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### Bully for you!

BY DENA HILL Staff Writer

Remember the kid who took your lunch money, or pushed you in the mud? What about the girl who made fun of your haircut in front of all your other classmates?

Like Eddie Haskell, these perennial bullies can be found in every community, through every generation. More and more, however, public and private schools are taking steps to change the bullies' ways and give their targets methods to deal with them.

Tracy Newton, director of youth education and prevention services of The Family Place, told a hopeful story of change recently at a joint McCullough Intermediate and HP Middle School PTA meeting.

The scene she described could have happened on any city street in any town in the country. A boy walking home from school steps into the path of another boy, one who had been bullying him daily. But this time all the victim's classmates, who knew of his situation, had volunteered to walk him home from school to confront his bully. The message relayed? Bullying isn't cool.

Bullies want to be popular, and if they perceive other kids turning against them, they'll stop, Newton said. "I really focus on empathy-building with the bullies and with the bystanders," she said.

Newton relayed how critical a role bystanders actually play in a bullying situation, stressing that they need to be taught to help the person being bullied.

"It's very important to encourage your kids to stand up for each other," Newton told the group of some 100 moms who had crowded into an assembly room, some standing or even sitting on the floor for the meeting.

Newton was there with Charlotte Sewell, a "bullyproof counselor" at the Family Place who is involved in a 10-week "Bullyproof Elementary School Project" with McCullough fifth-graders, that began Sept. 23.

This program, (sponsored by La Fiesta De Las Seis Banderas, a nonprofit community foundation in HP) also includes a "Bullying Behavior Identification Survey," which was handed out by the school at the beginning of the project.

The project teaches kids empathy building and also strategies to deal with bullies, such as humor and ways to stand up and be assertive — without becoming bullies themselves, Sewell said.

Among the sources she will utilize, she said, will be "Bullyproof: A Teacher's Guide on Teasing and Bullying for Use With Fourth and Fifth Grade Students," written by Nan Stein.

"There's opportunity for them (the students) to process their feelings if they

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need to," Sewell said. It's an interactive group using role-playing, games and art projects. Kids sit in a circle.

"That way, everybody's included. They can see each other and be able to communicate with each other," she said. The project eventually will cover all fifth graders at McCullough, although some will participate in the fall, and some in spring, Sewell said.

Newton and Sewell were addressing the PTA to inform parents of the components of bullying, outlining the characteristics of children who are targets, as well as those who are the bullies themselves.

"It's a way for one person to feel that they have more power over another person," Newton explained. Bullies don't necessarily have low self-esteem. They are just using some sort of behavior that gets what they want, she said.

Newton has been working in the domestic violence field since 1995 and said that she learned from the women with whom she worked that most abusive relationships started in high school. In response, the agency began a program four years ago that addressed middle and high school violence.

They then realized that the program needed to start even earlier, with the elementary school level, Newton said. The project started in five elementary schools in Coppell and Carrollton last year and will continue with McCullough and four schools in Coppell again this year.

"We're hoping we can do this survey every year," said McCullough principals, Caren Edelstein, adding that she hoped the training at the fifth grade would carry over into other grades.

"We see more incidents of bullying at this age, and I want children and adults to understand that this is not a rite of passage," Edelstein said. "We need to give children the tools to deal with bullies and be sensitive to each other. We want to stop the bullying entirely."

Like Edelstein, Warren Foxworth, head of Middle School at St. Mark's School of Texas, agreed that bullying seems to be more prevalent among certain age groups.

"We see it starting in the sixth (grade) and coming out of it in the eighth," he said. The age-old problem is ongoing, but not always intentional, Foxworth explained.

"Middle school boys (fifth through eighth grades) don't always know that they're bullying. When you are 12 and 13, an inappropriate way but a common way to build yourself up or make yourself feel better is to make others feel lesser."

St. Mark's doesn't have one specific program to deal with the topic of bullying. The issue is addressed through overall respect topics, such as those covered in twice-weekly chapel talks, Foxworth said.

"Basically what we talk about is how to treat each other, he said."

When there are incidents of bullying, the school tries to address the problem personally with the individual boys, Foxworth said. He noted that the school also accesses other resources on an as-needed basis. "We will do individual workshops on occasion if an appropriate one comes up," he said.

On a much broader scope, the Dallas Independent School District employs several methods throughout each of hundreds of campuses in the city of Dallas to address the problem of bullying.

According to Paige Marsh, prevention specialist with Safe and Drug-Free

Schools/Health Education, a department within the DISD, several "bullies and violence prevention programs" are ongoing throughout the city's 218 campuses.

The DISD's programs are offered at all grade levels, K through 12, and are continuations of existing programs. According to Marsh, one ongoing program, CHARACTER COUNTS! is a framework based on "Six Pillars of Character" (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship) from the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

Teachers who are Campus Instruction Leadership Team members, and who were trained in CHARACTER COUNTS! this summer, were able to go back and train their entire staffs of teachers, Marsh said.

Another program, "Peers Making Peace," which Marsh described as a promising program at the national level, offers some students the opportunity to go through peer mediators to resolve their conflicts.

"We're trying to meet each of the campuses' individual needs," Marsh pointed out.

The district's 11 prevention specialists also go into classrooms to teach the "Get Real About Violence" curriculum, which is grade-level specific, and counselors assist as well, working at the campus level, Marsh explained.

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