullies. That is akin to treating the symptoms and not the disease.

Enter **PeaceBuilders**.

I first became aware of **PeaceBuilders** when I was teaching middle school in the Paramount Unified School District in Los Angeles.

Through coaching and discussion, **PeaceBuilders** works with educators and parents to implement a research-validated violence prevention and character education program for kids.

It is dedicated to creating a positive environment, free from bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviors that are all too common in our schools today.

However, children's success or failure in school depends not only on creating, but maintaining, a positive environment where the students can learn and the teachers can teach. It must become part of the daily routine for all - teachers, students and parents.

PeaceBuilders identifies specific risk factors that can lead to bullying and manages them with simple techniques. In all settings, the program creates a peaceful environment by increasing positive, respectful, thoughtful behavior while decreasing violence and disruptive behaviors.

One of the most important aspects of the program is character education. A child's development and education is about more than just what they learn from books, tests or in any one subject.

It is equally important to teach them the life lessons that will help them become responsible adults so they will know what kind of behaviors society expects of them. That is how we build character.

Bullying usually happens in the shadows when there are no adults around. Whether on the playground during school hours, at the Mall on weekends or in a darkened room where the cyber bully's weapon of choice is the internet; both predators and their victims try to keep bullying away from the prying eyes of parents or teachers.

By the time the adults become aware of what is happening, the damage has already been done.

We need to teach our children that character is not just behaving when the adults are present. Children need to know that character is how you act when no one is looking.

But children do not come into this world fully formed with a "character" gene that kicks in at a certain age and lets them know the differences between anti-social or pro-social behaviors. And children are not capable of building character on their own.

That is the job of those who have the opportunity to influence their behavior the most - their parents and their teachers.

Just as we give them the skills to learn arithmetic or spelling, we need to give them the skills to learn what is acceptable behavior in society and what is not. They have to be helped to understand what society expects of them as they mature into adults.

In 2003, my husband and I purchased the rights to the **PeaceBuilders** program. I gave up formal classroom teaching to instruct others - teachers, parents, and students - this new way to deal with the problems of bullying and violence in our schools.

PeaceBuilders works: 94 percent of teachers surveyed perceived that **PeaceBuilders** decreased the level of school violence, and the same number reported an increase in pro-social interactions among children. We have seen suspension rates decrease and API scores increase in schools that have implemented the **PeaceBuilders** program.

It is our hope that we can bring the **PeaceBuilders** program to schools all across America. If teachers, parents, and school boards adopt the **PeaceBuilders** protocols, they can create and maintain healthy, fun and nurturing environments for children to build their minds, build their bodies and build their character.

No child should wake up in the morning frightened to go to school for fear they will be accosted, harassed, or physically or verbally abused by bullies.

We at **PeaceBuilders** want them to awaken each day without that fear, knowing they will be in a safe environment so they can learn, play and grow.

Michelle Molina is a former teacher, school administrator and has been the Chief Executive Officer and Owner of PeaceBuilders since 2003.