



Don't tolerate bullies, expert cautions crowd

ST. THOMAS: Author Barbara Coloroso says the targeted need tools to keep them safe

By KYLE REA, QMI AGENCY, June 10, 2010

ST. THOMAS — Bullying is utter contempt for another human being, a social problem that can lead to abuse later in life and is a root cause of genocide.

And it's up to everyone — students, teachers, parents — to do something about it.

That was the message author Barbara Coloroso brought to a capacity crowd of 500 at Parkside collegiate institute Wednesday.

She was invited to speak by the local chapter of Parents for Children's Mental Health, after the May 8 death of Bryten Brown, 13, of St. Thomas. In a death notice, Bryten's family sought donations to the London Anti-bullying coalition.

Coloroso has spent years working with troubled children, which has given her a chance to look at bullying and its causes.

"Bullying is about utter contempt for another human being. (It's) an imbalance of power . . . most of the time there's an attempt to harm. They get pleasure from somebody else's pain," she said. "People ask, 'Doesn't the bully feel bad. . .' Absolutely not."

It's a learned behaviour picked up from parents, family and friends, among others.

A person targeted by a bully often becomes an "it" rather than a person, as the bully no longer cares about them. When that happens, it's all too easy for them to be treated poorly.

Coloroso has written a book about genocide and links the two. "Where does genocide start? Verbal bullying. The Jews were vermin and bacteria. Tutsis were cockroaches, Cambodians were worms."

One-third of bullies end up in jail, another third go on to abuse others as adults in the workplace or personal relationships. The final third learn it's wrong and move on.

Coloroso gave a chilling warning about what can happen if bullying goes unchecked.

"When kids feel they can do it with impunity, the target begins to feel helpless and hopeless," she said. "All of us can succumb to it if we are targeted repeatedly and with enough people against them."

When constant bullying leads to someone's death, Coloroso said it's called bullicide in Europe.

She urged parents to teach their kids to stand up for others if they see bullying.

"We have to stop it in the hallways, the bus line, the bathrooms, the classrooms. We have to say no more bullying, not here, never," she said. "We as adults have the biggest responsibility."

School administrators have to make bullies accountable for their actions and keep those who are targeted safe, teaching them tools to deal with bullying.

"And we have to say, 'we're not going to have a culture of mean here.'"

Putting an end to bullying is exactly what Nancy Waller wants to see. She's good friends with Bryten Brown's family.

“The fact is we have grandchildren who are coming up. They’re little now but something needs to be done,” she said. “I hope change is coming.”

Terri Snell, head of a newly launched St. Thomas-Elgin Anti-Bullying Coalition hopes the same thing. She was pleased with Wednesday’s turnout.

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