

Supporting Safety in Our Schools

By Brenda Spina, M.S., LMFT, LPC

Safety in our school systems (or lack thereof) is an issue that has been on the forefront of news broadcasts more frequently than ever imagined. Every time I hear of a random shooting spree or assault, the awareness of need in these isolated students is troubling. What follows is compiled information based on a conversation I had with Appleton East High School Counselor, Therese Helein. Therese is popular among the students for her commitment to their personal success and sense of wellbeing.

Brenda: Therese, what can parents do to support their student when they feel unjustly treated by other students?

Therese: Every student handbook has written in it the school's policy regarding harassment and bullying. Harassment and bullying is 'Not To Be Tolerated'. Harassment and bullying includes but is not limited to: facial expressions, hand gestures or signals, shoving, hitting, etc. I know students feel hesitant to reveal to their parents and in most cases, go to their friends. Going to friends is not really the helpful route. If a child is not ready to talk, parents can encourage them to go to those trusted (people in authority). We have Student Assistance Coordinators. A police liaison officer is available except on court dates. Without going to student services or someone like myself their isolation is likely to increase. That is the last thing we want to see happen for them. We want the school atmosphere to remain as safe as possible.

Brenda: Are there additional safety measures in place that parents can support?

Therese: All doors that are considered entrances into the school are locked during class hours. All visitors must enter via the main entrance and check in at the office. During lunch hours, teachers are posted at every door to ensure that behavior is kept in line with the written guidelines in the student handbook.

Brenda: Can parents volunteer?

Therese: They can. However, most high school students may feel uncomfortable having their parents around. We conduct formal background checks on every volunteer. The parent's desire to be involved communicates the reality that the student's physical, sexual, and social safety is of value.

Brenda: What about Facebook or MySpace? So much is communicated through today's technology. Is monitoring these avenues valuable to the school authorities?

Therese: Absolutely! Parents can be on top of it more than we can. So often

harassment sexually and verbally is done via texts, email, and through Facebook and MySpace. I would encourage parents to not only know their student's screen name and password, but to be unafraid to call the parents of other students if sexually inappropriate language, or abusive, harassing language is used. Way too much sneaks by through these venues and the silent suffering continues. We can only intercede with our discipline procedure when we know what is taking place.

Parents, please know that you are not alone. Yes, there are many things in need of refining in our school districts. However, any support and involvement to our school authorities sends a clear message to your children and to the schools as to the value (which is priceless) you place on the uniqueness of each child.

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