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INTERNATIONAL  
BULLYING  
PREVENTION  
ASSOCIATION

# Newsletter

## Roll Out the Welcome Mat

By Alex Kajitani

As educators, we know that creating a culture of inclusivity on school campuses is a key factor in preventing bullying. However, sometimes we focus so much on creating this culture among students that we forget about another critical group: parents.

When I was teaching in a low-performing school in San Diego, one afternoon, the mother of one of my students didn't show up for a pre-arranged, after-school meeting. The next day, I asked the student why his mother hadn't shown up, and he simply shrugged his shoulders. "Where was she?" I asked. "At home," the student replied. "Does she usually miss things?" I asked. "She goes to church every Tuesday and Sunday!" he answered.

Normally, I may have brushed this off as "typical" for a parent of an at-risk student; but this time, I realized I needed to take a hard look in the mirror. This parent was certainly attending functions (like church) in her community; she just wasn't attending our functions at school.

Her church was most likely doing many things that make her feel welcome there. And I had to ask: Are we doing the same on our campuses, especially for the parents who struggled in school themselves? If not, we need to be. Engaged parents can make a huge impact on bullying prevention, and forming relationships with parents is an important part of our job in helping students be safe and successful in school.



*How can we help parents feel included, welcomed and invested in our school?  
Discover simple ways to start on page 2*

# Roll Out the Welcome Mat (con't)

*Here are four simple ways to help parents feel included, welcomed and invested in our school.*

## 1. Pay Attention to the Signs

For many parents, a school campus can be a confusing, bewildering place. Simply finding the office, or a specific classroom, can be daunting. The signs indicating where a front office is may be obvious to those of us who work here, but not necessarily to a first-time visitor. Take another look at the signage around your school's points of entry. Do they all clearly indicate where a visitor should go?

Also, what languages do the parents of your school's current students speak? Creating a sign that says "Office" in several different languages can make all the difference for a confused visitor, and creates an exciting opportunity to demonstrate a school's commitment to the diversity of its student population.

Another idea: when a parent checks in, are they required to wear a "Visitor" sticker or badge? Consider also making a sticker/badge that says "Parent," so school staff can welcome them as valued and highly esteemed guests. (And be sure to train school staff to greet parent visitors warmly.)

## 2. Manage First Impressions

I once worked at a school where a very nice woman sat behind the desk that parents first encountered upon entering the front office. The problem, however, was that this nice woman did not speak any Spanish, yet most of the parents who entered spoke only Spanish. The first minute of every encounter was spent in the awkward situation of the parent having to ask if anyone in the office spoke Spanish, and the nice lady having to go find someone.

While individual occurrences may not have seemed like a big deal, over the course of the day (and school year), a culture was created within that office that was not inviting. Having the right people in the right roles is critical to establishing a welcoming climate where parents aren't made to feel awkward or embarrassed.

Ask yourself, who and what do parents see immediately upon entering your school's office? I also worked at a school where college paraphernalia adorned the walls, and sent a clear message to all who entered—the purpose of this school is to prepare students for college. Whatever message your school chooses to send, make sure that it is one that is inclusive, intentional, clear, and friendly.

## 3. Utilize technology.

Often, there are parents who just can't make it into campus, for whatever reason. Ask, then, how can we include parents via technology they're already using?

Consider setting up a Classroom Facebook Page for parents, highlighting some of what happens during the day. (Label it "secret" so it's only visible to those you invite.)

To combat parents getting the standard answer to "What happened in school today?" ("Nothing!"), one teacher set up a Twitter account and, each day, tweeted three specific questions parents could ask their children about that day's goings-on.

## 4. Reverse the Expectations.

When we think about it, we know that an inclusive school culture is formed outside of school as well as inside. So we must ask: what efforts are we making to get our school staff into the community?

Instead of a "welcome back luncheon" for school staff in the teacher's lounge each year, consider doing what one principal did and team up with parent liaisons to host small groups of staff members in their homes, and begin parent-school bonding before classes even begin.

You can also cut short a staff meeting and get teachers out into the community they serve – explore the neighborhood, cultural facilities, or watch a soccer game many parents are already attending.

### Expanding Our View

While we work to prevent bullying in our schools, these ideas can help us begin to broaden our view of inclusivity beyond just the students, to their families as well. When parents feel included at their child's school, they're more likely to engage in school-time behaviors and relationships. This small tweak in perspective can have big, positive effects for an inclusive school culture for all.



## Great Things Happening in the Field

The YMCA of Metro Chicago made a generous donation to IBPA.

