

Safe Environment



Diocese of Wheeling - Charleston

Spring 2018

Preparing for Camp

By Erika Tyner Allen, J.D., Ph.D.

Last year my older son went to sleep-away camp for the first time. Not only was that a brand-new experience for our family, our son was one of the younger campers at the grounds, too. All together, it turned out to be a terrific experience of growth and maturity for him, never mind a ton of fun.

However, getting our son ready for camp both last summer and again this summer has made me think afresh about my years of writing about and teaching child protection initiatives. Not only did I want him to be as safe as possible, of course, I also wanted to be able to eliminate any concern of sexual abuse from my otherwise long, long list of mommy-anxieties about sleep-away camp. If you know a child who is going to camp this summer, perhaps the steps we have taken with our son are useful to you.



Review the camp thoroughly. How well do you know the camp program to which you are sending your child? Have you spoken with both alumni campers and current staff? Many times, parents do an excellent job assessing what will be fun and what will be physically safe, but also make assumptions about sexual protection. In a setting that is intimate by definition, there are questions that must be answered. For example, do you know how the camp screens workers? In particular, do they screen for possible sexual predators by running criminal background searches? Getting references that speak specifically to staffers who work with children? What problems, if any, have they had in the past? How were they handled?

In addition, make sure you **ask specific questions about how the camp would respond to a child's complaint about a counselor or another camper.** Who acts as an ombudsman? Under what circumstances are the parents contacted?

Identify a safe adult at camp—To keep your child safe, you must help identify his or her own resources, as well. Have you learned enough about the camp to know who your child could go to if he or she was worried about something that had happened? For example, at our son's camp, we learned that the camp "infirmary" was staffed by parent doctors and parent nurses who volunteered a week of their time in exchange for camp enrollment for their own kids. While we can't predict everything, of course, these folks seemed like a reasonable resource for our son: likely compassionate, surely well-versed in talking with kids, and relatively disinterested in the camp structure. Plus, we knew our son has a good, open relationship with our doctor at home—he trusts and respects the doctor a lot. Thus, we told our son that if there was anything he was unhappy about that he didn't want to or couldn't discuss with the counselor, he should go to the infirmary. I am glad that we had identified that outlet for him even though no visits were necessary.

Check in—no matter what. The camp where our son attends is one of the many that touts an immersion culture in which the kids don't talk with the parents until the very end. We were told we could write to our child (we did

every day) and look at is picture on the website (we did every day), but that he would tell us all about it when and only when we picked him up. I didn't buy it. On day three, I called the main number and simply asked for a status report on my kid from the counselor. Later that day, the director called me back with a short report: a few details that added up to all was good. For me, checking in with the camp served two important roles. First, if something was wrong, of course, I wanted to know. But even more than that, I wanted the counselor and director to know that I was paying attention. Extra attention. More-than-even-allowed attention. Don't-mess-with-my-kid attention.

Discuss sexual abuse and protection with your child. Of course, your child should be well-versed in the basics of sexual abuse prevention before he or she heads off to camp. After all, at camp, your child will share close proximity to a group of relative strangers at the most personal of times: bathing, sleeping, etc. More than likely, you have laid a great foundation already, but make sure your child can answer the following:

- Does your child know that his or her private parts are private? Even in a group shower or changing facility, does your child know that no one should touch his or her private parts?
- And no one should ask your child to touch theirs? You might want to talk to your child about what kind of practices might be in order during these times.
- Can your child determine the reasonable boundaries for privacy? For example, no one should get in your child's bunk after lights-out.
- Does your child know that they can talk to you about anything—even if someone older said it was a secret? Let your child know that nothing bad will happen to them—or to you—if they talk to you about something that made them uncomfortable at camp.

Our son's sleep-away camp experience has certainly been a lot more than safe; it has been simply wonderful. I do wish the same for your child. And for you, I wish the calming power of knowing you have prepared your child for camp in every possible way.

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Parents, Don't Raise a Bully

By Erika Tyner Allen, J.D., Ph.D.

