

**Greetings, what follows is an article on GLBTQs and bullying. I am making it available to post/e-mail so that it can get out to as many people as possible. If you are going to send /post please copy it in its entirety.**

## **Advice To GLBT Kids Coping With Bullies**

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Recently the print and broadcast media has been a buzz about the issue of young people being bullied because they are, or even perceived to be, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgender (GLBT). The existence of such mistreatment is nothing new, it has been occurring forever; what is new is that the issue is getting attention. Likewise, there has been an increase in coverage of young people committing suicide in response to on-going abuse by their peers, and the lack of meaningful action by school administrators and other authority figures. GLBT kids are told to, "hang in there, things will get better, and people will eventually change their minds." All of which is true, but misses the point; I would never tell a child being sexually molested at home, "Don't worry, things will be better when you get older and can get out to the house and away from the offender." The victim's behavior isn't the problem---the *offender's* behavior is the problem. On the issue of domestic violence most people have stopped asking, why does the victim stay with the perpetrator, and begun to ask why does the perpetrator think this behavior is acceptable, and what can be done to stop it? We need a similar paradigm shift in regards to the verbal and physical abuse suffered by GLBT people.

Since it seems unlikely that in the near future the widespread abuse of GLBT students will disappear, what is a young person to do? Over many years my clients and I have come up with a number of strategies for responding to verbal bullying. There is no one right response for all situations, therefore I always recommend becoming familiar with all of them so as to have the greatest number of options.

#### **Be Powerfully Silent**

Bullies attack other people in order to get a reaction, therefore refusing to give them the type of response they are seeking is a way of standing up to them. By being silent I don't mean, looking at the floor in humiliation, but rather making full eye contact with the bully while remaining silent, thereby sending the message to the bully and to other people witnessing the event, "Your remarks aren't worthy of a verbal response."

#### **Express Surprise**

For most people, the kind of insulting remarks about African-Americans that used to be common are no longer acceptable, but we have not yet reached that point when it comes to insulting remarks concerning GLBT persons. However, public opinion can, and does, change. GLBT students and their allies can send the message that name-calling is unacceptable by expressing surprise that there is still someone who would make such ignorant and hurtful remarks.

"Wow, what century are we in? I thought that kind of thinking died out during the last century, along with racism and sexism."

"Wow, that certainly was a rude thing to say."

"How unfortunate that hatred and prejudice continues to exist in some people's minds."

#### **Play Dumb**

On the television program, Colombo, the main character was a seemingly inept police detective that showed up to crime scenes in a rumpled trench coat with the stub of a cigar. He would convince suspects that he was completely incompetent by playing dumb, but then would solve the case, usually by asking one last question as he made for the door. He wasn't afraid to

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appear as if he were a bungling idiot because he knew he wasn't. GLBT students can utilize this same technique in response to bullies; when insulted play dumb.

"I don't understand what you mean; I'm not familiar with this term faggot."

"I'm not clear how you are trying to help me with that statement."

"Would you say that slower, I'm not sure I heard you correctly?"

"Please speak up, I didn't hear you...No, I still didn't get all of it, please say it louder."

### **Be Delighted**

Since the goal of bullying is for the victim to be embarrassed and humiliated to refuse to do so is to defeat the purpose. Eleanor Roosevelt was speaking about race when she said, "Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent," but her message is just as appropriate for GLBT people.

"Oh, how nice of you to notice."

"Nothing gets past you, oh observant one."

"You say, 'queer' like it's a bad thing."

"You can say that again."

### **Be In A Different Play**

Social roles are like theater in that specific behaviors are expected of the characters that make up the scene. The motivation of the bully is clear, to look powerful by picking on someone who is perceived to be weaker and vulnerable. The role of the victim is also clear-to tolerate the mistreatment and be humiliated. When the bully recites his or hers line, "F\_cking faggot,"\* it is in effect a cue for the victim character to respond accordingly to expectations. But, just because a certain response is expected, doesn't mean it has to be forthcoming. The victim can resign from that role and play another, better, character by responding to the cue how he or she desires- the more nonsensical the better.

"Sometimes the magic works, sometimes it doesn't."

"No thanks, I've already got one."

"Nice of you to offer, but no thanks."

"Thanks, it's my favorite shirt."

"I think that was nominated for an Emmy."

### **Make The Covert Overt**

Communication between people occurs on two levels; the most obvious level, the overt, consists of the actual words being spoken. Then there is the unspoken, but understood level, the covert message that is being sent. Sarcasm is a common example of this. When the speaker says, "Nice brain, Einstein," the words are positive, but the tone of voice makes the actual meaning clear, "That was a stupid thing to say." Making the covert overt means speaking the hidden message aloud.

"So, you want me to feel humiliated because you called me a faggot."

"This is the point in the story where I supposed to be embarrassed."

"You believe by attempting to insult me you will some how improve your self-image."

### **Go Nuke**

When I was in high school there was another student that for whatever reason had decided to insult me every chance he got. Whenever he could, he would tell me that I was a queer, a homo, a faggot, etc. Thinking perhaps he didn't understand the meaning of these words I tried to educate him. I pointed out to him that as athlete it was he who would spent most evenings after school showering with other naked males, while I was busy being sexual with real live girls, and

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therefore I was certainly not homosexual. But like most bullies, he didn't allow the facts to interfere with his prejudice. I tired ignoring him, and hoped that when he insulted me in the presence of teachers and administrators, they would reprimand him, but since he was a star athlete, he was permitted to do as he pleased. Finally, I got fed up, and decided to go nuke on him the next time he did it. We were in social studies class and the teacher asked the students to consider how life might be different if we had been born the other sex. The bully chimed in, "You should ask Hunter, he's always wanted to be a girl." Having practiced my lines, I was ready, and I spun around in my chair and said in a loud voice so everyone in the room could hear, "You sure are obsessed with me sexually. I bet you masturbate thinking about me before you go to sleep, and have wet dreams about me all night long." He just starred at me with his mouth hanging open. When I turned around, I saw that the teacher didn't know how to respond either. After what seemed like a long silence, she began again as if nothing had happened. But something had happened, I had sent the message to that bully and any potential bully that I was willing to go too far, or at least farther than they would be comfortable going. That bully never bothered me again.

\* I find it sad that F\_ck and N\_gger are considered too offensive to print, but faggot is acceptable.

Dr. Mic Hunter is licensed as both a psychologist and a marriage and family therapist. He is the author of numerous books. His private practice is in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where he lives with his wife of 27 years. His most resent book, Honor Betrayed: Sexual Abuse In America's Military that addresses, among other things, the mistreatment of gays and lesbians. His forth-coming book, Back To The Source: The Spiritual Principles Of Jesus, will be released in late 2010 or early 2011. In it he addresses the mistreatment of women, gays, and lesbians.