

## **Ep.24 Bullying Prevention Month**

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

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Hello and welcome to episode 24 of the what's up APS podcast. On this episode, we are going to talk about bully prevention. So I thought we talk about bullying prevention at Arlington public schools and what's out there and talk to you about what bullying is and some definitions and how we train our staff and things like that. That's on a podcast today is our director of Administrative Services Jeanette Allen supervisor of counseling services Pam McClellan thank you both for joining us and what podcast. Thank you Frank. Thanks Frank. So just a couple of things just to point out.

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Like I said Bullying Prevention Month is a whole month of October so we want to highlight what we do in Arlington public schools to help and put an end to bullying.

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Just a couple of sentences draw to our listeners nationally 20 percent of high school students and 28 percent of secondary students since Grade 6 through 12 have experienced some bullying and that was done by a recent survey that's on the CDC website.

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So first off bullying is there it's seen at all levels but it would start with what is bullying and how does a P.S. to fight bullying.

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Thanks Frank. ABS defines bullying as repeated infliction or attempted infliction of injury discomfort or humiliation on a student by one or more students and it typically just to build on what Jeanette said it's an imbalance there's an imbalance of power.

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It can be physical bullying it can be verbal bullying like using slurs. It can be social bullying like spreading rumors or social isolation or it could be cyber bullying. So uploading text or photos that harm someone's reputation or sending abusive e-mails when you think about all that.

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Just everyday run of the mill kids teasing each other is not considered bullying or is that just kids being kids.

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It depends on the frequency and if it's repeated over time so it's a one time event or an isolated event that took place over the course of the day then not necessarily that investigation would be able to determine that. But we are definitely looking for a pattern and a good amount of time that it's repeated to be considered bullying.

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So for parents listening to us how can they tell if their child is being bullied. What are some of the signs that they can watch for.

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Well in some cases students or their children may not tell them. So parents can look at for signs like unexplained injuries. If this student or a child is having trouble sleeping if they're trying to avoid coming to school if any of the things that they have the items that they have are lost or destroyed and sometimes you know if parents see some changes in eating habits of their child those are some of the signs of how you can tell if your child maybe being experiencing bullying behavior.

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What can you do if you see some of these signs. What can a parent do.

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So a parent at one of the great tools has to ask open ended questions try to find out you know what's happening in their day and problem solve with them what they can but they can also do is document document what's happening and speak to school staff. But we also want to do. Parents can do is help build a relationship between your child and a trusted adult that they can access when they're needed. When you know they need to at school. So there are signs and there are things that you can do if you observe these things.

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If children in school observe what they think is bullying what can they do.

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They too can also report to a trusted adult or should their parents and asked the pass to follow the same procedures to come and talk to administration or a counselor helped develop really help help their child develop a relationship with a trusted adult so that at school so that they are reporting to school but that's something that we have that children should feel safe to be able to report. Right. What they're witnessing at school to an administrator or a counselor and or something that you're on our website I noticed in one place.

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Do not blame your child for what has happened. Talk a little bit about that and why that's important.

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Well we we don't want to blame children for behavior behavior is purposeful. So there's a reason why a person is behaving in a certain way. So what we'd like to advocate is instead of asking or saying what's wrong with you what's wrong with you know the other or your child. We want to ask What's happened to you. You know what's what has occurred that is creating these bullying behaviors what can we learn from that. Because that would then lead us to what you know might be the possible remedy or some conversation we can have about. You know coming up with alternative behaviors.

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We talk about the whole child and bullying prevention and how those two are related. What does that mean and why is it important.

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Well the adverse effects of bullying to reduce a student's sense of belonging in their school and the sense of safety they feel when they're at school and then they may avoid coming to school. So students have to feel like they belong and that they're safe. And only when that is a feeling that they have can they focus on instruction.

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And additionally our new strategic plan goal student well-being healthy safe and supporting students. One of our performance objectives is to reduce the percentage of students who are reporting being bullied based on our survey. So this is a very important issue for us and asked him mentioned we want all students to feel safe at school. All students to be able to access their education. So it is important that we are we use preventative measures and that we're proactive with talkable disciplining a little bit. But.

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When you when you look at it across the grade levels I think students in secondary school in high school I think they understand what bullying is. When you go down to the kindergarten first grade levels are students no advantage when Boeing is or do they not quite understand what it is.

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Well they may understand what it is but it is one of the things that we're teaching them we're teaching them specifically how to recognize bullying and what the differences between bullying and and having a conflict with someone are you asking about.

