

WORDS KIMBERLY ALLEN

# 3 Shades of Bullying

School • Cyberspace • Workplace

"If a student is caught bullying another student three times, even if there are three different victims involved, Georgia law says that child must be removed from that school and placed in an alternative school."

*Thirteen-year-old Israel Price recalls going to school "like any other normal day when some kids starting picking on me and messing with me, talking about the mole on my chin and stuff, calling me all kinds of names. Then one day in the locker room, they just started pushing up on me. I told the teacher, and he didn't really do anything about it. Then came the day I got jumped in the restroom. It was two boys at first, and then it escalated." The group stopped the beating temporarily, but then the initial two boys continued their assault.*



Israel Price, Overcomer of brutal bullying.

This seventh grader ended up with a concussion and brain injury. He had to learn to walk and talk all over again, which took about three to four weeks. While he has made a miraculous recovery and is even back singing in the choir, his mother, Charleia Price, has noticed her son's speech is slower at times.

Are you too tall, thin, fat, short, dark, light, gay, poor, religious, atheist, smart, or not so smart? If so, at some point in your life you've probably dealt with a bully, as they can be found in every zip code and tax bracket. Unfortunately, most kids are too ashamed or scared to tell their parents and even if they do, parents don't always know how to handle the situation properly.

With the help of Clayton County Solicitor General Tasha Mosley's presentation on Bullying and Sexting and Dr. Claudio V. Cerullo, Executive Director and Founder of Teach Anti Bullying, Inc., this writing will discuss the top three areas where bullying takes place, provide solutions on how to protect your child, and potential legal options for victims.

**Recognizing the bully: A few signs to look for:**

**Defiance and defying authority:** The child who says, "You're the bad parent" or "I'm not the problem mom/dad," – it's your divorce' your drinking/drug problem' you're working all the time, etc.

**Antisocial or borderline antisocial behavior/Obsessions with social status or popularity:** The child may exclude kids from groups they belong to or show hostility toward any child or group of children who are different.

**Unstable home life:** If there is violence in the home, a child is more likely to exhibit the same tendencies outside of the home. Further, if the parent doesn't have a good relationship with his/her child or frequently exhibits anger towards the child, said child will pass that energy onto someone else.

**Aggressive friends:** Do your child's friends seem aggressive or mean-spirited? Children who are violent or bully others are more likely to have friends who do the same thing.

**Passive-aggressive behavior:** The child who says, "I don't want/have to listen to you."

**Getting into trouble at school/Change in academic standing or grades**

Parents must be careful how they approach the question of whether or not their child is a bully. Not supporting your child and/or getting them help can push a bully further into anger and make the bad behavior worse. On the flip side, if your child is being bullied, let them know how proud you are that they trusted you enough to share what's happening in their life. Most kids don't tell adults they're being bullied for fear of not being supported by or disappointing the adult. For this reason, Dr. Cerullo's organization frequently honors bullied children with certificates or in some cases, interaction with celebrity sponsors, in order to publicly celebrate and acknowledge that child's courage for coming forward and most importantly, surviving.

**Importance of Documenting Incidents:** According to Dr. Cerullo, the key to protecting your child is to keep detailed records of all bullying occurrences. "The problem with prosecuting is the lack of documentation. You need to document everything with your school officials, and then certainly with local law enforcement. The bully knows that it's not going to end in school because the teacher(s)/principal are watching. So at some point in time, your child may have to face the situation off school property."

**BULLIES IN SCHOOL****STATISTICS:**

- One out of four kids is bullied
- One out of five kids admits to being a bully
- 43% fear harassment in bathrooms
- As many as 200,000 students may stay home on any given day due to fear of bullies

- 13 million-plus children are affected each year

**What are the Signs?** "When you diagnose and define bullying, you have to look at the criteria for what is real bullying," advises Dr. Cerullo. "Unfortunately, in schools in our country, parents think everything is bullying and it's truly not. You're looking for the frequency, the duration, the intensity, and the power base of the situation occurring."

**Protecting Your Kids:** Parents should look for physical signs such as cuts, bruises, and scratches beginning as early as elementary school. Next are the emotional signs: children who are withdrawn, shy, or become depressed, and/or start to experience psychosomatic symptoms such as anxiety, headaches, and stomachaches. Pay attention when children stop eating or sleeping habits change, especially if they have nightmares of not wanting to return to school. Some social signs to watch for include if the child's circle of friends suddenly changes or they begin wearing odd attire to fit in. Another warning sign is if your child's possessions are habitually being stolen, damaged, or go missing or if the child does not want to participate in any school-based or extracurricular activities they have always enjoyed.

*It's the Law. O.C.G.A. 20-2-751.4(a)* reads as follows: The term "bullying" means an act which occurs on school property, on school vehicles, at designated school bus stops, or at school related functions or activities; or by use of data or software that is accessed through a computer, computer system, computer network, or other electronic technology of a local school system.

"If a student is caught bullying another student three times, even if there are three different victims involved, Georgia law says that child must be removed from that school and placed in an alternative school," says Solicitor General Mosley.

