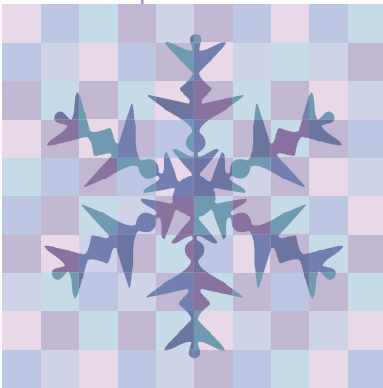


F O C U S

WISDOM: THE FREE, ETERNAL SOLUTION TO BULLYING



Hardly a week goes by before we learn of another tragic case of a child committing suicide because he/she couldn't tolerate being bullied. And the public's response is always the same: we need to pass tougher anti-bullying laws. Haven't we noticed that children continue suffering despite thirteen years of anti-bullying warfare ignited by the Columbine shooting? Year after year children are bombarded with anti-bullying programs, lessons, posters, movies, books, songs, and bracelets. They have signed pledges stating they won't engage in bullying and will stand up for victims. They have been informed of the punishments they will receive if they violate anti-bullying policies. They have heard their favorite celebrities rally against bullying. Yet bullying continues. The Obama administration declared it to be a pandemic. The great irony is that the solution is simple and has been known for thousands of years. The solution is not government but wisdom. It is about knowing how to be a victor rather than a victim. When kids acquire this simple wisdom, no one can bully them and any thoughts of committing violence against themselves or others evapo-

rates. Shouldn't social scientists be considering the possibility that the endless barrage of anti-bullying messages may be making children even more vulnerable and desperate? How should bullied kids feel when they are constantly exposed to the lie of "Bully-Free Zone" posters in school corridors? How can they let insults slide off their backs when the adult authorities teach them that "the sticks and stones slogan is a lie" and "words can scar them forever"? How can they feel empowered when they are informed that they are powerless to handle bullying on their own and need the help of everyone around them? How should they feel when they follow the instructions to inform adults on bullies only to find the hostilities against them intensifying and their peers calling them "snitches"? How can they be optimistic when celebrities declare, "It gets better," but meanwhile it's only getting worse? Is it any wonder that children despair and take their own lives in growing numbers? Why is the world's crusade to eradicate bullying failing? It's because it was spawned by panic, and panic diminishes rational thinking. As 9-11 reminded us, panic causes citizens to willingly

relinquish personal freedom and money to the government in return for the hope of safety. And we are willing to excuse all the destruction caused in the process as the price for pursuing that safety. Columbine was education's 9-11. Just as 9-11-01 woke the public to the danger of terrorism on our own soil, the Columbine massacre of 4-20-99 made us aware of the danger of bullying in school; a problem previously beneath our radar, and spurred the determination to create a Utopian school environment in which children need not fear anyone. Because it promised us the hope of a blueprint for peaceful schools, we eagerly latched onto a formerly obscure field of bullying psychology created a few decades earlier by Norwegian researcher Prof. Dan Olweus. Almost overnight, Columbine catapulted the Olweus bullying -will-not-be-tolerated paradigm into worldwide prominence, and as a result he has become the most influential psychologist in history. The next psychologist to win the Nobel Prize will certainly be Dan Olweus. The anti-bullying philosophy Olweus has spawned can be summed up as follows: "You are entitled to live in a world without mean

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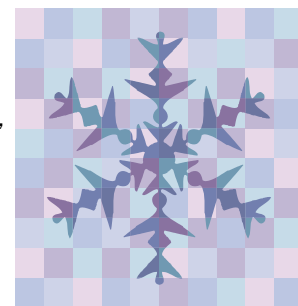
people. If people repeatedly treat you badly, please don't think it has anything to do with you, your attitudes or your behavior; it is only because of *them*. You are not strong or smart enough to make them stop, nor is it your responsibility to do so. Just inform the authorities when people upset you, and the authorities will make them stop."

There is no serious school of psychology, philosophy or religion that teaches this self-defeating approach to life. Yet this is the new anti-bullying philosophy eagerly embraced throughout the world. It is becoming obvious the Olweus approach to creating completely safe schools is failing. Had the Olweus paradigm been modeled after "Utopia" depicted by the

British renaissance philosopher Sir Thomas More, it would be successful. The problem is, the Olweus bullying psychology was itself a reaction to panic—panic over bullying-related child suicides in Scandinavia. Thus, to assuage public fear of bullies, he created a zero-tolerance system that more closely resembles the system we were warned against by that other great British thinker, George Orwell, in "Nineteen-Eighty-Four." Under pressure from anti-bullying activists, state governments have been mandating that schools adopt the Olweus paradigm of bullying. As a result, schools are becoming mini-police states in which everything students say and do is under surveillance of the school staff, now required to do double duty as correctional officers. Anti-bully laws are a Catch-22, for the harder schools try to comply with them, the worse the bullying becomes. They turn children against children, parents against parents, and parents and administrators against each other. And if the schools fail to satisfy both sets of parents, the disgruntled parents may sue the school district, wasting humongous sums of money while further escalating hostilities. Tension has reached an unprecedented level in our schools courtesy of anti-bullying laws. If we truly wish to create a Utopian school environment, we need to stop reacting with panic and childishly demanding that

the government legislate bullying out of existence every time we hear of a suicide. Aristotle said, "One thing no government can do, no matter how good it is, is to make its citizens morally virtuous." If laws could force people to be saints, every government would have created Utopia long ago. People can be excused for never having studied Aristotle. But we all grew up learning that the slick politicians in our capitols are not different from circus fortune tellers, and that the character traits required for dealing with adversity are already within us. No one wants schools to function as correctional facilities. They are educational institutions created to prepare children for the challenges of life, not to provide them with a false hope of a life without challenges. Bullying goes on in all arenas of life. Just as children deserve to be taught the three "R"s, they deserve to be taught the simple wisdom for dealing with bullying. Not only is this wisdom freely available, it will increase academic achievement while preventing future tragedies.

