

John Duggan: Welcome. This is a special podcast for the American Counseling Association. I'm John Duggan. ACA realizes our communities today face unique challenges, challenges unknown to past generations. Kids for example, in school face aggression and pressures to succeed, at home relationships break apart, and there may be violence in neighborhoods and local communities and media. Media sometimes can bring global unrest into our homes and right into the lives of our children.

The American Counseling Association also recognizes that good things happen in families, in our homes, our schools and our communities. We build focusing on strength, resiliency and good healthy relationships makes a difference in the lives of our youths. And that's why we have prepared a special series of podcasts for volunteers and staff who work directly with youth in community centers. We're here to provide some support and information that can help you do your jobs and volunteer and make a difference in the lives of our kids.

Today, I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Thelma Duffey, licensed professional counselor. Dr. Duffey is professor and chair in the Department of Counseling at the University of Texas at San Antonio, and she's the 64th President of the American Counseling Association. Welcome to the program, Dr. Duffey.

Dr. Thelma Duffey: Thank you, John.

John: It's good to be with you, thanks for joining us. I'd like to start by getting your definition of bullying. What is it and how can volunteers understand this behaviors?

Dr. Duffey: Bullying is a very destructive behavior and it just causes so much pain, as we all know and the effects of bullying are so painful that there are times that people just can't cope with them at all and by definition, bullying is a repeated, unwanted, and aggressive behavior towards a person by one or more other people. It can involve physical or emotional mistreatment of another person and it's always about wielding power and in that show bullying is about power. People who bully usually do so in groups, with the intention of hurting, dominating, humiliating or socially excluding another person and this can of course leave the person being hopeless, humiliated, and very often alone.

John: That definition resonates so I can understand how hurtful this can be. Would you say that there is different ways that people are bullied, can you talk a little bit more about how that looks?

Dr. Duffey: The age-old way is physical bullying. Physical bullying and verbal bullying have gone on through the ages as you describe. We also have psychological bullying and in more recent times, we've seen an epidemic of cyber-bullying.

John: How about breaking each one of those down?

Dr. Duffey: Physical bullying has behaviors like hitting, or pushing, or shoving. These are the least common forms of bullying. Even though, physical bullying is something that people continue to deal with every day, other people have verbal bullying experiences and this is definitely more common and people verbally bully others when they call people names that are mean, hurtful or derogatory. They might use sarcasm or a curse word. They might make jokes but the other person isn't going to think it's funny and they might joke about the person's religion or family finances, their sexual orientation, their ethnicity or about other things such as how a person dresses. Verbal bullying is definitely a common bullying for people below-the-belt.

Sometimes people bully other people in ways that are harder to pin down and we call this psychological bullying because it is manipulative. I'll give you an example, after teasing or making fun of someone a person would say: "can't you take a joke?" when the other person doesn't think it's funny and the truth is that jokes aren't funny when they are made at another person's expense and the hard thing about this kind of bullying is that people who are around, might not see or know that bullying is even happening and it's because it's intended to be hidden.

While this kind of bullying does not leave any physical marks, it definitely leaves an emotional mark. More recently, we have a real ride in cyber-bullying. Social media like Facebook, twitter, Instagram, e-mail, or people just using their mobile phones these are all used to hurt people in ways that can truly hurt and be out of control. One of the hard parts about cyber-bullying is that people are humiliated, they're stalked or they're exposed in very public ways often with very terrible consequences.

John: Okay, think about what it would be like for a young child on an after school program and their constantly teased and habitually kind of left out like we're not going to play with you, can that type of experience turn into a bullying encounter?

Dr. Duffey: Absolutely, social exclusion is a very common way that people bully and use power because power comes in group of children who want to be with a group, talking about an after school club or even at recess. Children want to belong. Belonging is basic, I think its human need and when children are habitually left out, socially excluded and sometimes when people might even encourage others of socially exclude a person, that is most definitely a form of bullying.

John: What information can we share with our listeners to help them understand why people bully in the first place?

Dr. Duffey: There are number of reasons. Two reasons in particular stand out. I believe: one is out of insecurity and the second is out of the sense of entitlement, two polar opposites. For example, a person who feels insecure -can bully another person can bully another person to feel a sense of personal power because that person is trying to make themselves feel big at the expense of the person who they are making



out to be small. And this kind of behavior courses cool and overtime it can be a habit and if the person gets attention from other people for being cruel, it can feed that need.

John: So, it almost reinforces it if they get too much attention from the-

Dr. Duffey: Exactly, right.

John: -and so will it be helpful for volunteers or staff at the club, let's say for kids and adolescence, to stop the reinforcement?

