

"The most effective, timely information on helping young people. Intended for schools, institutions and home."

Dr. Mayer's Memo

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Feel free to send this Memo to a colleague, friend or parents. I just ask to always do so in its entirety.

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Dr. Mayer is available to personally care for troubled youth and families, crisis calls, consultations, and presentations.

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Bullying and Teasing: The Herd Mentality

I guess this year is becoming the Bullying and Teasing year in these Memo's.

I had planned to write this issue about an exciting new program to help ensure that the adults in the lives of our students who play sports are appropriate and trained individuals. But, several people have asked me for concrete strategies for dealing with small groups of bullies. In fact one email I received said, "Our school got more out of these free memos than the \$6,000 we spent last year on that program that sounds like the song from the *Sound of Music*. We should have just showed the movie."

I want to pass to you three techniques that work well when your problem is groups of students who tease and bully. I call them: **Ignorance Hurts**, **The Shot Over the Bow** and **Sacrificing the Lamb**.

In the vast majority of instances, groups of kids tease others out of fear and ignorance. Kids fear those things they don't understand and this lack of understanding stems from ignorance. A common condition that fuels this triad of ignorance/lack of understanding/fear is when a student (victim) is *different* from the norm. Kids lash out at different. So, first step in intervening with a group that picks on another student is to erase the ignorance and explain why that student, the victim, appears to be different. **Ignorance Hurts**.

Next, how do you communicate with this group of bullies? You make your best guesstimate of who they are and then you call them into the Dean/Principal's Office and address their behavior. "It's come to my attention that you (the group) are picking on xxxx xxxxx." Use this as a teaching moment and educate them about ignorance, individual differences, and empathy. Erase the hurting ignorance. But, you also send the shot over the bow during this meeting. That is, "By the way, if this behavior doesn't stop there will be big consequences for all of you." Please elaborate and embellish this intent dramatically. This is when you are firing your warning **Shot Over the Bow**.

Finally, if the first two techniques don't curb the acting out by the group of bullies, and I would bet they will at least cull the herd significantly, it may be time for **Sacrificing the Lamb** inside the group. Yes, you take the most flagrant offender and you give them a stiff consequence. Suspend them from an activity, sport, school attendance, write an essay on empathy, whatever they are going to 'feel.' This sends a message to that group and to the whole school that this school is a safe place and you care.

Now, some staff may protest these techniques, but I assure you they work. Common objections are: Geez, if we highlight the victim's differences aren't we just making it worse for that student? Now the bullies have more ammunition? Answer: No. Most kids are good kids and remember their teasing came from ignorance/misunderstanding and fear. Knowledge erases THAT ammunition. I've seen surprising groups of bullies rally around a 'different' kid once they were enlightened.

Objection: How can we be sure that these specific kids are the bullies when we send the shot over the bow? Answer: Doesn't matter. The shot over the bow is a warning and these kids will carry that warning back through the school milieu and by osmosis you may just stop the bullying.

Objection: Why only sacrifice one lamb? Answer: Cost effective! You'll get a better result with less expenditure of resources and headaches from complaining parents. The other kids will live in fear of their turn and they will behave.

Next issue: Bullying and Sports-Coaches. (I promise.)