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We have an OK curriculum on bullying. What is that. What are we teaching kids and how is that at different levels.

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So we know in order to focus on the whole child and to boost our you know engagement in student learning we need to teach social emotional learning. So our Qa5 curriculum through second step we use second step which is an evidence based curriculum we teach about resiliency and so we teach social emotional skills like for example like empathy or emotion regulation problem solving and then we also teach students K through 5 how to recognize bullying how to refuse it and how to report it to an adult.

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So we also teach some of the upper grades fifth and fourth and fifth about bystanders and cyber bullying. So we're teaching them those schools so that they can bounce back if something happens they know how to respond. And they know how to recognize we have a separate curriculum for middle school. We also. Teach social emotional learning there and there were really focusing on building strong friendships and avoiding negative ones. We also talk about with them self-control when they experience strong emotions and.

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Then preventing bullying and harassment. So you know basically how do you identify and avoid and and respond when there's a serious peer conflict.

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There time I was doing or talk about relationships and knowing who to go to. And of course avoiding exactly that part is the same throughout the grades. And the most people since bullying verbal physical face to face bullying but kids can also be bullied online that can be through social media and text messages. We touched on earlier you talked a little more about that and how parents can tell if their child is being a victim of cyber bullying.

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Well starting with how you can tell maybe looking at the changes again like we discussed earlier changes in your child around sleeping eating school avoidance maybe changes in mood anxiety. Cyber bullying is difficult it's you. You may not see it. You may not be able to tell. So it's it's basically photos or text that are uploaded that insult a student or are you know trying to harm their reputation. And those abusive e-mails so it's a little bit more difficult. But it is important to report. To report those incidences as well.

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Would you recommend parents when this happens more at the older levels once kids get phones and have e-mail viewers more. Would you recommend that parents have access to their e-mails on their phones and look at Dial regularly.

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Well one of the old golden rules we've always used is to have have computers centrally located in the house. Now I know that that's quite difficult to get a student especially an older student to share that kind of information. So again you know. Before. Forcing them to show their phone and stuff I would just look for any change in there and how they're behaving or how they're acting.

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Now I would add to that in addition to the change in behavior especially with cyberbullying if there's a change in their phone usage or their online presence if they're avoiding being online or avoiding being on the phone that might be a sign that something is happening online.

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Talk a little bit about I know we touched on this earlier. What do you do if you suspect their child is being bullied at school or online. What happens. What should they do. What are the steps involved.

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So I believe Pam mentioned earlier that all of our t all of our staffs are direct reports however those who do the investigations are the administrator and are with it in conjunction with the counselor. So direct reporting to an administrator a parent wants to talk to the administrator counselor. They can do that. Also we have a online form that is available on our Web site. And the bullying prevention Web site the CPS and some schools also have online complaint forms that parents or children can access and some of them are anonymous so they can submit those and then once it's received by the administration we begin an investigation and of the claim and then we let all part we notify all parties involved and then determine what action steps to take after that. One of the things that I remember when I was in school specially in junior high was bringing both parties together so that the.

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Child is doing the boy and the child that is bullying. Is that something that happens now.

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No that's that's definitely discouraged. It's very important to separate them to not put this student who's been victimized in the same room with someone who has been using bullying behavior. So it's not a peer mediation because typically these aren't friends you know that. And there is that imbalance in power say you don't want to put two people in the room where one has more power than the other. So typically after the discipline occurs you know each student needs support. Right. The person who's using bullying behaviors and even the witness are because they can feel anxiety and guilt and you know powerlessness and you know are the adults in control. And then the student who's been victimized they all need separate types of support.

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So you know but we do not look at peer mediation as an appropriate response to bullying lot more about the discipline for somebody who has done bullying or bullying another student or a peer. What happens and what does it look like at different levels. It is a case by case basis.

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So as a public school system our main purpose is to educate. And that goes alongside that's also our philosophy with our approach to discipline. So our main purpose is to educate and support students at all levels. It's an opportunity to reteach or teach correct behaviors appropriate behaviors. And that is again at all levels but depending on the severity of the bullying it may lead to disciplinary actions which could include alternative suspension like changing a schedule a parent conference requiring that the student meets with the counselor or social worker school psychologists and then we have some non school alternatives. Nonschool are alternatives that include like detention or before or after school or saturday school up to in school or out of school suspension so that that range is for all levels. But again our first step is to educate.

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And to reteach or teach that behavior appropriate behavior.