Last month, I stood around the schoolyard with a huddle of other moms talking about the most recent incident involving the bully of our kids' elementary class. This girl's hatefulness was well established; her path of destruction now long and bloody. The conversation shifted from reactionary to diagnostic as we began to speculate about what was going on at this little girl's home.

It doesn't take an expert to tell a mom that parents play a role when their child is a bully; however the experts do concur with us. Study after study tells us that what happens at home can either foster or quell bullying. Of course, home-life isn't the only factor with an effect on bullying; other factors can make a bully, including social and community influences, psychological triggers, etc.

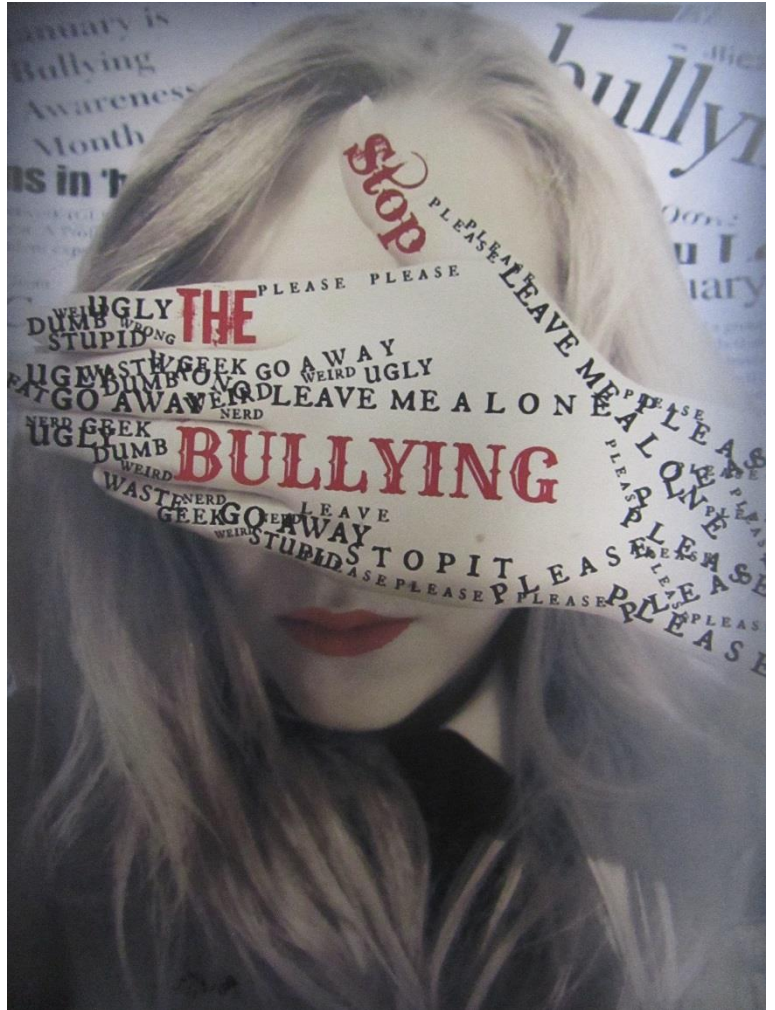
But what is it, exactly, that parents can do to raise a child who is able to lead a healthy social life and who has self-confidence and the respect of peers, garnered by kindness and empathy? In short, how do you not raise a bully? This is a complicated and nuanced question. **We'll review ten essential steps.**

1. **(Re-)consider what you are saying about power, popularity, and control.** We love it when a teacher describes our child as a leader. Isn't there something satisfying about hearing through the grapevine that your child is really popular?

In so many ways we convey to our kids that being in charge is good and that being well liked is an asset. Yet, too often we fail to communicate that what we really want is for our child to exhibit the positive qualities that earn him or her that esteem. Power or popularity at all costs, or as the end in itself, is a framework that makes all sorts of inappropriate behavior okay, including bullying.

