

## **MAY – BULLYING**

### **Music Full then Under**

BRYAN: Hello, and welcome to the *Scouting Magazine's* May ScoutCast. I'm *Bryan on Scouting* blogger, Bryan Wendell, along with the one and only Gina Circelli, the Digital Producer for *Boys' Life Magazine*.

GINA: So as you know, ScoutCast is sort of like your monthly roundtables as we talk about subjects that sometimes folks are a little uncomfortable with. Take this month, for example. This ScoutCast will be an in-depth discussion about how to handle bullying in your troop. It's a very important subject to talk about always, and what better place than here on ScoutCast?

BRYAN: Yeah, seriously. It doesn't have to be uncomfortable. You just gotta shine a light on it. I wrote a blog back in November, about bullying. I talked to Dr. Susan M. Swearer, who is co-director of the Bullying Research Network. We get a lot of questions regarding how to handle bullying in a Scouting context, so we thought this might be a good time to talk about it some more.

### **Music Fades**

BRYAN: And our guest today is Cody Solesbee, a doctoral student of Dr. Swearer's, in the School of Psychology at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. He's a researcher for the Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative, which is a huge deal when it comes to anti-bullying initiatives, and their goal is to address the personal, social, and cultural factors that underlie bullying behaviors, and all of that is going to help them advance solutions to promote these healthy relationships within

families, schools, communities, out-of-school organizations like Scouting. So, all of that is to tell you that we've got the expert here with us and we want to welcome you to ScoutCast, Cody.

CODY: Thank you so much for having me on.

BRYAN: So, let's start with like a fundamental question. Is there a difference between teasing and bullying and, if so, can you define and outline that difference for us?

CODY: There absolutely is a difference, but it's a little bit complicated so I'll start with bullying. The definition we like to use is from the CDC is based on three criteria. The first, it's behavior that's intentional, it's done with a purpose. And the second is that the victim, whoever is experiencing that behavior, can't defend themselves. And then lastly, it's a behavior that's repetitive, so it's happened multiple times or there's the threat for it to happen again in the future. The main take-away from that definition, like the hallmark of a bullying interaction, is there's a power differential. So, you have someone who's using these bullying behaviors and holds power over the people that are victimized by what they're doing.

On the other hand, you have teasing, and it's often a point of confusion for a lot of people, so I'm glad this is where we're starting. So, teasing can look a lot like bullying. Often the example we use is like name-calling. So, name-calling can be bullying but it can also be teasing, but when it's teasing the power differential is nonexistent. It's often reciprocal in nature, so the two people that might be in a teasing experience it's often that the person calling that other person is name is also being called a name back.

But it's not done to hurt someone's feeling, or to do anything to harm a person. It's just kind of part of the relationship dynamic.

GINA: I think I get it, but can you use an example off the top of your head of both bullying versus teasing?

CODY: One way to really pinpoint if something is bullying or teasing is to really look at how it's experienced by the victim. So, using the name-calling example, like let's say we have one kid in your troop is calling another kid some kind of name, making fun of them. If that victim feels upset about that or if they're hurt by those words, then we can consider that more on the side of bullying because it's somehow impacting the person who's experiencing it in a negative way. Now, that would be different if that person was called a name and then they weren't hurt by it, like they were laughing then it would be considered teasing. So, part of piecing out if something is bullying or teasing is really looking at how it's impacting the victim in that experience.

BRYAN: So, Cody, looking at what makes someone a bully have you guys at the University of Nebraska identified some traits that cause bullying that lead to that negative behavior that kids sometimes demonstrate?

CODY: So, there's a lot of research we've done here as part of the Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative and also through the Bullying Research Network around the country. There are lots of people really looking at this. When you try to look at why a child becomes involved in the bullying dynamic, there are several reasons that

consistently pop out; things like power, revenge, if someone was bullied themselves, they're more likely to then be a bully after having some of those experiences. It could also be attention - that's something we see a lot in the work that we do. Kids are pretty smart and very observant, and so if a child is maybe lacking attention in their life and they recognize that, there's other people in my troop or in my class that are using these bullying behaviors and getting a lot of attention from it, then they're going to kind of make that connection. So, attention is a major player. Also modeling, just seeing other people doing those behaviors. We also see a lot of expectation. If someone is labeled a bully, we put that label on him, then they're more likely to act as a bully and kind of internalize that role or that label that's been given to them.

**BRYAN:** That's interesting. So is that an argument to not make that label so public, because you do have to identify them, at least to fellow leaders, I would imagine, say, "Watch out for this individual because he's bullying others," so is there any harm in outlining that and possibly, as you say, almost reinforcing or encouraging that behavior in some weird way?

