

We Can Stop Bullies!

ELIZABETH WINCHESTER

Colten Boyle, 10, knows how badly it hurts to be teased, called nasty names and left out by other kids. "I used to get bullied a lot at my old school," he says. Classmates used words to hurt Colten. But bullies pick on others in many ways. Sometimes the abuse is physical, like kicking, shoving and hitting. Sometimes it takes the form of mean online or text messages.

No matter how it's done, bullying is damaging. It can cause victims and bullies to feel badly about themselves, and can lead to other problems. Experts say that as many as one in 10 children is bullied at school. Each day, about 160,000 U.S. students miss school because they are afraid of being harassed. Preventing bullying is an important issue for kids, parents and teachers. Last week, almost 800 people from 42 states and eight countries attended an International Bullying Prevention Association meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana. They discussed the latest research and ways to prevent aggressive behavior in schools.

A Bully's Bulls-Eye

Why are some kids singled out as targets for bullies? A new study suggests it has to do with how kids act early in life. Researchers studied 1,970 children in Canada from when they were 4 months old until they turned 7. The research team found that toddlers who regularly pushed and hit other children did not become bullies. Instead, they were more likely to be picked on. The researchers recommend that parents and teachers start early to stop children from acting aggressively toward others.

Some experts are not yet convinced that angry toddlers are more likely to become bully magnets. Nancy Mullin, the director of Bullying Prevention Inc., in Natick, Massachusetts, believes the subject needs more study. But she agrees that, as early as possible, children should be taught how to get along with others.

Let The Bully Beware

Communities across the globe are fighting back against bullies. "Bullying has been found in every country that has been studied," Edward Barker, an author of the Canadian study, told TFK. He believes schools should promote kindness, communication and conflict-resolution skills. In the U.S., at least 39 states have laws that address bullying in schools. A variety of prevention programs are available. But for a program to work best, "youth must be a part of the solution," says Stephanie Bryn, head of the Stop Bullying Now! campaign (see "How to Handle Bullies"). Kids are tackling the issue together at Rosa Parks Middle School in Olney, Maryland. Through a program called You Have the Power!, high school students are working with 20 Rosa Parks students to spread anti-bullying messages. "When I see someone being bullied, I sometimes don't know what to do," admits middle schooler Haley Nachlas. "I feel this program will give me answers."

Colten rarely sees bullying at his new school, Elrod Elementary, in Kalispell, Montana. For the past three years, his school has participated in the Olweus (ol-vey-us) Bullying Prevention Program. Olweus is active in schools in more than a dozen countries. It aims to get everyone involved: teachers, administrators, students, parents, bus drivers and cafeteria workers. Everybody works to make the school a welcoming place. "It makes the bullies think twice," says Colten, "and the people who are getting bullied feel supported."

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A Fierce Firestorm

Raging wildfires sweep through Southern California

BY CLAUDIA ATTICOT

Fast-moving wildfires devoured hundreds of homes and buildings in four counties in Southern California in recent days. So far, more than 20,000 residents have been evacuated. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared a state of emergency.

Total Devastation

Record heat and low humidity coupled with strong, dry Santa Ana winds gusting up to 75 miles per hour fanned flames from Los Angeles to three neighboring counties. Riverside County was the hardest hit.

Nicknamed the Triangle Complex fire, the Riverside County blaze torched 500 homes in the Oakridge Mobile Home Park in Sylmar, a suburb of Los Angeles. "Even those of us who know there's nothing left, we want to go in and kick over the rubble and see if we can find something, anything," said Sylmar resident Tracy Burns.

Fire agencies from four counties dispatched 575 fire engines, 16 helicopters and 3,700 firefighters to control the flames. "We have almost total devastation here," said Los Angeles fire captain Steve Ruda. "I can't even read the street names because the street signs are melting."

Firefighters Push Back the Flames

Lucretia Romero, 65, of Los Angeles hoped her house would be spared. Within an hour of seeing smoke from the fires, she watched as a wall of fire approached her house. "(Firefighters) would drop water, the water would squash the flames and then two minutes later the flames would come back," she said. Romero was given just 10 minutes to evacuate her home.

By Monday, winds had died down to about 20 miles per hour and firefighters were slowly gaining control of the fires. The largest of the three fires was 20 percent contained. "It's wonderful news," said Angela Garbiso of the Orange Country Fire Authority. "When it calms down, it obviously makes it easier for us to handle this massive undertaking."

As a precaution, officials in Orange County canceled classes at dozens of schools and called for mandatory evacuation of all areas located near fire zones.

The cause of the fires, which started burning last Thursday, is under investigation. At least 20 people have been injured.

The Next First Family

Welcome to the White House! Last Monday, President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush gave President-elect Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, a tour of the White House. It was the first face-to-face meeting since the election for the President and Obama.

It is a tradition for the newly elected President and the current President to have a meeting. Earlier, Bush had told White House employees that the "peaceful transfer of power is one of the hallmarks of a true democracy."

Bush and Obama greeted photographers and then met privately to discuss the economy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mrs. Bush showed Mrs. Obama the private part of the White House. They paid special attention to the bedrooms that Sasha, 7, and Malia, 10 the Obamas' daughters likely will use.

One of the first orders of business for Obama is to hire a staff of nearly 8,000 people. In the meantime, a transition team is hard at work. While the Bushes and Obamas met, the current White House chief of staff, Josh Bolten, and Obama's transition manager, John Podesta, held their own talks. "The American people will see a transition of government that is efficient and organized," said Podesta.