

Guest Blogger Jenny: Does Your Potential L.A Private Elementary School Have An Anti-Bullying Policy?

Description



When youâ€™re first applying to private schools, your child is usually around five. Theyâ€™re small, innocent, and seem closer to toddler than child in some ways. Most likely, the last thing on your mind is that, in just a few short years, your child might be the kid bullied and teased mercilessly by classmates (or, possibly even worse, *be* the bully).

Asking about a schoolâ€™s anti-bullying policy is sound policy for you. Sure, bullying seems like a problem best dealt with internally, on an individual basis. But, schools that do this and donâ€™t have a solid program in place often end up with big problems, and your kid might pay the price. Kids who bully often never learn alternatives to aggression, kids who are bullied often suffer from depression and psychosomatic illness, and the bystanders feel a sense of pervasive helplessness. And bullying runs the gamut from teasing to physical endangerment to true gendered harassment.

I recently heard about a very well-respected L.A. private school that has ended up in precisely this position. After repeatedly placating complaining parents and kids regarding bullying incidents, either not dealing with the problem or dealing with it inconsistently and inadequately, the school is in turmoil. There are a bunch of angry parents and a defensive school administration, trying to sort out a problem that should have been firm policy long ago.

When asked, an admissions director should be able to coherently and concisely map out exactly what happens regarding a bullying incident, from individual talks to involving the parents to eventual suspension/dismissal. Many schools have an honor code that encompasses anti-bullying values; my daughterâ€™s school, Mirman, touts the "Character Counts" program. Any policy regarding bullying should also cover the cyber aspects. Again, at my daughterâ€™s school, which has a laptop program, all students are required to sign a use agreement that covers these issues. An infraction involves the loss of a laptop.

One stumbling block in these policies that no admissions director would ever admit to is this: what happens when the bully happens to be the child of a board member, or a major donor? Yeah, thatâ€™s a pretty big conflict of interest. Thatâ€™s why schools should have a program in place to raise awareness and prevention through student behavior *before* any bullying takes place. Because, letâ€™s face it: all kids are capable of either acting like Lord

of the Flies, or of acting like good citizens. It's up to the school and the parents to help kids develop character and good behavior. The kids certainly aren't going to learn it on their own.

Are any of these policies and programs foolproof? Of course not. There's probably always going to be some form of pecking order in a school; it may just be human nature. But, a school should be observant enough of its students and responsive enough to its parents to stop the bullying behavior in its tracks, before it creates a truly toxic environment for all the students. By all means, ask about a school's policy, and if the admissions director can't succinctly describe it, approach with caution. *Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News and on Mamapedia, The Well Mom, Sane Moms, Hybrid Mom, The Culture Mom and A Child Grows In Brooklyn. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).*

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