

Leema Todd

Imagine as you sit here that you are receiving texts from a colleague threatening to beat you up immediately following this session. Not only are you receiving texts but the people on either side of you are as well and you can tell by their reaction that the texts are in reference to you. You realize that this one colleague is gathering a dozen people to confront you after the session is over.

You leave the building. You are swarmed by men and women. The taunting begins and a few urge the first colleague to 'go ahead and punch you already'. He does, you go down and at least three other people climb on top of you and begin punching you. They only stop when they are sure you are not getting up. When you are able to recover enough to get up, you go back inside and report it. You are told it is of no concern as it did not happen inside Province House but outside on public property and it is not the staff's responsibility.

Imagine taking public transit to work every day. You sit in the middle of the bus. As the House resumes, the bus fills up daily with members of the other parties. They are behind you, beside you, in front of you. There is no other bus downtown at this particular time of day so you are forced to travel back and forth to work every day with people with whom you disagree. One day, they decide they are going to target you. Every day. This goes on for weeks. You have no escape. There is name-calling. They spit things at you and tell you to quit your job. One day they are eerily quiet. And they are texting furiously. Just as you get off the bus, someone shows you what they have been texting - a plan to attack you later that day as you are getting on the bus. There is a written threat to 'slit your throat'. You report them when you arrive and you get laughed at. It's just a little government banter. It's all talk. You are waved away and dismissed.

These scenarios are not merely figments of my imagination. I am drawing parallels to incidents happening in our schools. Both scenarios happened here in NS within the past four weeks. They are not isolated incidents. And they are certainly not bullying. These scenarios consist of harassment, physical and verbal assault, as well as threats and acts of violence. We as adults do not tolerate this behavior in our workplaces, and yet we expect our children to tolerate it in their places of learning and call it bullying.

Harrassment

Behavior intended to disturb or upset and is characteristically repetitive. In the legal sense it is intentional behavior which is found threatening or disturbing.

Abuse

Any action that intentionally harms or injures another person.

Physical Abuse

-Infliction of injury by another person

-Includes punching, kicking, biting, burning, beating or use of a weapon

Psychological Abuse

-Threatening the victim with violence, harassing them while at school, isolating the victim

Assault

A physical attack. The touching of another person with an intent to harm.

Stalking

A form of harassment generally comprised of repeated persistent following with no legitimate reason and with the intention of harming, or so as to arouse anxiety or fear of harm in the person being followed. Stalking may also take the form of harassing telephone calls, computer communications, letter-writing.

Children in our schools are being harassed, stalked, assaulted and abused. It is no longer 'school yard rough-housing' or kids being kids. It is abuse and needs to be treated as such.

EXAMPLES (on which parallel scenarios are based)

Boy beaten up outside Amherst school and teachers response was 'not our responsibility as not on school property'

Kennetcook Vice-Principal's response to a texting plot to beat up another student and threats to 'slit his throat' was "It's just kids and it's all just talk"

"I see it, every day and every hour and I ignore it, I don't want to but everyone seems to do it. I think as it happens what if that was my son would I ignore it then, and I know I wouldn't but I just turn around anyways and walk back into the classroom because it isn't my son and every night I tell myself that someone else will step up and deal with it, but every day it happens and no one ever does..."

This is a quote from one of the letters Todd White received from a Teachers' assistant in the Truro area.

SUGGESTIONS

'severely disruptive behaviour' is expanded upon so that it separately addresses harrassment, assault, threats or acts of violence whether they be physical, verbal or through text or social media

principals not only investigate and report but notify authorities in cases of harrassment, assault, abuse and threats/acts of violence - this could be the law enforcement liaison already within the school or a separate entity

all reported incidents be documented

anti-bullying representative in all schools and/or objective organization similar to Dept of Labour/Child Welfare whose sole purpose within the school is to address incidents of bullying/cyber-bullying and creating safe spaces for our children

that the legislation requires staff to report even if it is not on school property/school hours - so perhaps if it were written as 'students who are familiar to them' or is this already a blanket statement?

ie: are staff to support any and all suspected cases just as with child abuse?

AMANDA'S STORY

began with name-calling

she had no friends at her school

she moved schools twice due to bullying

she received texts threatening her and demanding she get out of her own school

15 kids confronted her in front of the rest of the school

someone said 'punch her already'

a girl threw her to the ground and punched her several times

other kids filmed it

she was left alone on the ground

she ran away alone and hid in a ditch

quotes from facebook immediately following her first suicide attempt:

"I hope she's dead"

"She deserved it"

"Did you wash the mud out of your hair?"

quotes from facebook six months later:

"She should try a different bleach this time"

"I hope she dies this time and isn't so stupid"

"I hope she sees this and kills herself"

They were also posting photos of bleach and ditches and tagging her in them.

Children don't begin their abusive behavior this way. It begins with words and 'playground rough-housing' and 'kids talking'