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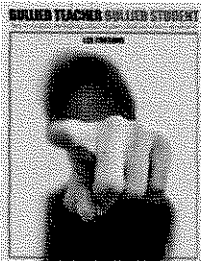


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## Creating an Anti-Bullying Environment: Understanding Adult Bullying

EducationWorld is committed to bringing educators the practical tools they need to make good decisions, engage in effective leadership and implement strategies that work. To further this commitment, we have formed a content partnership with Stenhouse Publishers. EducationWorld is pleased to feature a variety of book excerpts as part of this collaboration. Check back frequently as we feature additional excerpts from Stenhouse titles.

The following excerpts are taken from Chapters 2 and 3 of *Bullied Teacher, Bullied Student: How to Recognize the Bullying Culture in Your School and What to Do About It*, by Les Parsons (Pembroke Publishers, 2005; distributed in the U.S. by Stenhouse Publishers). The book retails for \$18 and is available on the [Stenhouse Web site](#).



*These excerpts address the problem of adult bullying and how it can have a pervasive negative impact on a school's culture. See [Creating an Anti-Bullying Environment: What Your School May Be Missing](#) for an additional excerpt from Bullied Teacher, Bullied Student.*

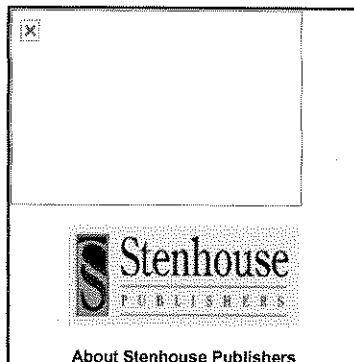
### When School Staff Are the Ones Bullying

For an adult bully, children make ideal targets. Bullying students is like shooting fish in a barrel: as a captive audience, students can neither fight nor flee. They are expected to respect and obey their teachers, as they owe their success or failure in school to how those teachers evaluate them. They are quick to accept blame, and their fledgling egos can be deflated and destroyed with a few, well chosen words or gestures. A bullying teacher can be

described as one who uses the imbalance of power to intentionally harm students physically, emotionally, or socially. Whatever definition you choose to apply, a catalogue of bullying teacher behaviors would certainly include the following:

- *Verbal abuse* through the use of sexist, racist, cultural, socio-economic, ability-related, and homophobic stereotyping and labeling;
- *Physical abuse*: such as shaking, pushing, pinching, pulling the hair or ears, slapping with a ruler, or throwing things;
- *Psychological abuse*: such as yelling, using sarcasm, ripping up work, setting student against student, making threats;
- *Professional abuse*: such as unfair marking; applying penalties selectively; using inappropriate disciplinary methods; inducing failure by setting inappropriate standards; lying to colleagues, parents, superiors about a student's behavior; denying students equal access to lessons, resources, or remediation; intimidating parents who, through language, culture, or socio-economic status, are cut off from a complaint process.

The first step in controlling and treating bullying in a school environment is acknowledging that anyone in the building, especially the adults who are acting as surrogate parents, can bully and be bullied. How effective can any zero-tolerance policy be if students are expected to believe in anti-bullying ideals while witnessing adults around them bullying others and being bullied themselves? Any anti-bullying policy based on the assumption that students will do as teachers say and not as they do will accomplish nothing. How diligent will teachers be in implementing their school's anti-bullying strategies while under the thumb of a bullying principal? How effective can any bullying policy be if it's applied piecemeal, subjectively and inconsistently?



**Stenhouse PUBLISHERS**

About Stenhouse Publishers

Principals can be bullies; teachers can be bullies; and so can parents. And if adult bullying stains a school, wiping out student bullying is an uphill battle. If a school is developing or has developed a bullying culture, the effects are wide-ranging and invidious. Keep in mind that the majority of adults in any school are idealistic, hard-working, nurturing professionals who accept their vocation as a calling rather than as a job. A few key individuals, however, wielding and abusing whatever power they possess, can turn a school into a toxic environment.

Stenhouse publishes professional development books and videos by teachers and for teachers. Their titles cover a range of content areas -- from literacy and mathematics to science, social studies, the arts, and environmental education -- as well as a variety of topics, including classroom management, assessment, and differentiation.

Consider the extreme example, "A Visit to Your Worst Nightmare," below.

