

SUCCESS DUE TO SCHOOL ANTI BULLYING STRATEGIES

My son Mike has seen many challenges over the years caused by his ADHD. From a very early age he was hyperactive, irritable and did not interact well with other children. His pre-school staff said that he talked incessantly and did not want to be part of the group.

He started in Special Education in first grade but had to transfer to another school, as those services were not available at our grade school. His peer relations were terrible and his grades were poor due to inability to concentrate, stay on task and complete assignments. This led to a very low self-esteem and at times he just “wanted to be dead”.

We found a wonderful child psychiatrist and fine-tuned his medications, which helped immensely with the concentration and impulsivity, however, by that time he was “Marked” by his classmates and either not chosen to be on teams or picked on and harassed.

He has been mainstreamed since Middle School with only a support period consisting of social skills and guided study in Special Education, which continues in high school.

He has been unable to take the bus since 7th grade because of the harassment. He either had a bad day because of what happened on the bus in the morning or did not want to go to school because of what happened on the way home. It was preventing him from being successful in school.

His freshman year was a disaster. While he passed all of the classes, his grades were between D's and B's. There were many incidents of bullying during the year, most of which he reported to the staff. He felt that the perpetrators were not being punished and the bullying continued. At one point during that year I considered hospitalization due to his remarks about killing himself. The last day of his freshman year when I picked him up from school he told me “I successfully completed my freshman year as being the MOST PICKED ON KID IN THE SCHOOL.”

I immediately emailed the school superintendent, psychologist, principal and anyone else who had contact with my son and told them that something had to change and if they needed help with anti-bullying material I would be glad to assist them. I also requested that the

superintendent stop at our home before the start of the next year to listen to my son's description of the things that happened to him.

She did come and made sure he understood that EVERY time there is an incident he needed to tell an adult or they could not help him. She also purchased some videos and books about bullying for the school staff and had a meeting with the principal and Special Education instructor regarding this issue.

Two weeks into sophomore year some students were teasing him and he went right to his Special Ed teacher. She had the school liaison officer involved and was incredibly firm with the students and outlined severe consequences.

After that, the harassment seemed to stop and gradually he was able to feel better about going to school and picked his grades up. His final report card of sophomore year was all "A's including Algebra which he barely passed in freshman year.

I keep in very close contact with the school personnel. The week before each medication check appointment I email them asking for any changes in his mood, behavior, homework completion, and class participation. The last emails from his teachers read something like this: Mike's been working like a dog in here during guided study...His attitude has been impeccable. He's been a pleasure to be around. Another teacher wrote, "He is studious, insightful, dependable and hard-working. I wouldn't change a thing! ☺" A third teacher wrote, "He is doing really well and seems to be learning quite a bit about personal finance. His behavior etc. has remained constant. He is a pleasure to have in class, asks great questions and never is anything close to a discipline problem. He always has great control of himself. I only regret that I can't have him in class again because he has taken every class that I teach."

I firmly believe that Mike's success is mostly due to the Elimination of the Barrier of bullying! His self-esteem is much improved and he is confident and determined to do the best he can. All children deserve this success and I believe we can change the school environment. It takes hard work from school personnel and a change in attitude. It is not ok to humiliate, make fun of or be cruel in any way shape or form. It is not acceptable because "this is the age that kids get picked on the most". There are many

anti-bullying programs already available and Wisconsin is one of eight states to receive the “Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI). In addition to anti-stigma public service announcements, there will be training for school staff, which will give instructors the tools to help identify a child who may need some help or evaluation and refer the child to the proper school staff to perform an assessment.

*The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration Center for Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) has created many **free** publications on children’s mental health and also has new material on bullying called:*

“MAKE TIME to LISTEN TAKE TIME to TALK --- about Bullying”

It includes a large booklet entitled “Bullying is Not a Fact of Life”(order #CMHS-SVP-0052). They were out of this booklet the last time I called to place an order. The smaller brochure is “Take Action Against Bullying” brochure (order #CMHS-SVP-0056). Then there is a group of cards (order #CMHS-SVP-0051) and a Plastic Bag (Order #CMHS-SVP-0087) to put these items in along with anything else you wish to provide.

SAMHSA toll free # 1-800-789-2647 or www.mentalhealth.org.

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