

Tormentors, victims focus of bully talk

By Justin Strawser
The Daily Item

MILTON — More than 13 million American children will be bullied this academic year, making it the most common form of violence experienced by young people in the nation, according to the federal website stopbullying.gov.

More than 160,000 students are believed to miss school every day because of the fear of being bullied, and research shows that children who are excluded from their peer group in early grades are at a greater risk of academic difficulties.

The Center for Safe Schools will host a documentary and

Please see TALK, B3



Brandon Bitner
Mid-West



Britney Tongel
Line Mt.

WATCH FOR SIGNS

Possible indications that your child is being bullied in school include:

Headaches, stomach aches, sleep problems, anxiety, depression and other mood disorders.

MICHELLE NUTTER, MANAGER,
THE CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

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TALK, from Page B1

facilitate a discussion at the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit on April 30 to combat bullying in schools.

Michelle Nutter, a manager of the center, said Friday that it's important to talk about bullying and learn to identify signs that some children are experiencing harassment.

"We want to show parents how we can help and respond to them, and then prevent it from happening in the first place," she said.

Directed by Sundance and Emmy award-winning filmmaker Lee Hirsh, the 2011 documentary "Bully" follows two bullied youths and their families over the course of a school year.

Locally, 14-year-old Brandon Bitner ended his life over peer pressures at Mid-West High School in 2010; months later, in 2011, 17-year-old Line Mountain student Britney Tongel also killed herself after being bullied.

But Nutter stressed that suicide is not an option when dealing with bullying, which is part of the reason why the 90-minute documentary has been edited to 45 minutes. The more controversial material — such as two students committing suicide and one student bringing a gun to school in response to bullying — was cut.

The film seemed to present suicide as a way out, and that's not the message the event organizers are attempting to get across, Nutter said.

"A lot of times kids who are bullied don't confide in their parents or trusted adults, and they become consumed with that behavior," Nutter said. "Having those conversations and seeking help from trusted adults, and being able to talk about problems is the way to better solutions."

Bullying is a problem that affects more than just the targeted child: it affects the school climate as whole, she said.

"It affects every individual observing it happen," Nutter said. "Because it has a ripple effect in the community; we're all affected. We all need to be part of the solution, and it's important to take the time to learn about it and prevent it, instead of standing in background and letting it continue."

Following the screening, a facilitated session conducted by bullying prevention trainers/consultants will be held after the viewing with professionals who will offer additional insights and solutions to bullying. They will also be available to speak privately with families in need of assistance.

Free resources will be provided for anyone seeking more information and tips on how to identify and prevent bullying.

The CSIU screening is one stop of a nine-city tour throughout the state. The program has also been to Reading, Pittsburgh and Erie, and will be at Harrisburg, Gettysburg, Allentown, Carnegie and Altoona between April and June.

Those events were well-attended, Nutter said.

"We had a wonderful dialogue, and people learned more about how they can be supporters," she said.

The screening, which is co-presented by the Highmark Foundation and the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, will start at 6 p.m. April 30 in the Susquehanna room A and B at CSIU, 90 Lawton Lane.

The events, including the one at the CSIU, is free and open to the public.

■ Email comments to jstrawser@dailyitem.com.