

# Researchers advocate kindness to combat bullying

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The stereotypical school bully of past generations was easy to identify -- the playground brute victimizing those weaker and vulnerable.

But today's typical bully is a far cry from that tough guy or girl who made life miserable for others. And the consequences have escalated tragically. In one week recently, a 13-year-old hanged himself in a Texas barn, an 8-year-old jumped out of a two-story building in Houston, and nine Massachusetts teenagers face jail time after allegedly harassing a 15-year-old girl so mercilessly that she killed herself.

Students are turning to suicide, experts say, as an escape from taunts that now continue beyond the school day through cyberspace. Experts say [bullying](#) is becoming easier as technology develops. "That's becoming more prevalent than the face-to-face type of bullying. They don't have to do it in front of a person; they can put in a different name or login and be anonymous," one says.

Two Penn State Harrisburg faculty researchers argue adolescent bullying and youth [violence](#) can be confronted in America through in-school programs that integrate "kindness -- the antithesis of victimization."

In an article scheduled for journal publication, Assistant Professor of Education Shanetia Clark and Assistant Professor of Reading Barbara Marinak write, "Unlike previous generations, today's adolescents are victimizing each other at alarming rates, leading adults to ask why. Is it

caused by television? Video games? Music? Is an absence of moral and civic values contributing to the rampant rise...?"

Noting that legislation, nationally and locally, and intense awareness efforts have sought to stem bullying, they point to recent research suggesting a broader perspective is necessary to reverse a loss of empathy in society. The foundation of their solution is reading, discussing and acting upon the attributes of kindness, which "enables us to be our best selves."

Clark and Marinak argue schools can practice prevention by arranging discussions about bullying and kindness and that the "purposeful integration of social studies and literature can be a catalyst for critical instruction." Included in the article are numerous suggested books for middle and high schools that can be used in a variety of classes including psychology, sociology, English and history to examine the actions of a responsible citizenry.

"Carefully selected texts provide an anonymous forum for students to examine the circumstances that can lead to violent behavior," they say. They also stress research that indicates human kindness facilitates communication, cooperation and trust in all arenas.

"By engaging with texts and others, young people can shape their identities, make sense of the world and move away from victimizing themselves and others," they say. "Teachers can help by critically discussing and unpacking the moral and civic values in these important stories. [Victims](#), perpetrators and spectators in complex school systems can speak more openly through a veil of anonymity."

The researchers suggest books that contain messages highlighting attributes of kindness, such as sense of belonging, respect, honesty and empathy. The titles include "Rescue Josh McGuire" and "Touching

Spirit Bear" by Ben Mikaelson, "Radiance Descending" by Paula Fox, "The Misfits" by James Howe, "The Barn" by Avi, "Coast to Coast" by Betsy Byars, "The Chocolate War" by Robert Cormier, "Thirteen Reasons Why" by Jay Asher, "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst, "No Shame, No Fear" by Anne Turnbull, "Bait" by Alex Sanchez and "Sucker" by Carson McCullers.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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