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Sounds like it depends on the severity to it.

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And boy it does yeah and sometimes bullying becomes threatening behavior or it could be based it could turn into discrimination. So it just depends on on the severity of it.

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And we'll all. All bullying we take seriously and investigate. But it depends on the level and the type of bullying that's occurring. It depends on the.

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Act the disciplinary action that's taken.

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And we've talked a lot about what happens if your child has been the victim of well what happens if if your child is one that's engaging in these negative behaviors is a way for families to tell that that's happening other than that of being contacted by their school. Well there are a few things and they may or may not be you know.

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Bullying behavior. But do they get into physical or verbal fights or arguments. Are they becoming aggressive in any way. Are they being sent to the principal's office. Now they may not be being sent for bullying behaviors but that's something that would be a you know something to explore. Do they have friends who are you know engaging in bullying behavior maybe. Do they blame other people for their problems or they might have unexplained money or items. So those are those are some of the things said at least you could look at and then look deeper to see if if that's what's going on.

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What about you. And I think we mentioned this earlier on is the talk of asking open ended questions. Give an example some of those open ended question the parents get their kids to see if something is happening.

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So I might ask around friendships like you know how how does the how does lunch time work. You know we're to students where students go in the school you know and then you can start narrowing that down you know where to where do you go. As part of that you know who are you sitting with. And then just apply that it's just anything that's not answerable by no or a yes. Right. That you know so instead of asking. Well it can be good to ask specific questions like How was algebra today not right. Or how do you feel the classes you know how how is your relationship with other people and teachers that the kids behave so just just basically ask for a story about their day.

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So if you to see your child where you have lunch and they say you know you set off by myself that's probably a trigger for the parents to look into it more to see if something is going on at lunch or during recess or whatever.

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Yeah that be a really great reason to you know maybe call the school counselor and see what can be done to you know establish those friendships which are really critical at school because that's a concern of a parent that their child is reporting not eating with anyone and sitting in the cafeteria alone.

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Certainly enlistee counselor or the administrator to observe and see what in fact is happening in the cafeteria. Just an extra pair of eyes and then that could be reported back to the parent. We've talked a lot about.

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The children and the education of child support and provide them and it seems like education and support is a theme throughout all of this. So what happens is this stuff or more stuff being trained. I know you mentioned goals in the new strategic plan. But how are they being trained and what can staff do to address bullying.

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Well we we consider each staff person a first responder. So everyone is accountable to being able to recognize and respond to and report bullying that students staff and we want families in the community to feel the same way to be able to recognize intervene and report it. We see a lot of bullying you know and among adults and children and the nation today and so we really believe that in order to respond to it we need a coordinated response. And so we Jeannette will tell. We can talk about some of the policy review but we do we do try to address it at all of our beginning of the year.

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Meetings are bullying and harassment policies reviewed with all staff at the beach at the beginning of the year. And often times like this month since it's bullying prevention month again it's revisited as well. And then as each school looks at their data and see and sees what trends there.

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As far as like bullying or any types of incidents any type of disciplinary incidents are they. So it may need to be readdressed or revisited at that point it's reviewed annually.

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And then again schools are reviewing their patterns of discipline monthly and then if it's something that is coming up to the surface it's something that's addressed again at the school level working we're going to find more information about bullying.

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And if they do have questions where should they go should they talk to you first.

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So we have several resources on our Web site that they could visit. There's many many resources online. And we've published a couple of articles on this topic that parent or are free to read. One can also in Virginia look at the Department of Education and look at the information that they provide. They have a national policy and model on bullying prevention and then looking. At Jannette mentioned our policy and procedure and take a look at that. But in terms of. Personnel I'd say either talk to an assistant principal or talk to a school counselor and they can give you information and further you know further resources that you might that a parent might be able to access. I think this has been pretty informative for our listeners and for our families to know what goes on in the bullying as it is.

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Is a hot topic in education because it can lead to more serious consequences as kids get older. So I want to thank you both for joining us. One of the articles of Pam was referencing was we set out on Friday. And it's on our Web site. A coordinated response to bullying yes approach tips for parents I think a place to start and much more information on the site. I want to thank you both for joining us and. For the information that you share tonight. If you have any questions for us you can reach us @APSVirginia on Twitter or if you have news as vitæ got us send us an email and you can find us on social media on our Web site [www.apsva.us/podcast](http://www.apsva.us/podcast) or find us on Stitcher or wherever you find your podcasts. Thanks for joining us and have a great day.