

Workshop provides tools against bullying



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Vivian Spears was thrust into the world of bullying as a concerned grandmother who is speaking up after her granddaughter was bullied and choked by another student in an Alabama school.

Nearly every student nationwide has either been bullied or has witnessed bullying occur, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Department of Education.

Too often, victims of bullying commit suicide and perpetrators of bullying grow up to be domestic violence abusers. Just last year, four Montgomery Public Schools student suicides stemmed from bullying.

Spears, who traveled to Montgomery from Tuscaloosa Tuesday, was one of nearly 100 attendees who came out to learn more about the issue and laws concerning bullying at the Bullying Prevention and Disabilities workshop titled, A ROCK Solid Approach.

"I am here as a parent and a grandparent who cares," Spears said. "I want to know what's in Alabama. Are there laws to protect children, whether they have a disability or not ... I wanted to help my granddaughter and provide immediate information to her."

The workshop, sponsored by the Family Sunshine Center and Auburn Montgomery, is way to inform concerned citizens, give them tools and discuss solutions, said Melanie Beasley with FSC.

The FSC is a domestic violence shelter and counseling program for Montgomery and six other counties and recently became involved in the area of bullying of youth.

"We've been hitting bullying hard for the last five years," Beasley said. "We got involved in bullying because when we look at the profile of a bully and the profile of a domestic violence perpetrator, they are very similar."

"We felt that if we could teach kids not to bully at an early age, then maybe we could prevent them from bullying their families," Beasley added.

Both perpetrators want power and control over someone else.

"With a bully, they want power or control over you and they will get it by calling you names, treating you poorly, hurting you or embarrassing you in a public setting," Beasley said.

While bullies often use physical, verbal or relational bullying, which attacks someone's social standing, cyber-bullying is now used to hurt their victims over social media.

"It used to be that bullying was contained to the school, the playground and the bus," Wendy Ciambor said, a FSC prevention educator. "Today more bullying is happening in our neighborhoods and on the internet and it can happen anytime."

"With a limitless amount of tech, bullying follows kids home and into their bedrooms," Ciambor added.

It's a scary thought.

What is even scarier, is that four children in Montgomery Public Schools committed suicide last year because of bullying, according to Cherrie Walker, the district behavior prevention coordinator for MPS.

"Just one is too many," Walker said. "We have to make sure we are cutting that number each year, because it is so serious, every time it happens it's devastating. We go to the schools and do crisis intervention for our teachers, counselors and administrators to help students through that bereavement time."

Walker attends similar workshops to learn all she can about the topic to share with her staff. Also present, were area counselors, teachers, law enforcement officers, daycare providers and a large group of students from Alabama State University.

Kelsey Watts is in her second year of graduate school studying occupational therapy and she and her group are currently helping an MPS middle school.

"We'll be going into the classrooms and putting on an hour-long program with the kids to address bullying. That age-group is very susceptible and we

think that if we go out there, we can do activities and look at how bullying affects those being bullied.”

The workshop was provided through a grant with the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities. Those with disabilities of an especially vulnerable group to bullying, Beasley said.

“It can be Autism, ADHD, poor sight or hearing,” Beasley said. “We want to prepare those people who interact with kids on a routine basis what signs to look for in a victim and a bully so they can intervene early.”

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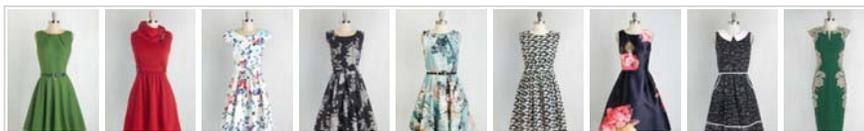


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