Source: (Israel) Izzy Kalman, school psychologist with over 33 years experience in the New York schools and the creator of Bullies to Buddies.
Published on *Psychology Today*
www.psychologytoday.com



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MINI-RELAXATION EXERCISES: A QUICK FIX IN STRESSFUL MOMENTS

Mini-relaxations are stress busters you can reach for any time. These techniques can ease your fear at the dentist's office, thwart stress before an important meeting, calm you when stuck in traffic, or help you keep your cool when faced with people or situations that irritate you. Whether you have one minute or three, these exercises work.

When you've got one minute

Place your hand just beneath your navel so you can feel the gentle rise and fall of your belly as you breathe. Breathe in.

Pause for a count of three. Breathe out. Pause for a count of three. Continue to breathe deeply for one minute, pausing for a count of three after each inhalation and exhalation. Or alternatively, while sitting comfortably, take a few slow deep breaths and quietly repeat to yourself "I am" as you breathe in and "at peace" as you breathe out. Repeat slowly two or three times. Then feel your entire body relax into the support of your chair.

When you've got two minutes

Count down slowly from 10 to 0. With each number, take one complete breath, inhaling and exhaling. For example, breathe in deeply, saying "10" to yourself. Breathe out slowly. On your next breath, say "nine", and so on. If you feel lightheaded, count down more slowly to space your breaths further apart. When you reach zero, you should feel more relaxed. If not, go through the exercise again.

When you've got three minutes

While sitting, take a break from whatever you're doing and

lax your facial muscles and allow your jaw to open slightly. Let your shoulders drop. Let your arms fall to your sides. Allow your hands to loosen so there are spaces between your fingers, uncross your legs or ankles. Feel your thighs sink into your chair, letting your legs fall comfortably apart. Feel your shins and calves become heavier and your feet grow roots into the floor. Now breathe in slowly and out slowly.

SEASONAL AFFECT DISORDER: WHEN WINTER BRINGS THE BLUES

The gloom of winter seems to get inside some people, the dark affecting their mood as well as their days. Known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), this form of depression affects about 1% to 2% of the population. Although it strikes all genders and ages, women are more likely to develop SAD than men, and young people are more likely to develop it than older people. SAD seems to be triggered by decreased exposure to daylight. Typically, it arrives

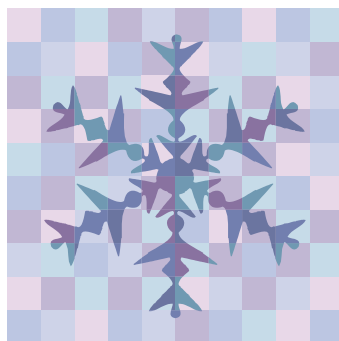
during the fall or winter months and subsides in the spring. Symptoms are similar to general depression and include lethargy, loss of interest in once-pleasurable activities, interpersonal problems, irritability, inability to concentrate, and changes in sleeping patterns, appetite, or both. Experts don't fully understand the cause of SAD, but leading theories place the blame on an out-of-sync body clock or on improper levels of either the hormone melatonin or the neurotransmitter serotonin. The mainstay of SAD treatment is light therapy, also called phototherapy. Phototherapy involves daily sessions of sitting close to a special light source that is far more intense than normal indoor light. The recommendation is typically to get 30 minutes of exposure to light at an intensity of 10,000 lux each day, but optimum dosing remains a major question. Some people need more light than this, others need less. The

light must enter through the eyes to be effective; skin exposure doesn't seem to work. Some people feel better after one light treatment, but most people require at least a few days of treatment, and some need several weeks. You do not need a prescription to purchase a light box to treat SAD; however it's best to work with a professional to monitor the benefits of the treatment. Some SAD light boxes look like medical equipment, while others more like table lamps. The prices vary. Although professional groups and government agencies endorse light therapy, your insurance company may balk. If you are counting on coverage, better check first.

Source: HEALTHbeat, Harvard Medical School, December 6, 2012.

Visit www.sadlightbox.org for SAD lights, light therapy boxes, SAD alarm clocks, and read sad light reviews for light therapy products comparisons.

Women are more likely to develop SAD than men, and young people are more likely to develop it than older people.



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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT...

The following is the philosophy of Charles Schultz, the creator of the 'Peanuts' comic strip.

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America pageant.
4. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
6. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.

The point is, none of us remembers the headliners of yesterday.

These are not second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But the applause dies.... Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appre-

ciated and special.

5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Easier?

The lesson: The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials....the most money...or the most awards. They simply are the ones who care the most.

**Our real heroes are not
those we took an interest in,
rather those who took
an interest in us.**