The students of Chicago's Carroll/Rosenwald Elementary School held coin collections, a pizza party contest, \$1 donation for a dress down day, designed posters and completed classroom visits – all to promote bullying prevention! A big thank you and job well done to these amazing students that are making a difference!





## From the Field

# Make Kindness Go Viral in the New School Year!

By Dr. Sameer Hinduja & Dr. Justin W. Patchin



The major theme of this year's IBPA annual conference is kindness, and with the new school year upon us it is critical to build prevention efforts with this concept front-and-center. We don't

want youth to simply not do the wrong thing, but do what is right instead – treat their peers with respect, compassion, and empathy. To be sure, sometimes educators naively expect kids to know and apply the Golden Rule in all their interactions from early childhood. However, without intentional efforts to instruct and cultivate kindness, your students are simply not going to be others-focused by default. With that in mind, here are some ways you can encourage the children and teens in your life to make kindness go viral at the beginning of this school year.

### *Set Up a Social Media Compliments Page*

Most teens have a profile on one or more social networking platforms and are very comfortable navigating these environments. Perhaps you could encourage them to set up a separate account for the purpose of dishing out anonymous accolades to their classmates. This idea was made famous by Kevin Curwick's "OsseoNiceThings" Twitter feed and Jeremiah Anthony's "West High Bros" Facebook compliments page. Now dozens of social media accounts have been set up by teens for the purpose of encouraging and praising their peers.

### *Participate in Random Acts of Kindness*

More and more individuals in all walks of life are realizing that it's actually really cool to be kind. It's even cooler when kindness

is dished out anonymously and unexpectedly. Encourage your students or children to engage in random acts of kindness in their school or broader community. Search online for examples of young people being kind to others to give them inspiration. Dozens of videos and even a Twitter hashtag (#RandomActofKindness) can direct you to ideas as well.

### *Create a Public Service Announcement*

Many teens have great ideas for promoting positivity that they would love to share with others. Give them creative freedom and let them loose to script out and record a short video with the simple purpose of encouraging others to be kind. They could interview their classmates or "famous" people in their school or community (like the principal or mayor). Leave it up to them about how to approach the activity—they'll surprise you and hopefully come up with something really compelling! Then you can upload it to YouTube, your school's Web page, or social media accounts, and otherwise use it as a teaching tool to reach so many others!

### *Make Posters*

A simple activity that kids of all ages can tackle is to design inspirational posters that can be plastered on walls around the school. It doesn't take much artistic talent to inspire others to be kind with drawings or creative slogans. Teachers could work with a particular class or a specific subset of students to produce posters that could be covertly placed all over the school on Friday afternoon or over the weekend. The rest of the student body will return on Monday and be totally inspired by what they see all around them.

In closing, remember that promoting kindness doesn't have to be a big production. The best ideas are often among the simplest. Working together, parents, teachers, and teens can make tremendous strides toward combating cruelty in all its forms during this new school year. Hopefully, as you share these ideas and stories of kindness, your teens will feel compelled to write their own!

Dr. Sameer Hinduja is a Professor at Florida Atlantic University and Dr. Justin W. Patchin is a Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Together, they co-direct the Cyberbullying Research Center, which is intended to be an information clearinghouse for educators, counselors, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and others who work with youth. The Center provides bullying and cyberbullying statistics, resources, presentations, downloads, activities, events, facts, examples, stories, and so much more to help you prevent and respond to victimization. Hinduja and Patchin's latest co-authored book *Words Wound: Delete Cyberbullying and Make Kindness Go Viral* was written specifically for teens and comes with a free Leader's Guide. In addition, their latest book for educators *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying* was just completely updated and released in its 2nd edition.

**Dr. Hinduja is presenting three times at this year's conference – come say hello and share successes, struggles, and questions!**

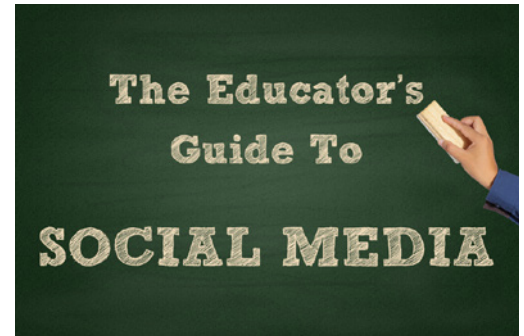


## Tools You Can Use

### Educators Guide to Social Media

Just in time for back to school our friends at Connect Safely have published an "Educators Guide to Social Media." The downloadable guide provides many tips for educators on how to safely and effectively use social media in class and professionally. It includes tips on how to protect both student and personal privacy and how to manage potential risks.

You can download the guide at:  
<http://www.connectsafely.org/eduguide/>



## Conference

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**November 8-10, 2015**  
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