**BULLIES IN CYBERSPACE****STATISTICS:**

- 42% of kids have been bullied while online (one in four have had it happen more than once)
- 35% have been threatened online (one in five have had it happen more than once)
- 21% have received mean or threatening email
- 58% have not told their parents/any adult about something mean or hurtful happening to them online

**What are the Signs?** "Cyberbullying" is on the rise, and much of it is sexual in nature, such as sending explicit pornographic texting (sexting) or visual photographs. Most cyber-attacks are launched by "friends" who know your child (and his/her secrets or embarrassing information) well. Some signs include your child showing fear of technology, especially when a text message or email pops up; if your child stops playing games online or using the phone and/or computer or appears upset after using the computer/going online or viewing a text message on a cell phone.

**Protecting Your Kids:** "It's about preserving texts and/or emails to show proof that a crime had existed. With texting, the instinct is to delete them 99.9% of the time," adds Cerullo. But once deleted, it's very difficult to get back. If you look at the cellphone providers, Verizon has a window of about three to five days to retrieve a text whereas with every other provider, Sprint, Nextel, AT&T, it is gone. These companies are developing apps for cellphones and the internet in order to preserve texts because without that you can't tell if a crime occurred." An app that can help document texts, photos, and social media is TruthLocker, which tracks from your phone as well as any device where your children are engaging in conversation. You can view TruthLocker's features at <http://www.truthlocker.com/features>. Additionally, parents should call police if bullying occurs after school or on the computer.

Further, if a parent finds evidence of a cyber-issue, don't leave a computer in the child's bedroom. "You want to centralize that computer so that you can visually monitor what the child is doing online. He/she will be a bit more apprehensive about sending something that may hurt others, or you can see the reaction if something negative comes in. On the social networks, you can go into what's called "lurking-only mode" where the parent can see what the child is texting, writing, or drafting, but they don't know you're there," advises Cerullo. "We also caution parents, especially those with teenage daughters, that you don't want to violate a child's privacy because you'll further alienate them. Lastly, we tell parents to please teach your children to keep all personal information private. Children with autism spectrum, hidden disabilities, and especially Asperger's are very open and looking for social acceptance."

*It's the Law. O.C.G.A. 16-5-90*—Stalking: A person commits the offense of stalking when he or she follows, places under surveillance, or contacts another person at or about a place or places without the consent of the other person for the purpose of harassing and intimidating the other person. The term "contact" shall mean any communication including without being limited to communication in person, by telephone, by mail, by broadcast, by computer, by computer network, or by any other electronic device; and the place or places that contact by telephone, mail, broadcast, computer, computer network, or any other electronic device is deemed to occur shall be the place or places where such communication is received. With regards to sexting, O.C.G.A. 16-12-100.1—Electronically furnishing obscene material to minors; or O.C.G.A. 16-12-100.2—Computer or Electronic Pornography and Child Exploitation Prevention Act of 2007 applies to sexual images being disseminated of children under age 16.

According to Solicitor General Mosley, Georgia doesn't have a law that specifically addresses cyberbullying. The closest law on the books is stalking; the first conviction is a misdemeanor; second or subsequent is a felony, and punishment is one to ten years. As for sexting, there is no statute per se, 16-12-100.1 is the closest.

## BULLIES IN THE WORKPLACE

### STATISTICS:

- 35% report being bullied at work (that's 53.5 million Americans; roughly the size of Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah, combined)
- 58% of workplace bullying cases involves same gender victims
- 62% of workplace bullies are men; 58% of those men target women
- 80% of the time, women target women in the workplace. Women generally don't bully men

**What are the Signs?** Your boss makes unreasonable demands, shouts, treats employees rudely, plays pranks, gives the silent treatment, or excludes employees from meetings and social gatherings, just to name a few. This could be based on your appearance, sexual preference, or rise to success. The boss could threaten to affect your raise or issue a poor evaluation. Any of these things can cause you to become withdrawn, anxious, and/or depressed.

"Those effects are no different than the child who goes to school and is sneaking around corners to see where the bully is. The major difference is the boss' behavior impacts your livelihood, family values, and marriage," explains Dr. Cerullo. "Eventually, you will have to get a job and may continue to face these same types of people who never got the help they needed growing up."

**Protecting Yourself:** This still boils down to documenting bad behavior and not being afraid to go over your boss' head if he/she takes things too far. But basically your choices are limited: either quit, find a new job, or go to work traumatized every day hoping that you don't run into the boss you have issues with.

*It's the Law.* "Adults are on their own when it comes to workplace bullying," says Solicitor General Mosley. "There are no specific laws on the books to address this."

It can be difficult to remember that the bully is probably a person in need of professional help. And if your child is the victim, it's understandably hard to care about that aspect. With this in mind, what can a parent do to make things right? In Israel's case, suing the school system was not an option. "[Georgia] schools are protected by sovereign immunity, which means they're not liable for anything that happened to him. The school district, the schools, nobody," laments Ms. Price. "The only recourse we have is to sue the families or the bullies directly, but there's not too much you can do when it comes to the schools and holding them responsible." The Price family has since relocated out of state.

Regardless of the severity of any bullying case, use common sense before approaching the person, and remember to document everything. Most of all, offer your child a support system that encourages him/her to share what's going on in their lives with you. It could be the difference your child needs to withstand a bad situation.