**CODY:** It's definitely challenging. Something that we try to do when we give talks or work with schools and families is to try and talk about bullying in terms of behaviors instead of bullying in terms of someone being a bully. So, when we talk about it as a behavior, it's something that can be changed. You can change your behavior. You can learn to act differently. We can support someone to change their behavior that might not be appropriate in a given setting. But when you do apply a label, labels have a lot of meaning attached to them, and it's often hard to shed that label. Something we see a lot, especially in school settings, is you have kids who have been doing these behaviors for a while who get that label given

to them maybe by school staff or even their peers and classmates, and then it's hard for them to move out of that label because everyone sees them then as the bully or the mean kid.

BRYAN: Yeah. It's like change the color of your eyes. I can't do that. That makes a lot of sense - focus on the actions and not the individual.

GINA: Yeah. This is fascinating. As you're saying this, I'm identifying that as a kid I definitely engaged in a lot of teasing dynamics, but I can say for sure, I've been a bully, I've been bullied. I think that that's probably common for a lot of kids. As you were learning about this, did you start to reflect and realize maybe you'd been bullied yourself at some point or maybe you'd been a bully, and what did you learn from that experience?

CODY: I haven't experienced much bullying, but I was deeply engrained into the world of youth sports. It's like the culture of troops and even in school settings when you're around all of these people all of the time and you're building these relationships, there is an environment where bullying and teasing can happen. And so, I know in the role of sports, we can branch out to hazing. Teasing is very much a part of youth sport culture. And the point that you made - that you learn that there's a lot of fluidity in these roles, so just because you are someone who has been a victim of bullying doesn't mean you always will be a victim. So, you could, in certain situations, become that bully perpetrator or even witness. So, we have these different roles in a bullying situation and it's very fluid how kids move through them throughout their lives or even throughout a school year. So, a big takeaway is that you're not just one part of a bullying experience. It can be very fluid.

BRYAN: So, Cody, as I'm sure you've heard, the BSA has welcomed girls into all programs now, and so this is a really timely question: Do boys and girls exhibit bullying behaviors in different ways? Do they experience bullying themselves in different ways? I'd love to hear what your research has shown.

CODY: That's a great question. The breadth of research out there on this would say yes, they do bully differently. Traditionally what we've seen is that girls are more likely to use relational bullying, so it's more about spreading rumors, saying mean things behind someone's back, maybe excluding someone from a group. Then boys, on the other hand, tend to use more physical acts of aggression, things like fighting, kicking, things that are just more physical in nature. But I would caution everyone listening to this not to think that just because a boy is more likely to use a physical act of aggression, doesn't mean they don't also use relational bullying like spreading rumors. There's overlap because girls can be verbally aggressive or engage in some of those physical acts as well.

GINA: It seems like the similarity of the styles of bullying is probably especially true with the advent of social media. Even bringing up the idea of cyberbullying is a huge fear of parents and volunteers. It's like this great unknown, and the best way to fight that's definitely with knowledge, so give us some idea of the traits of social media or cyberbullying.

CODY: It's certainly challenging from a research perspective too, because social media is always adapting and changing and there are certainly forms of social media where cyberbullying is happening that I don't even know about. So, it's a challenge for us as researchers, as parents, as

community leaders to really be up to date on what kids are engaging with, what social media platforms are being used. What we see from a cyberbullying perspective as those traits, it's a challenge because there's often a level of anonymity that you have on social media, so that presents a challenge to especially the people experiencing it, those victims who are getting bullied and harassed by people that they don't know or have a way to even report them, so that presents a really unique problem for people who are trying to intervene in these situations.

In general though, there is a lot of overlap between more traditional forms of bullying, like the verbal aggression, the relational forms, and cyberbullying, and something we've seen as a trend in the last few years is that kids are experiencing those traditional forms in schools and community environments, and then there's kind of a spillover effect into cyber as well, so they're kind of getting it not only at school but then at home when they're on their phones or on their computer.

GINA: It seems like there's a whole new way of approaching this where kids are in the loop on these almost viral videos, but they're only viral within certain groups. What is the best way for parents to at least try to approach finding out about this stuff instead of finding out about it months later?

CODY: The first thing I would recommend, is to really work on fostering those open lines of communication. What we see a lot is, when a child does disclose to their parents or adult in their life that they have been experienced some bullying or experiencing cyberbullying, it's often just not immediately after that experience has occurred. It's probably something that they've experienced multiple times and has really thought a lot and debated about with themselves on how to come forward with this information. And so, when we have this open lines of communication we

not only increase the likelihood that the child is gonna disclose that, but then also just having that relationship be comfortable so that a parent can step in and help their child. Another thing we make sure to talk about too with cyberbullying is, a lot of parents I've talked to will say, "If my child is experiencing cyberbullying, then my reaction is to take away their phone, or to ground him from Facebook," or whatever social media platform it's happening on. And we really want to stress that that's not the best approach to take because then it's punishing the child because you're taking away something that is not completely bad if they are connected with other friends and have some more positive interactions, so we would caution parents away from reacting by restricting their access if it's something where they have been bullied through their phone or their computer.