#### A Visit to your Worst Nightmare

Imagine that you're filling in for a Grade 5 teacher who may be off for a few weeks. It's your first day on the job. You report to the office.

*Welcome to Watcherstep Public School. I'm Doris, the head secretary. I think you'll like it here; it's a good school. I do like the morning attendance sheets sent down promptly; I'd hate to have to embarrass you on the "on-call." The office photocopier is off-limits to teachers no matter how many others in the school have broken down. We're busy here and we don't have time to wait in line. And don't send kids down to the office and expect us to watch them. We have more than enough to do as it is. I'd introduce you to the principal but her door is closed this morning. After a while you'll get used to figuring out the best time to talk to her. You'll like her though: she's tough but fair. She's usually pretty busy, so I wouldn't bother her unless it's really important. If it has anything to do with ordering books or supplies, or spending money at all, just give the request to me in writing and I'll see what I can do. You don't want to get on her bad side. That made you jump, didn't it? You'll get used to it. It's just Dave, the VP. He's in charge of discipline and one of the school bullies was sent in early from the yard for fighting. Dave will rip into him like that for a bit, tear a strip off his back, and the kid will leave bawling his eyes out. Dave has a knack for it. He'll go after the odd teacher now and then, but it's just for their own good. We like to run a tight ship around here. You'll really like him. He has a new joke every day and some of them will make your hair curl. Just don't get caught in the book room with him, if you know what I mean.*

*That's Sonja, the other Grade 5 teacher. You'll be teaching across the hall from her. She's a terrific teacher. You can go by her classroom any time you like and you won't hear a peep. Her kids do as they're told if they know what's good for them. She'll tell you what texts to use and fill you in on the routines. Follow her lead and you won't have any problems. Speaking of problems, you have the Robertson boy in your class. He's a bit of a rough-and-tumbler, but it's the other kids who mostly get him into trouble. Some of them egg him on; you know, they just ask for it. Anyway, I'd go easy on him; his mother can get a little out of hand. She went after the teacher you're replacing and the principal in the hall last week, just when the classes were changing. You should have heard the language! She's also not afraid to call the area superintendent over the least little thing. You'll say something to the boy, the boy tells her, she phones the superintendent, the super calls the principal, and the next thing you know you're hauled up on the carpet. It might also be a good idea to check the kind of marks the boy usually gets before you mark any work, if you know what I mean. Anyway, I'd like to talk to you for a while longer but we're really busy here in the office. But I can tell right off that you're the kind of teacher we need here in Watcherstep P.S.*

From this example, it's clear that a bullying school culture defies easy or simple analysis. It's not simply a matter of a principal bullying a teacher who then bullies students. If the dynamic were as linear as the classic case of a parent slapping a child who then turns to slap the family dog, intervention would be more clear-cut and definitive. In a bullying school, the student who is bullied at home is likely to bully other students at school; that same student might also try to bully the teacher using the reputation of the bullying parent as leverage. A collaborative, fair-minded principal might inadvertently empower a bullying teacher, who might use that leverage to bully other teachers as well as students. Teachers who band together to stand up against a bullying principal might well find themselves undermined by the principal's superior or even by the school community.

In a bullying school, morale is eroded, initiative squelched, and risk-taking discouraged. Apprehension seeps into the learning environment. Adults, as well as students, are reluctant to take risks or make mistakes for fear of ridicule or censure. People feel alienated, isolated, and disenfranchised and begin to mistrust their own abilities and competencies. As they fall prey to dependence, ignorance, and uncertainty, their capacity to learn or teach is critically impaired. As the bullying in a school increases, a school's effectiveness wanes.

#### Related resources

[The Best Bullying Prevention Schools Aren't Doing](#)  
[Stan Davis: Ask Bullied Kids What Helps Them](#)  
[Lesson Plan Booster: How Can Students Help a Bullied Peer?](#)  
[EducationWorld's Bullying Resource Page](#)

Do you agree that examining adult behavior is a critical first step in school bullying prevention? Join the discussion!



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#### Related Items

[Bullying Prevention: What Your School May be Missing](#)

[Dr. Ken Shore: Dealing with Bullying Incidents](#)

[Dr. Ken Shore: Cyberbullying](#)

[Wire Side Chats: Creating School-Wide Anti-Bullying Strategies](#)

[How Important Should One Test Be?](#)