

# Middletown parents, students tackle bullying in separate workshops

LOCAL  
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Parents and students took part in a unique approach to combating bullying Wednesday during an education and prevention workshop at Middletown High School.

“I hold my breath for fear of what I’m going to see,” said Dawn Knull, mother of a 7th-grader whose phone she admits to checking regularly. “I check my son’s iPad, Twitter account, Snapchat. I go on it every night, I have his account numbers, and I check it every night to see what’s on there, and I’m simply amazed by some of the things I’m seeing on there.”

Knull attended Wednesday's bullying workshop. There, students tackled the problem in one room while the parents did so in another.

Organizers with Center for Safe Schools, which hosted the event, said the individual approach and age-specific language helps to better communicate an often overwhelming topic.

"You have kids out there that are so gentle and quiet and different, and when they're different – they get picked on," Knull said. "[The] toughest three years are middle school because the kids are trying to come out and trying to find themselves, and trying to make a statement. These past two years have been the hardest two years of school, in my life and my son's."

The bully and their target aren't the only parties involved – onlookers and witnesses make up the largest group.

"When we talk to children who witness bullying, we want to give them tools on how they can respond and intervene," said Sally Canazaro, with the Center.

She said it is vital to teach children how to *safely* intervene.

"It can be as simple as going up to a child after an incident and saying 'I'm sorry that that happened to you, you don't deserve to be mistreated'."

Seventh grader Dustin Whitaker said just hours before the workshop, he was bullied at lunch by someone who wanted his dessert to pay back a friend.

"And the kid went, 'hey, give him your ice cream!' And I said 'no!'."

Whitaker may still be in middle school but he seems to have the bullies figured out.

"They're not telling anybody so they feel trapped and they feel like they have to take out their anger on other people. The more I know what happens, the more I can talk to that person and get to know them more, and know why they're bullying."

Experts say bullies crave attention and control, and their victims often have higher absenteeism, lower grades and perpetual sick days or nurse visits, in order to avoid the bullying altogether.

Knull believes knowing the signs and discussing them, are a good first step.

"Open communication and dialogue with your children is the most important thing right now," Knull said. "If you don't have an open dialogue with your children, you're done."

More information about the Center's work and presentation can be found [here](#).

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