

COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

Monday 10/25: Pajama Day (I feel safe and accepted in school - wear your pj's)



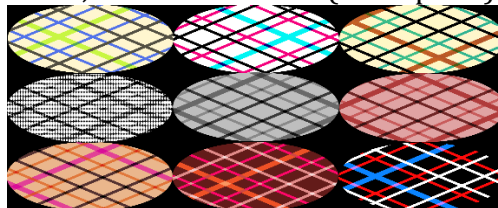
Tuesday 10/26: Tie Dye Day (We all have a unique design - wear tie dye apparel)



Wednesday 10/27: Team Up Against Disrespect (wear sports team apparel)



Thursday 10/28: Bullying is Bad, Wear Your Plaid (wear plaid)



Friday 10/29: Reporting Bullying Doesn't Have to Be Scary (wear your Halloween costume)



Is It Rude, Is It Mean, Or Is It Bullying?: Helping Children Know the Difference



Many parents are concerned about bullying, protecting their kids from it, and making sure their kids aren't engaging in it. But with so much talk about bullying, sometimes we call behavior "bullying" that is actually not. So how can you tell the difference?

While we as adults should take caution not to minimize anyone's experience, we need to draw a distinction between behavior that is rude, behavior that is mean, and behavior that is characteristic of bullying. It is also important to teach children the skills necessary to navigate all situations they are faced with.

Rude = Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else.

In children, this takes the form of social errors like burping in someone's face, jumping ahead in line, bragging about achieving the highest grade or even throwing a crushed up pile of leaves in someone's face. The critical factor? Incidents of rudeness are usually spontaneous, unplanned, inconsiderate, based on thoughtlessness, poor manners, impulsiveness, or narcissism, but not meant to actually hurt someone. This makes it imperative for adults (parents, teachers, school staff) to utilize these situations as teachable moments to define the behavior, teach the acceptable way to respond, and model appropriate behavior. When children are directly taught social skills, it gives them the opportunity to self-reflect on their behavior, though accidental or inadvertent, and change it for future social situations.

Mean = Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone once (or maybe twice).

The main distinction between "rude" and "mean" behavior has to do with intention; while rudeness is often unintentional, mean behavior very much aims to hurt or tear someone down. Kids are mean when they make negative comments regarding another person's clothing, appearance, intelligence, social status, or just about anything else they can find to criticize or draw attention to. Meanness also sounds like words spoken in anger—impulsive cruelty that is often regretted later. Very often, mean behavior in kids is motivated by angry feelings and/or the misguided goal of building themselves up at the expense of the person they are putting down. Commonly, meanness in kids sounds an awful lot like:

"Are you seriously wearing that shirt again? Didn't you wear that last week?"

"You are so ugly/stupid/fat."

"I hate you!" "No one likes you!" "You can't sit with us!"

Make no mistake; mean behaviors can wound deeply and adults can make a huge difference in the lives of young people when they hold kids accountable for being mean. Yet, meanness is different from bullying in important ways that should be understood and differentiated when it comes to intervention.

Bullying = Intentionally aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power.

Experts agree that bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance, and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behavior. Kids who bully say or do something intentionally hurtful to others and they keep doing it, with no sense of regret or remorse—even when targets of bullying show or express their hurt or tell the aggressors to stop. The aggressor feels a sense of power over the victim and feels a sense of enjoyment in causing the victim pain. Bullying may be physical, verbal, relational, or carried out via technology:

- Physical aggression was once the most common form of bullying and the one most parents and kids refer to and identify readily. This kind of bullying includes hitting, punching, kicking, spitting, tripping, hair-pulling, slamming a child into a locker, and a range of other behaviors that involve intentional physical contact.
- Verbal aggression is what our parents used to advise us to “just ignore.” We now know that despite previous beliefs that words can’t cause harm, words and threats can, indeed, hurt and can even cause profound, lasting harm on the self-esteem of children.
- Relational aggression is a form of bullying in which kids use their friendship—or the threat of taking their friendship away—to hurt someone. Social exclusion, note passing, shunning, hazing, and rumor spreading are all forms of this pervasive type of bullying that can be especially crushing to kids.
- Cyberbullying is a specific form of bullying that involves technology. It is the willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. Notably, the likelihood of repeated harm is especially high with cyberbullying because electronic messages can be accessed by multiple parties, resulting in repeated exposure and repeated harm. Social media is another avenue through which bullying can occur.

So, why is it important to make the distinction between rude, mean, and bullying?

In our culture of 24/7 news feed and social media accessibility, we have a better opportunity than ever before to bring attention to important issues. In the last few years, Americans have collectively paid more attention to the issue of bullying like never before. Millions of school children have been given a voice, 49 states in the U.S. have passed anti-bullying legislation, and thousands of adults have been trained in important strategies to keep kids safe and dignified in schools and communities. These are significant achievements. However, in other words, if kids and parents improperly classify rudeness and mean behavior as bullying—whether to simply make conversation or to bring attention to their short-term discomfort—we all run the risk of becoming so immune and jaded that a serious situation involving true bullying and harassment could go overlooked or neglected.

It is important to distinguish between rude, mean, and bullying behavior so that teachers, school administrators, counselors, police, youth workers, parents, and kids all know what to pay attention to and when to intervene. It is also the role of these adults to directly teach children how to respond and cope with peers who are displaying rude and mean behaviors. As we have just learned, not every act of negative behavior is defined as bullying. A child’s life may depend on a non-jaded adult’s ability to discern between rudeness at the bus stop and impactful bullying.

