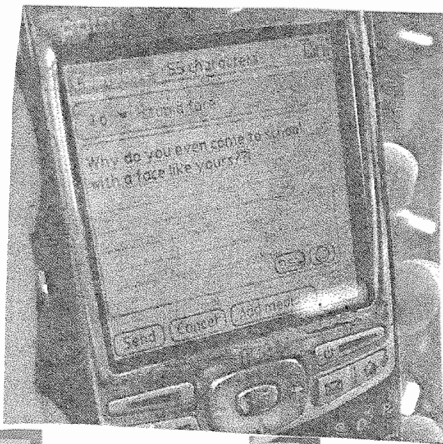


STICKS & STONES

Bullying is Killing Our Kids

by Valerie Wells

"[B]ullying (by females) is really increasing with the ability to cyberbully," Kelsey Ann Jackson said. "Our technology—the Internet, text messaging and cell phones—make it much easier to bully. Now gossip and meanness toward victims can be done in groups and with lightning speed."



'What's Going to Work?'

Last year, 24 students at Blackburn Middle School started down a new path in the Jackson Public Schools system. They learned ways to resolve conflicts, new ways to talk to each other and more detailed ways to listen and solve problems. Eight of those students will become student mediators in a new program unfolding this year at Blackburn.

Malkie Schwartz, director of community engagement at the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, worked with Blackburn educators to develop the program. Schwartz, 29, studied alternative dispute resolution in law school and said it can be applied to school situations. When she came to the institute and Mississippi last year, she asked people how she could best help the community. Blackburn educators then approached her about a mediation program.

"A lot of discipline is telling kids what not to do," she said. A peer mediation conflict-resolution program helps students discover what they could do instead.

An example Schwartz uses is hallway hostility. Every time a student comes into the hallway, the same kid bumps into him. They

exchange funny looks. Then someone said something mean.

Through peer mediation, the students could each come and confidentially explain their side of the story. The mediators would ask open questions in nonjudgmental phrases and get both parties to express what they would like to see happen and acknowledge what their options are. They have the option not to talk to each other or the option to not be bothered by the funny looks.

"A student might say, 'I'm willing to walk away' or 'I'm willing to smile,'" Schwartz said.

Schwartz said asking them to smile at each other might be too idealistic and expecting them to become friends also might be asking too much, but peer mediators wouldn't hold the hallway bumpers to an unreachable standard.

"They would ask, 'What's going to work?'" she said.

Last year's initial training focused on explaining the concept of conflict resolution. Students learned the technique of making "I" statements. Saying "I am upset" instead of "You upset me" can go a long way to reduce tension, blame and even funny looks.

"Conflict doesn't have to be negative," Schwartz said. "It can be a learning experience."

Jackson
FREE PRESS
The City's Smart Alternative
VOL. 9 | NO. 6 // OCTOBER 20 - 26, 2010
DAILYBREAKINGNEWS@JFPDAILY.COM **FREE**