2. **Teach your kids healthy ways to express anger.** If you have ever yelled at your kids because you were mad at your spouse, you can appreciate that bullying is sometimes a misplaced response to anger. Do your kids know what makes them angry or even when they are feeling angry?

Parents too often make anger a “bad” emotion—one that “good” kids should never feel or at least learn to quell. But anger is a healthy emotion, that plays a role alongside the more well-liked feelings of, say, happiness and pride. Yet anger has to be okay, and expressing it has to be okay. Have you demonstrated to your kids how one can simply say to someone else, “What you did made me angry. Here’s why ...”? Do you make it acceptable for your kids to say similar things? Without this ability to address issues head-on, anger can become displaced and foster bullying behavior.



3. **Does your child know what to do when another child is driving them crazy?** By the age of eight or nine, kids can understand that there are more productive strategies than a public put-down. Help your children understand the annoying behavior of another child. Does the other child lack the social skills to see what he is doing? Is it an attempt at gaining attention?

Teach your child that, many times, he or she can say something like, “Hey, it is not fun to play this game when you keep singing that song over and over.” Has your child heard you say similar things at home that were spoken with kindness rather than annoyance? Does your child know that sometimes, he or she may have to find a teacher or other responsible adult to ask, “Eva keeps singing the same song over and over, and it is really annoying. What should I do?”

4. **Never provide an appreciative audience for bullying at home.** Have you ever been with another family when one sibling makes a sarcastic dig at the other and the parents laugh? Too often, bullying at home is written off by parents as “sibling rivalry” or “the way brothers or sisters are,” and thus left unaddressed.

Yet several recent studies confirm what, deep down, we all know that when a child bullies a sibling or other relative at home, he or she is more likely to bully other children. Don't let your kids get away with

bullying behavior at home. Instead, make sure that they are hearing messages from you like, "You should stick up for your brother. Helping him is one of very important things you do in this family."



5. Don't rely on other parents to tell you. This is all fine and good, you may be thinking, for other children. After all, my child is fine. My child doesn't have these problems. My child is not a bully! But, I'd like to ask, with all due respect, how do you know?

Don't rely on what other parents, or even teachers, tell you. I am struck time and time again that other adults are loathe to pass along negative messages about another's children. More importantly, who wants to know their children only through second-hand reports? Make sure you are spending enough time with your kids and their friends to assess their behavior yourself.

6. Expand their repertoire. Bullying can be a response to boredom, a simple desire to generate interaction and activity, or a way to "get something going." Too often kids are not as effective at generating positive activities to relieve boredom. Kids are rarely going to self-generate an activity that they haven't done before. Do you want your kids to pull out a board game? You probably will have to teach them to play. Do you want them to make a sculpture out of recyclables? The same holds true.

Activities that generate direct interaction foster different and likely better social skills than the side-by-side play of most video games. If your kids always run to television or videogames, they may not be bored, but it's unlikely they are building the comprehensive set of social skills you'd choose for them.

7. Help your kids manage all their relationships well. My younger son is really outgoing and social and we are proud of his leadership qualities. Over the years, he has had some wonderful friendships with quieter, less assertive children. We've talked with our son explicitly about the fact that it is incumbent on him to work harder to make sure that the quiet friend is getting what he wants—his choice of games, his activities and his decisions. A good friend, we tell our son, draws out those things even when he doesn't have to. I don't think that my son risks bullying his quiet friends, but I don't want him inadvertently to do solely what he wants without regard to others.

8. Reward empathy and kindness. In many ways, empathy and kindness are the opposites of bullying. As a starting point, have your children heard you use those words? Could they define them? When a child—your own or another—demonstrates empathy or kindness, it is worth calling it out pointblank. "I saw you ask that younger child to play with you and your friends, and that was really kind. I was proud that you did that."

Not raising a bully is about preventing some specific negative behaviors. It is also a matter of promoting certain specific good behaviors in your children. When your child is doing the right thing, make sure that you are acknowledging it.



