

The End of Their Rope

The Devastating Effects of Student Bullying

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On September 9, 2010, 15-year old Billy Lucas reached the end of his rope, figuratively *and* literally. Suspected of being gay, Lucas was tormented continually. He ended the torture by hanging himself.

But Lucas wouldn't be the last bullied kid to hang himself in September.

A Tragic Month

September of 2010 proved to be a heartrending month for several families.

The horror began in Greensburg, Indiana when [Billy Lucas hung himself in the barn](#) behind his parents' home. Though Lucas never claimed to be gay, the mere suspicion of his homosexuality by peers supplied them with the necessary reasons to ridicule him.

School officials, including the principal, claimed to be unaware of any bullying, but this [video shows Billy wasn't the only homosexual](#) who was picked on at Greensburg High School in recent years.

Just 10 days later, the pain of teenage suicide was felt again, this time across the nation in Tehachapi, California. On that Sunday, September 19th, Seth Walsh hung himself from a tree in his back yard. He was just 13 years old.

Adding to the tragedy of this young man's story was the fact that he spent the last 8 days of his life connected to breathing tubes and IVs, which gave his family the false hope he might survive his self-inflicted wounds.

He did not.

On Monday, the 27th of September, more than a week after his suicide attempt, his frail body finally lost the fight. California news agencies reported that Walsh was [yet another victim of anti-gay bullying](#) and teasing.

Astonishingly, between Walsh's suicide attempt and his eventual death, a third student committed suicide, this time on the east coast.

On the evening of September 22nd, [another horrific story](#) about a tormented homosexual student emerged. Earlier that afternoon, Tyler Clementi, a freshman at Rutgers University, committed suicide after a homosexual encounter between himself and another male student was secretly filmed and then publically displayed online by his roommate.

When Clementi, an accomplished violinist, discovered the video, he posted a message on his Facebook account at 8:42pm that simply read, “Jumping off the gw bridge sorry.”

Unfortunately, Clementi followed through, and ended his life by jumping from the George Washington Bridge in New York City later that night.

And though there were 8 more days left in September, only one would pass before the last suicide of the bloody month.

On September 23rd, Asher Brown, a 13-year old living in Houston, TX [ended his life with a fatal shot](#) from a Beretta 9mm pistol.

Without a doubt, the young gay Buddhist – who also suffered from Asperger’s Syndrome – stuck out in the Texas town. And he paid a high price for it. His suicide that afternoon followed an episode of bullying – *what he determined would be his last* – at school that same day.

From now on, every September will bring memories and remorse and regrets to several families across the country.

But it doesn’t have to.

Self-Inflicted Wounds

Teen suicide is, of course, self-inflicted. Sadly, many of the wounds leading up to that “final solution” are also caused by teens.

In fact, according to [one of the largest studies ever conducted on the act of bullying](#), it was discovered that 50% of U.S. high school students say *they’ve bullied* and/or teased someone at least once in the past year, and 47% of the same group say *they’ve been bullied* in that same period of time.

For the first time in the history of their institution, the Josephson Institute of Ethics researched bullying as a part of their bi-annual Ethics of American Youth Survey. What they discovered can only be described as appalling.

Researchers found that:

- 52% of students have hit someone in anger
- 37% of boys say it’s OK to hit or threaten a person who angers them
- 19% of girls also believe hitting/threatening a person who angers them is permissible

It appears as though many adolescent problems are being sorted out through violence.

With all this pent up bitterness and stress, it’s little wonder why the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry found [suicide to be the third leading cause of death](#) among 15- to

24-year olds.

National Notice

Most of the devastated families mentioned above never noticed anything that led them to believe suicide was on the horizon for their kids. But now, an entire nation is taking note of the peril today's students find themselves in.

October has officially been declared [The National Bullying Prevention Month](#). A myriad of organizations and high profile personalities are joining forces to help end the senseless devastation wreaked on kids by other kids.