**BRYAN:** Yeah, that's a challenge though because with their phone, that's just like a portal to the outside world and they're literally taking a cyberbully into their room basically, inviting them into their room. You mentioned, Cody, we're hoping that the child comes and tells their parents, whether it's months later or weeks later that I've experienced cyberbullying. But are there also some signs that parents can watch out for that the child is experiencing either cyberbullying or in-person traditional bullying?

**CODY:** We always like to say that parents are truly the experts on their kids, and so trust your instincts. Parents have a really good sense of when their child's behavior changes or when they're talking differently about things, so if a child is experiencing bullying, you could see them transition from being someone who's very social, very engaged, very active, to then maybe more quiet and reserved, becoming a little more shy, maybe even isolating themselves, so when those changes do occur, it could be really



subtle, but it means something. Something has occurred to cause that change, and the parents are a great resource, even for us doing intervention work and research, to really have a keen sense of when something is happening with their child that you might not necessarily think is tied to bullying, but those like subtle changes in behavior and personality could mean that there's a lot more going on that needs to be asked about, followed up with, if you're a parent of a child that's experienced bullying.

**BRYAN:** OK, listeners: Now that we know the characteristics of a bully and how to identify one, we'll discuss what you and others in your unit can do to help, right after this.

### **COMMERCIAL - elearning**

**GINA:** So, let's say you've noticed those signs, you've followed up with your kids, you're realizing there's an issue going on. What can others in the troop or crew or even parents do to help victims or bullies or witnesses?

**CODY:** If you are a parent or a troop leader, some trusted adults in these kids' lives, if a victim comes forward to you and discloses that information, the best thing you can do is just listen and be very empathetic and validating for them. And then take on a role if the child wants you to, to really help support them. If there's concerns about like their physical well-being or their emotional well-being, it's also important to just make sure that whatever has happened, especially in like a troop environment where it is a closer-knit group of kids, that there's a way that it's addressed that it's not something that continues beyond that experience or that event that might have happened.

Also, something we talk about with kids a lot, too, is we have the word “upstander.” It’s kind of a play off the word “bystander,” like a bystander being someone who’s witnessed a bullying event happen. We talk a lot to kids about being upstanders by if they do witness something, getting an adult or doing something to stop what’s happening besides just watching it. So often that can be a little bit tricky because we don’t want kids to maybe step in if there’s an altercation happening it then put themselves in harm, so we say, “Find a trusted adult, find someone who can help you.” And then if that’s not possible in that situation, if you can’t find that adult, then try and support the victim afterwards, making sure that they’re OK, making sure that if there’s a way to support them, that you’re doing that, ‘cause often we see kids who do experience bullying get then a little bit more isolated in their groups.

**BRYAN:** So, Cody, when I was in school, the way that they would deal with someone who was exhibiting bullying behaviors is they might have detention or suspension. What are the current trends in, I hate to say, punishing but, reprimanding someone who’s been a bully, and how can we apply those in a Scouting context if we’ve identified one in our troop?

**CODY:** There’s still that presence of the zero tolerance policies, like the suspensions and expulsions, detentions, so that’s still present but there’s a trend away from that to finding a more effective solution. Because what we’ve seen from this history of research on bullying is that those zero tolerance policies just aren’t effectively addressing the problems. Something we do in Lincoln, which is really unique and a great model for how to address bullying, is that we take an approach of working with the bully to first figure out what’s going on. Like I said earlier, there are lots and lots of reasons why kids get caught up in that bullying dynamic, so

first it's figuring out what's going on. Is it a mental health concern? Are they having hardships at home or are they getting bullied themselves? And then work with the schools, the parents, community leaders, whoever are kind of key stakeholders in their lives to figure out ways to get them out of the bullying dynamic. So, if it is a mental health concern that is explaining why they're in the dynamic, then how can we connect them to resources in the community or at school to address those concerns and then, ideally, get them out of the dynamic? We often talk a lot about how bullying behavior is not something that is spontaneous or random. It's caused by something, and if we can figure out that cause, then we can work to address it instead of just suspending or expelling them, which doesn't address the cause of that behavior.

GINA: Very interesting. You're opening some minds right now. This is a lot. So what resources are available if I want to see maybe some of the new research on bullying and what's available so that we can educate leaders about bullying and internet bullying?