Dr. Duffey: Absolutely. To the degree that would be able to stop the reinforcement of any negative behavior like bullying is a good thing to also train the children and those around to know that it is not an acceptable act. So, they themselves can intervene as well.

John: That sounds powerful because really, a lot of what happens for the volunteers and staff is modeling that behavior for the kids and quite honestly, they're modelling for each other.

Dr. Duffey: Exactly.

John: Yes. How about looking at how power relates to bullying, can we talk a little more about that?

Dr. Duffey: Absolutely. Bullying truly has everything to do at the core with a wielding of power and people bully to feel powerful and then they belittle other people to make the other person look as if he or she doesn't have any power. If you think back to school experiences, there's often a pecking order in many groups and by picking on and bullying another person, it could establish the person doing the bullying as the person with the control, and that is very unfortunate because a person with a real sense of power and confidence just isn't going to bully anyone else. When it comes to power again, a bully can be stronger, bigger, older, more popular. A bully can be the leader of the pack but that doesn't make him or her genuinely powerful. Certainly, that is not how it feels to the person being bullied because the situation can feel very hopeless and they can feel very powerless.

John: Can you think of an example of a child that may be you've helped?

Dr. Duffey: I can speak to a situation where I worked with a young boy. Who was really smart, worked hard in school. He was friendly. He likes getting along well with others. He was a kind person. His family was a hard-working family. He is very well-loved. They weren't especially well connected in the neighborhood but people loved them. For no reason that anyone could imagine, this boy subjected to bullying throughout his elementary school years. People had taped paper to his back that would say: "kick me" and they didn't talk to him unless they were making fun of him.



One day, they started writing things about him online. Doing the cyber-bullying. This is when his parents found out, about what was happening and they got him to see me. It truly was a devastating experience for him and he went to a small school. He belonged to a small school so he'd been with the same group of children and it was very lonely for him.

John: It almost feels like there were just such an incredible piece of shunning that went on as well as the taunting.

Dr. Duffey: Exactly, and he really didn't want to talk to anybody about it and in fact he came to counseling because his parents just literally, brought him in to the office and when I was able to see what was happening, I knew that he had so little control in his school environment that I wanted to give him a little bit and I told him that he didn't have to see me. That I knew, that he needed to see somebody, his parents were going to take him because they wanted to help.

And they wanted this to be so much better for him and that it could be, that he didn't have to work with me and if he wanted we could figure out who he could work with. By the end of the session, we had made enough of a connection that we agreed that we would work together and it ended up being just a very good therapeutic relationship and I was able to see him do some nice growth but it was not easy and it was not quick.

John: What I think is beautiful is that you offered him a choice and it sounds like very few other moments in his experience there was the ability to make a choice and to really determine good things about himself.

Dr. Duffey: It's true and that's what I had hoped for. I wanted him to feel some sense of empowerment and choice, as you say. And I think that's what people need, when they are feeling cornered or alone or mistreated. It's a feel of their own personal sense of power in whatever way that they can have it. I think that when you're a teacher or a counselor or a club leader that if we can do what we can to empower children in the middle of their very stressful situation that, that can be one way that can help.

John: This might be a good time to remind listeners, if they are volunteer or staff at a club, they're not trained as a counselor or a behavior health professional and yet it's important to have that list of providers in the community so if there is a need to help a family make that connection to someone such as yourself they could do that through a list of referrals and really do the best effort working with the family.

Dr. Duffey: Right, that's a good point, John. I think having a list of resources for whatever needs might come available, that is always a good thing. When a counselor is involved to be able to work together as a team takes a village sometimes to make really good things happen. Counselors are trained and ready and hoping to make that kind of difference that we're talking about.

John: Why is it so hard for children and adolescence to speak up? What holds them back?

Dr. Duffey: No one wants to be a snitch. They don't want to be the children who might be further hurt because they tattle-tale. They don't want to be perceived as weak. A lot of times, people are embarrassed or afraid, it's hard to admit that you're being mistreated because sometimes when we're mistreated, we wondered what we did to bring the bad behavior on-

John: Am I at fault, am I to blame for this?

Dr. Duffey: -"Am I at fault? Did I do this? What's wrong with me?" I want to reiterate the point, it's not a self-esteem issue is when somebody is being hurt for reasons they can't understand. It's a very normal response to wonder what is wrong with me. And then another reason that they may not tell is: "what if I tell" and this happened, "what if I tell and nobody does anything, what if I'm not supported?" Another reason is retaliation: "what if I tell and somebody does take a stand, a person in authority does do something about it and then I have to experience retaliation, what if it gets worse?" These are some of the reasons that people have a hard time speaking up for themselves.