9. With great power comes great responsibility. Sometimes bullying behavior grows from poor social skills. However, research shows, and as parents we know, that just as often, the bully is the child with more socially desirable traits. The tall, handsome, and athletic boy can use his standing for good or for bad; the smart, attractive, and mature girl can use her role positively or negatively in the community.

Do your kids know that their talents only hold them to a higher level of behavior? With my two sons, I find myself frequently talking in terms of super-heroes and other protagonists: As Uncle Ben told Peter Parker, “With great power comes great responsibility.” “You know why Anakin turned into Darth Vader? As amazing as he was, he gave up trying to be good when it became really hard.” Your kids need to hear that they are expected to use their powers for good and then be rewarded for doing it.

- 10. Don't model bullying.** It seems that it should go without saying, especially at the end of a list such as this. However, parents sometimes do not recognize the bullying they themselves are doing at home. Do you make fun of your child's weakness (or a spouse's weakness) and calling it “teasing?” Do your kids hear you gossiping with your friends about a peer's problems or failings?



You have every kind of superior power over your children—physical strength, mental prowess, and financial control. Any way that you use these things yourself without kindness and empathy creates a powerful example that you may well spend a lifetime overcoming. Parents, you can not raise a bully. However, rearing a child who is compassionate and kind takes some specific attention.

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Why Is There An Office Of Safe Environment?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) requires that all Dioceses/Eparchies have in place a Safe Environment Program for the protection of children and young people. The “*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*” was adopted by the USCCB in June 2002 as a response to sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons, particularly from the time period of 1950 to 2002. The USCCB established an **Office of Child and Youth Protection** to oversee the application of the Charter's principles and to create the means for accountability for ensuring implementation of standards.

Reporting

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse please contact **your local law enforcement agency** or call the **West Virginia Adult / Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.352.6513**

To report suspected cases of sexual abuse of children by personnel of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese, please contact one of the Bishop's designees at: **304.233.0880 or 1.888.434.6237:**

- Sr. Ellen F. Dunn, O.P., ext. 264
- Mr. Bryan Minor, ext. 263
- Rev. Msgr. Frederick P. Annie, V.G., ext. 267
- Rev. Msgr. Anthony Cincinnati, STD, V.E., ext. 270

You may also fill out and return a confidential **Complaint Form for Allegations of Sexual Abuse of a Minor** by printing one from the Diocese's web site at www.dwc.org, then clicking Diocese › Offices › Office of Safe Environment › Download Files and Forms or by calling 304.230.1504 to request a form via U.S. mail from the Office of Safe Environment.

The Three Components of Compliance

The Safe Environment Program by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston consists of the following three components:

- ✓ Background Check
- ✓ Policy Relating to Sexual Abuse of Children (Summer 2014)
- ✓ Awareness training for adults (VIRTUS online or live training)

All three components are mandated by the Diocese for persons seeking employment or seeking to volunteer directly or indirectly with children. A person is considered in compliance with the Diocese's Safe Environment Policy upon successful completion of all three components. Every year, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston - as well as all other dioceses in the United States - is audited by the USCCB for compliance with its "*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*."

Touching Safety

A Student Awareness Program has been implemented since the fall of 2005 to give children information (appropriate for their age levels) and skills to help recognize acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and how to effectively deal with those behaviors. This is a VIRTUS program called "**Touching Safety**". The program is taught in Catholic schools and as part of Parish Schools of Religion. This program offers lesson plans for children in grades Kindergarten through 12.

The "Touching Safety" lesson cycle for this year is:

School Year **2017-18** - **CYCLE ONE** - Lesson One (by the end of October) and Lesson Two by the end of the school year

A PROGRAM AND SERVICE OF
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RISK RETENTION GROUP, INC.



Spring Canticle by Bob Hostetler



Sun and cloud, bless the Lord.
Dew and rain, bless the Lord.
Flower and weed, bless the Lord.
Breeze and bird, bless the Lord.
Mist and meadow, bless the Lord.
Sunrise and sunset, bless the Lord.
Light and darkness, bless the Lord.

<http://bobhostetler.blogspot.com>