CODY: There's probably a couple of websites that I would highly recommend that have great resources. The first is [StopBullying.gov](http://StopBullying.gov). It's a great website that has lots and lots of information for both parents and youth, so it's kind of tailored to different audiences. There's videos, and even information about federal legislation, state legislation, things that parents might also be interested in for how certain experiences of their child might be supported by legislation. There's also the Committee for Children, one of my personal favorites. It has a lot about not just bullying but social emotional learning in general, even things like mindfulness and other resources to help children who have experienced some adverse child events like bullying. That's another great resource for parents and children

alike. And then, it's more towards the cyberbullying end of things, cyberbullying.org has lots of resources tailored to specifically those experiences online.

**BRYAN:** Cody, one thing that we haven't discussed today is adults bullying other adults, and I wonder if you see that in your research. I imagine it could happen in the carpool lane, it could happen at the office, and we hope not but it could even happen in a Scouting context.

**CODY:** Something we do talk about with the reasons why kids get into the bullying dynamic is modeling. So, not only is it modeling from peers but also modeling from adults in their lives. Kids are very observant, very keen and aware in their environment and they are learning by observing, so if they do see those things like adults bullying each other within the troop environment or in the carpool line, they're paying attention to those interactions and potentially introducing them to some behaviors that we don't want to see out of kids in different settings. So, there is a component there where adults and their behaviors and interactions with each other can filter down to how the child might interact with their peers.

**GINA:** Hey, Cody, is there anything else we haven't discussed that our listeners should know?

**CODY:** The best thing I could recommend to everyone is look into those resources and then sharing and connecting with people. I really appreciate you having me on because it's always important to share this information. It's such an important and challenging issue, and the more we have

people engaged with the research, engaged with the resources, reading this information and sharing it, the more we will be able to effectively address this problem.

BRYAN: It's almost cliché to say it: knowledge is power, but in this case that's so true. And what you guys are doing at the Nebraska Bullying Prevention and Intervention Initiative is giving us so much knowledge so that we have the power to be upstanders, and to identify and stop bullying. Our listeners are gonna feel really empowered and thank you, Cody, for joining us on ScoutCast.

CODY: Thank you so much for having me on.

GINA: Now let's check out our May Safety Moment. Then we'll be back with Reminders and Tips.

**(May Safety Moment – Energy Drinks)**

GINA: And now for the timely Reminders and Tips. This is a busy time of year for planning summer outings, so be sure your unit has adopted the Risk Assessment Strategy. Check out the BSA Health and Safety website for all the tools you need to access risk.

BRYAN: That would be a good one to bookmark. Also, you should be recruiting your Popcorn Kernel or other fundraising coordinator right about now.

The committee chair is responsible for this, so if you know somebody who might make a good candidate, go ahead and pass the suggestion along to your committee chair.

GINA: You've probably heard that World Scouting is coming to America in 2019, for the World Scout Jamboree. But it's actually been coming here for decades. In the May-June 2019 issue of *Scouting Magazine*, look for a roundup of some of the men and women who were Scouts in their home countries before moving to America and joining the BSA. It's a very interesting and unique situation for those Scouts/

BRYAN: They came from five different countries around the world and now they live here in the U.S., and they talk about how it's different and the same. So, speaking of the World Jamboree, are you going, listeners? So, you should head to the January 2018 ScoutCast to hear about all the reasons why you should not miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity/

GINA: It's not too late?

BRYAN: It's not too late. Even as you're listening to this in the month of May or June even, it's not too late to sign up for the World Jamboree. You can be a visitor. There might even be some spots at this point for staff or participants.

GINA: So, also in the May-June issue of *Scouting Magazine*, you can get tips for teaching the Hiking Merit Badge, learn how to fend off bugs, and read our advice for finding water in the wilderness.

BRYAN: Now, what about that May issue of *Boys' Life*? A troop from Detroit spent a week kayaking in the open waters of Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, and this was part of the Michigan Crossroad Council's Great Lakes Kayak Adventure.

### **Begin Music Under**

BRYAN: So, with that, this ScoutCast has come to an end. We want to thank our guest, Cody Solesbee, for joining us and thank you for listening. Do not keep all this ScoutCast fun to yourself. Be sure your fellow leaders are tuning in.

GINA: Suggest they do what you do – the cool thing – and subscribe to ScoutCast on iTunes or your favorite podcast app. Now, is there a topic you'd like to hear about? Let us know by sending an email to [scoutcast@scouting.org](mailto:scoutcast@scouting.org) or tweet us @bsascoutcast. And with that, I'm Gina Circelli.

BRYAN: And I'm Bryan Wendell. Whether your troop trailer has ever been stolen or you're worried about it getting stolen, join us next month and we'll figure out all the different ways your unit can make sure that's secure. We'll see you then.

### **Music Full to Finish**