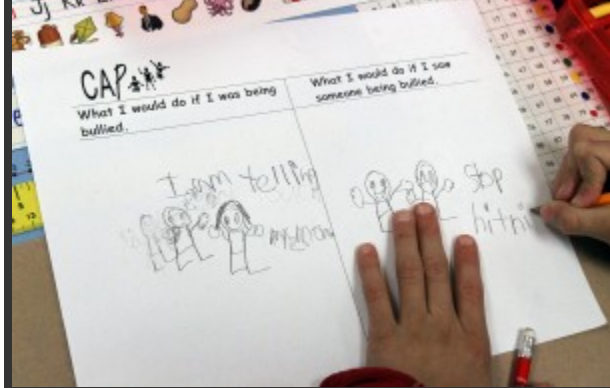


Students in Wildwood learn how to stand up for themselves - and prevent bullying

Posted: Wednesday, March 2, 2011 6:55 pm | Updated: 9:11 pm, Wed Mar 2, 2011.

By TRUDI GILFILLIAN, Staff Writer |

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Dale Gerhard First grade student Anthony Freeman, draws a picture showing how to deal with a bully. Facilitators from Atlantic/Cape May County Child Assault Prevention (CAP) were at the Glenwood Avenue School in Wildwood, working with various classes, teaching students through role-play, how to deal with bullying. Wednesday Mar 2, 2011. (Dale Gerhard/Press of Atlantic).

WILDWOOD - Everything was going just fine in Liz Wade's first-grade classroom until Eileen Crescenzo came along. Barb Jackson was busy drawing when Crescenzo started teasing her. "You can't draw. You can't draw." But Jackson didn't have to stand up to Crescenzo alone. "Don't make fun of her drawing like that," said 7-year-old Ava Troiano. Fellow 7-year-old Joshua Vargas had plenty to say, too. "Don't call her names." And Anthony Freeman, also 7, suggested they tell the teacher. Then came the applause and the smiles.

Jackson and Crescenzo, grownups and friends, credited the children with playing their parts well in the exercise designed to show the first-graders at Glenwood Avenue Elementary School that there are ways to cope with bullying in schools. Jackson and Crescenzo were visiting the school this week as facilitators with New Jersey Child Assault Prevention, a statewide education program hosted locally by AtlantiCare Behavioral Health.

Pam Celenza, county coordinator for the program, looked on as the women led Wade's students through a series of exercises as part of the No More Bullies, No More Victims presentation. "All the children have the right to be safe, strong and free. That's our motto," Celenza said. The two-day program involved students throughout the school with the goal of encouraging children to stand up for themselves and others who are experiencing bullying.

"I have three special rights you see. They are safe, strong, and free," the class sang as Crescenzo and Jackson reviewed what they learned on day one. The song was another way to remind students that they don't have to simply accept being bullied. Tuesday, the students spent time reading a story about a young girl who is bullied and how others could help. The next day, Wednesday, they talked about where they feel safe - and who to turn to when those feelings of safety disappear. The role-playing exercises took them through classroom settings and bullying at the lunch table to the playground.

Celenza said the program puts together workshops for parents and staff to help them recognize and cope with bullying, and then focuses on students and ways to empower them. The words "no" and "stop" are emphasized as the program focuses on what children can say and do to prevent bullying. At the close, they drew pictures related to bullying and had a chance to speak one-on-one with Crescenzo and Jackson about bullies.

"Our attempt here is to empower the kids," Crescenzo said. Emely Osoria-Dejesus, 7, was staring to work on her drawing and said she had learned how to handle a bully should she have to face one. She learned, she said, "how to be strong."

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