John: What about kids that may be reluctant to reach-out and somebody doesn't respond and take them seriously that could be a significant breach or loss of trust? What behaviors might the volunteer or staff person look for?

Dr. Duffey: You happen to notice that the child is changing behaviors. Let's just say somebody who's characteristically cheerful or happy is becoming more withdrawn or quiet or you see sadness in their eyes or silence or wearing off on their own. There's a change in behavior. That would be one sign, to at least be noticing that there could be something. Here, she may have unusual or unexplainable injuries.

You might find bruises or cuts. And certainly if you have the physical signs in addition to the withdrawn behaviors, that would be something to look for. Or, maybe you have a child who is starting to report being sick more often. I remember working with someone who complained about headaches, then he had stomachaches, and his parents let him stay home. But, after a while he had been absent too many times according to the law, and no one knew that every time he opened his laptop, he'd see some really terrible comments about him on screen.

He didn't tell anyone that he was being mistreated at school. It was a truly painful time for him and when his mother found out, it was obviously very painful for her. This young boy, like so many like him, have a hard time sleeping. I'd be on the lookout for nightmares, or not being able to fall asleep. It's hard to function when you're not living the normal life as one would expect. It's hard to function without sleep, and it's especially hard to be awake knowing or believing that people are making fun of you.



Another sign that we look for relates to grades. If there's a sudden decline in grades, or a disinterest in school, together. Or, if we're talking about after school clubs or things of that sort, if you have a child who historically enjoyed going and is absent a lot. I would wonder, what is that about? And, could there be something in the environment that is not feeling good to him, or is actually hurting him? I can think of a few situations. I remember one young girl who was taunted by some of her peers and left out of social situations.

She was becoming increasingly quiet and she smiled, she tried to pretend that everything was fine. But, even when you looked at her smile, it was sad. She spent a whole lot more time alone. This was hard for the grownups who cared about her to see. It was definitely hard for me, as a counselor, but it did let us know that something was happening. After a while, she was able to acknowledge more and more. She wasn't able to do it at first, in her case, she felt shame.

John: That reminds me of a saying, "What we resist, may persist."

Dr. Duffey: That's one I know well.

John: What would be some things that volunteers or staff might do to empower kids, to help them stand strong or feel confident when they are faced with some of these challenges?

Dr. Duffey: One of the ways in which volunteers, or any sort of adult, in a situation can help is by empowering those around us. The way we model our behaviors is important because we're reflecting what we hope the children around us will also do. When children see us demonstrating confidence, compassion, and courteous communication, they notice.

It's important that we tell children that they're cared about, that they're deserving of love. And, that we are there to ensure their safety, if we do it in a non-shaming way, a non-patronizing way. If we're able to do it in a supportive way, I think that can go a long way - that helping someone, at least know that in that moment that they are not alone.

John: Let me play devil's advocate for a minute. What if somebody comes along and they say, "Oh, come on, this is not bullying, this is just kids being kids," what can we do?

Dr. Duffey: Well, that's a really good point because that will happen. I think it's important for us to be able to be clear if we're educated in this enough, for us to be able to have the confidence to say, "Oh, actually, I don't agree. I think what we need to do is help support, and make everyone here feel good." And then, instead of getting into a power struggle with the person who's disagreeing, again, act in a way you would want someone to act in that situation, but take a stance and say, "That's not the way I see it and what I think we need to do is help everybody here feel a little better because this kind of teasing isn't making the person being teased about feel any better."



John: Okay. One example I use is, don't pick up the tug of war rope about whether this is or isn't, but, try to find a way to reframe or describe it differently.

Dr. Duffey: Right. Exactly, reframing is a perfect example. And if we were to see a bullying situation happen, I think it is important we step in, immediately, and handle it at the same time, as privately as possible.

John: Please say more about that.

Dr. Duffey: That, even though we're interrupting something that could escalate, that we handle it privately. That's one of the first things. That we shouldn't expect to resolve the situation in the moment. The whole point is to break it up in that moment, we can work on resolving it later because student witnesses also shouldn't be forced to comment on the incident in front of their peers. And, if someone needs medical help, or support, it's important that we intervene.

Modeling by staff can be an excellent tool when we're trying to defuse bullying situations. When someone sees a bullying situation occur, I think it's important that we behave in ways that we would like the children around us to behave because our actions are powerful and they communicate far more than our words do sometimes.

John: Definitely, the actions are louder than words.

Dr. Duffey: Absolutely.

John: It sounds like it's also important for volunteers to not be working solo in these types of situations where bullying could be a potential problem. I would almost want to have another volunteer who's there to help work with the group.

Dr. Duffey: Yes, that's an excellent point. I talked earlier about the power of the group. There's also the power of the group when we're talking about leaders, or the adults. We have an opportunity to work together to defuse situations, to intervene, to be supportive, and to help create the safety that we want.

