

Cultivating a Positive School Climate



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Workplace Bullying and Restorative Practices

John W. Bailie, Ph.D., president of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), shares his workplace experience as an intern youth counselor in this recent article reprinted with permission. It beautifully illustrates the restorative process, and has application for both adults and children. It can also be applied with prayer and virtue.

“One of the unique aspects of the organizational cultural was something called “basic concepts,” to which all staff were required to adhere. These were regularly discussed and reviewed during monthly staff team-builders. They were group exercises designed to reinforce important organizational norms and ideas. Two of these basic concepts were:

We believe that others benefit from, and actually welcome, honest feedback.

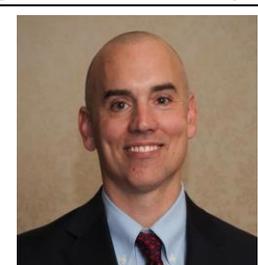
If we have a legitimate concern about a fellow staff member’s behavior, we should present the concern to them directly or seek supervision.

Previous to the IIRP, I had worked in several settings that claimed to have a similar culture and norms, but failed to put them into practice in the daily life of the organization. Understandably, my reaction to these early team-builders and basic concepts was somewhat cynical. Early in my employment, a colleague made me a target for harsh and embarrassing teasing, a form of workplace bullying that frequently embarrassed me in front of our staff and students. One day after a particularly troubling interaction, I asked to speak with the school supervisor. She listened to me patiently and expressed concern for what I had told her, saying, “I’m very sorry that this happened to you. You do not deserve to be treated like this and his behavior is not acceptable.” Then she asked me, “Would you like to tell him how his behavior is affecting you?” Surprised, I responded that I frankly thought this was her job! She told me that she would talk to him as well, but that I deserved the opportunity to confront him directly. Sensing my hesitation, she offered to join me and tell him together that this behavior needed to stop. I agreed. In this conversation, we used restorative questions as a guide:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected and in what way?
- What’s been the hardest thing for you?
- What needs to happen in order to make things right?

I started by telling him that I was frustrated and angry with

him and recounted several recent incidents when he had teased and embarrassed me. To my surprise, I also shared some of my own history with this type of behavior in the past. I told him that I grew up in a neighborhood where I faced fights, physical threats and bullying as a regular part of my childhood. I also shared that in my experience in the military, there were a few authority figures who regularly abused their power in this way – using their role as training leaders to physically and emotionally abuse subordinates.



John W. Bailie, Ph.D.
President, IIRP

I grew surprisingly emotional during this part of the conversation. I had not planned on sharing anything about these parts of my life story, and I certainly didn’t foresee the emotions that rose in me. I then said that the hardest part of what happened wasn’t his behavior per se, but that I had been trying hard to trust that this organization was different from others I had experienced and that his behavior contradicted these organizational values.

I related how difficult it was for me to trust authority figures and that I had been working to be more emotionally honest and open – especially in my desire to be more effective as a counselor and role-model for the youth we served. He was supposed to be mentoring and helping me, but instead he was hindering my professional development. To my shock, he didn’t make excuses. He hung his head and admitted that this kind of behavior had been an ongoing problem for him, both at work and at home, and that this wasn’t the first time he had been confronted about it. He apologized and asked me what I needed from him.

I thanked him and told him that the teasing and bullying needed to stop immediately. I suggested that if he had a real criticism, he should talk to me privately first and not use sarcasm. I also asked that we update the other staff on our conversation and his commitments to change his behavior.

I never had the same issues with him again. Not because he was told he would be fired, or that he was formally reprimanded, or because of any aggressive response from me. He changed because sharing our personal feelings and stories in a very real and human way affirmed that we both deserved better. I affirmed my dignity by insisting that I not be treated that way. His dignity was affirmed by me, and the organization, by setting strong limits and high expectations for his behavior. Simply put, we told him that he was a better person than his behavior suggested. We held him

accountable while affirming his worth as a person and his potential to change. Ultimately, he did make a choice to leave the organization and did so with a truly warm and heartfelt farewell. He acknowledged that this was not the place for him, but that he had learned a lot about himself during his time with us.

One of the great contributions of restorative practices as a field involves bringing to full consciousness the way personal narratives impact our daily lives, relationships and work. Research into adult learners in programs utilizing restorative practices found that sharing personal narratives helped to reconcile past conflicts, hardships, and trauma.

Each of us is unrepeatable and unique. As such, our personal narratives contain the seed of our dignity as individuals. Sharing those stories in the presence of others builds a more thorough understanding of our own lives and the humanity of those with whom we live and work”

Parents and Pastors

Bullying is the devil’s work, Pope says at morning Mass



(Jan 8, 2018) Pope Francis celebrates Mass in the chapel of his Vatican residence at the Domus Sanctae Marthae.
(Credit: CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano.)

ROME - “When we realize that we harbor within ourselves the desire to attack someone because they are weak, we have no doubt: It is the devil. Because attacking the weak is the work of Satan,” the pope said in his homily Jan. 8 at morning Mass in the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

The pope centered his homily on the day’s reading from the First Book of Samuel, which recounts the verbal abuse Hannah endured because she was unable to conceive a child. Similar accounts in other Bible stories - from Abraham’s wife Sarah ridiculed by her servant to Job who was rejected by his wife after his misfortune - are stories that Christians should take time to reflect on, the pope said.

“I ask myself: What is within these people? What is it within us that pushes us to mock and mistreat others weaker than we are?” the pope asked.

“It is understandable when a person resents someone stronger than them, perhaps because of envy ... but

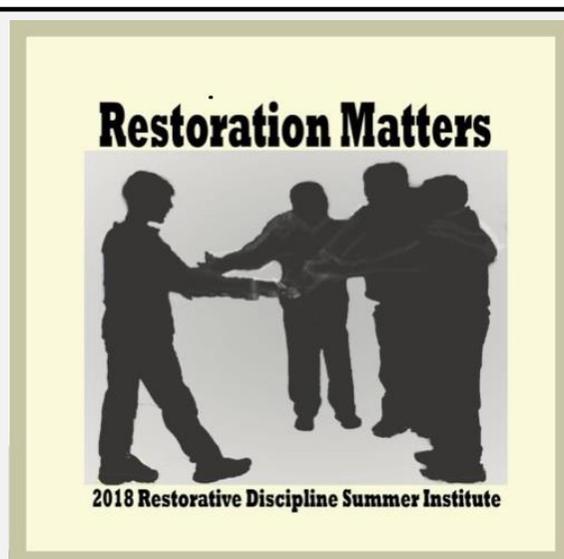
toward the weak? What makes us do that? It is something habitual, as if I need to ridicule another person to feel confident; as if it were a necessity,” he said.

Francis said that as a child there was a woman named Angelina in his neighborhood and she was constantly ridiculed by others, especially children, because of her mental illness. While people would generously give her food and clothes, local children would make fun of the woman and say, “Let’s find Angelina and have some fun,” the pope said.

“Today we see it constantly in our schools - the phenomenon of bullying, attacking the weak because ‘you’re fat or foreign or because you’re black,’” he said. “This means there is something within us that makes us act aggressively toward the weak.”

Although psychologists may give a different reason as to why some are inclined to bully the weak, Francis said he believed it was “a consequence of original sin” and the work of Satan who “has no compassion.”

“Let us ask the Lord to give us the grace of God’s compassion,” the pope said. “He is the one who has compassion on us and helps us to move forward.”



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