MTV is offering students a chance to draw a line, *literally*. Their [Draw Your Line](#) campaign gives teenagers a chance to outline what steps they're taking to make themselves, and others, safer. An interactive map of the US shows that one teen has "joined a group on digital abuse," while another tweets she has "blocked a phone number." Yet a third has "called someone out for their hurtful message to a friend."

The problem of teen suicide hasn't just captured the attention of parents and the media; politicians have taken note...even politicians at the (very) top.

The [pro-homosexual campaign *It Gets Better*](#), received a huge boost when [Secretary of State Hillary Clinton posted an online video](#) which told kids, "Here at the State Department, I'm grateful every day for the work of our LGBT employees who are serving the United States...." Her overriding message was one of encouragement and hope because of where the country has come from in regards to its treatment of homosexuals and where she believes the country will be in the future.

Even President Obama is weighing in on the matter. In [this YouTube video](#) released by the White House, the president claimed to be "shocked and saddened by the deaths of several young people who were bullied and taunted for being gay." He denounced bullying from both a parents' perspective, and also from an American perspective.

Overall, it's a good thing for our elected officials to involve themselves in such a traumatizing issue that affects so many families. But I'm not sure that the kid who is being bullied right now cares about what the president and/or secretary of state thinks about his/her struggle.

But I am certain that the same kid cares what his/her parents think.

Stay of Execution

Teenagers have plenty of people resources available to help them deal with bullying, teasing, and suicidal thoughts – guidance counselors, teachers, mentors, even politicians – but without a doubt, the most effective voice is that of a parent or godly youth worker. Here are some simple tips that may go a long way toward helping a troubled and tormented teen.

1. **Ask your kids the hard questions about the issue.** Don't make it an interrogation, but be willing to ask your teenagers the tough questions regarding bullying and teasing. *Have they done it? Has it been done to them? Have they seen it done to others? If so, what did they do about it?* This is not a conversation you can have just one time with your kids and consider yourself done. Have it over and over again. In my experience with larger student ministries, I've found that "suicide attempts breed suicide attempts." If a kid in our city – or sadly, even a kid in our ministry – attempted suicide, we put everything on hold and talked about it because we observed that suicide attempts were not isolated incidents, but rather, they came in pairs (or even larger numbers). Bottom line: it's better to communicate too much than not enough.
2. **Keep the issue about the issue.** This article, nor this problem, is about homosexuality. With all due respect I admonish you to not allow yourself to become sidelined by the homosexual agenda that can so easily spring from these travesties. Though these kids (above) shared that in common, let's not forget that *lots* of kids are bullied for lots of different reasons that have *nothing* to do with homosexuality. Kids who are overweight, unpopular, non-athletic, religious, ethnically diverse, poor, etc. have all felt the pain of bullying. So, let's not allow the greater need to be hijacked by an agenda. Our kids need to be taught to love and defend everyone...not just those who are homosexual.
3. **Know how to handle the situation – and share the strategy with your kids.** First, train yourself on [what to look for](#) when it comes to kids who are wrestling with bullying and suicidal thoughts. Since there's no hard and fast sign that automatically equates with suicide, just keep your eyes open for hurting kids. If you encounter a kid who's potentially suicidal, get them professional help immediately...then show them large and frequent doses of unconditional love. Don't forget to equip other teenagers to be a first line of defense against bullying, too. Bullying doesn't happen in the dark; scores of teens – *if not hundreds* – watch it happen every day! Tell them how to handle the situation courageously and effectively. Don't consider your job done until both you and your own children know how to handle bullying and suicide.

Bullying and suicide are delicate matters. But so are the lives they negatively affect. So many problems teenagers find themselves in can be talked through, even after the mistake (including pre-marital sex, shoplifting, or even drug use). But with suicide, no more conversation can be had. So let's do a lot of talking now, providing our kids a much-needed stay of (self) execution.

David R. Smith is the *Director of Content Development* at TheSource4YM.com, providing truly free resources and ideas that help youth workers reach kids. David [speaks](#) and [trains](#) around the U.S., sharing the gospel, and equipping others to do the same.