John: We have been talking a lot about what to do in the bullying situations and how to address the behavior, but what can the volunteers do to prevent it from occurring in the first place? How can they set up an environment that is bully-free, and perhaps more accepting of diversity?

Dr. Duffey: That's something that, hopefully, more people are striving more and more to do in of the different settings in which we are caring for children. One way that I see that we can do this is by being clear that bullying isn't acceptable, and to very clearly communicate this so that everybody understands. Basically, that means creating a culture of safety within our organization. Just because we have what appears to be a peaceful, calm culture, that doesn't mean that we don't continue to name it as important and continue to create it. And, let the group leaders set the example. Another way is to



use peers as a form of positive power. Children can empower each other in a situation. That's one of the really neat things that I've seen, and that we read and hear about. It doesn't have to be the kind of intervention that can put them at risk, just to be kind, to look out for each other. That's, again, a culture that we build.

Another one is to unify around a cause. One of the things that we've seen is inviting everyone involved to developing a mission statement that reflects what staff, students, and parents will do to combat bullying and promote a safe environment. So, really make it important. One of the things that we've done recently, and that I've certainly been working on this year through the anti-bullying initiative, is to launch a campaign to raise awareness about the devastating impact of bullying. By raising awareness, we are working to prevent future occurrences of bullying.

John: I love that idea, especially about the mission statement and creating that sense of community. That mission statement is so important because if the kids and the staff can all know it, it's part of the daily mantra. It's a beautiful idea.

Dr. Duffey: Right. It's built in, that's exactly right. It's built into the culture, and it's not only an expectation, it's a way of being that children can take pride in and promoting as well.

John: Really wondering about those kids that could be in a program where there's different ages, different backgrounds, ethnic, racial. In your view, is there a universal way that we could address those issues and help kids in a program where there's probably so many different socio, economic,—it can go on and on, so many different backgrounds come together—what do you think about that?

Dr. Duffey: There's definitely ways to talk to children about bullying that can cross all cultures. I think the first thing is, we need to acknowledge the good and use praise and positive reinforcement to support positive behaviors. This is something that any of us can do across cultures. Second, we can make it clear that bullying is not acceptable in our space. Everyone needs to be aware that there are consequences to bullying, and bullying isn't going to be tolerated.

There, again, that can be done in all settings, with all age groups. It's staff who intervene in bullying situations that need to be clear that bullying must stop. And, when delivering feedback to children who behave in hurtful ways, it's important that we communicate authority without chastising or bullying them. That's the universal language of do unto others. It's important that, whatever we do, we help the children involved on all sides feel empathy by the way that we treat them, even when they are not behaving well.



John: What about different prevention efforts that a volunteer or staff might use? Are there any suggestions of campaigns, or resources that are out there, that folks could turn to?

Dr. Duffey: Well, certainly. I have one very immediate example that ACA, American Counseling Association, has recently launched. It's a national campaign designed to combat bullying and we're calling it the Impact Project. Our goal is to use technology and social media to show that we all make an impact on one another, and what we would like to do is recognize the people who've made an impact on us so that we can mitigate experiences of bullying, violence, rejection, isolation.

The whole idea is technology, like we talked about earlier, can be used to hurt, it can be used to isolate, to demean and humiliate. The whole goal in this project is to use that same forum, technology through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, through whatever means we have, to use it for the good, to show gratitude. One of the team leaders could model that by filling out a little form-- we have that on the ACA website-- a little Know Your Impact form. If it were me, I might be able to write something on there about a big sister, a young boy I knew who saw that I didn't get as many candies as the others after a pinata at a birthday party. She brought over this little dime ring, a plastic ring that made me feel like a million dollars and I was so happy. There's some gratitude that there was a bigger sister there who was just kind.

John: We're coming to the end of our time. Do you have any final thoughts that you'd like to share with our listeners?

Dr. Duffey: It really does start with us. It starts with our own ability to listen, the way we respond, our expectations of good, of examining our own biases, what preconceived ideas might somebody have that they could inadvertently show through a behavior that would then be modeled to children. I really think that if children-- it's not to say that it would be a perfect world-- but I think if children have the modelling of respect and care and inclusivity, we will see very different behaviors in our school yards, in our clubs, and in our homes even.

John: It's that humility to listen to the kids. I think this is a very important project and your message is-- I'm confident is going to help many. Thank you.

Dr. Duffey: I certainly hope so, John, thank you so much.

John: And that's our program for today. If you have any questions or comments, please email them to podcast@counseling.org. This program is copyright 2016 by the American Counseling Association, all rights reserved.