

# Families of bullying victims seek signs of support

**By Enterprise staff**  
Several families expressed interest in sharing their recent experiences with bullying.

### Death threats

Last November, Melissa Carmichael of Park Rapids decided to home-school her older son when the fourth grader received death threats from other students at Century School.

"I was on the bus," said 10-year-old Cadin Humphrey. "My head was getting pushed down to the floor. I was getting hit and punched."

Carmichael said Cadin's brother Cole, 7, moved back a few seats to help him out.

Afterward, Cadin said, the hostile boy "threatened to shoot me with his dad's gun."

According to mom, the same boy told Cole that Cadin is gay and accused him of trying to touch the boy's privates. "That's my first grader that's being told to," she said.

Asked how he felt about this, Cadin said, "I've not been liking it at all. I've been trying to avoid him."

A few days later, Cadin said, "a kid in my class threatened to stab me with a screwdriver-like pen." He admitted to being "a little bit scared."

Carmichael explained that everyone thought it was a screwdriver. When other students told school staff about it, they searched the boy and found what turned out to be a pen.

"I pulled Cadin out of school after these incidents," said Carmichael, explaining that she worried her son would suffer academically.

In March, however, she sent him back to Century School because she realized that he "just does better in a classroom setting."

"He's definitely more a 'structure' kind of guy," she said. "With a daycare at home, that's the one thing I couldn't provide, and it turns out that's what he needs."

When she sent him back to Century, Carmichael said, she extracted a promise from school staff to keep her informed of any trouble. On his first day back, they told her that a student informed

school staff that another child was talking about shooting Cadin with a bow and arrow.

What bothers her most, she said, is that school staff says "it's being handled and he is safe" but won't say what is being done, for privacy reasons.

"I just have to trust them," she said. But because incidents keep happening, "I don't trust that they're actually doing something about it."

Meanwhile, the boy who threatened to shoot Cadin is riding the bus again.

Carmichael said she has instructed her son to tell the principal that she wants to be called immediately if there is another incident.

"It's very important that he knows that I'm always going to be his biggest advocate," she said.

### A different girl

"We could tell there was something wrong," the mom recalled about the end of her daughter's sixth-grade year. "She wasn't our daughter anymore."

Terry and Tanya Edwards of Park Rapids were starting to realize something was troubling their daughter Tera, the oldest of three children.

They logged into her social media accounts and found threats and name calling by other students at Century Middle School. They told school staff about it. They advised Tera not to talk to those kids any more.

"What's happened, though, is these kids anymore - they don't stop," Tanya said. "It just escalates, more fuel for the fire."

In seventh grade, Tera was punched in the ear by another girl while waiting to board a homebound school bus. Tera's face swelled up so that she couldn't open her mouth.

Her mom took her to the emergency room to make sure her jaw wasn't broken. An ER doc told them to press charges.

Suspended during Christmas break, the girl who punched Tera and came back to school after the new year. "That's when everything got really bad," said Tanya. The girl and three of her friends started harassing

Tera on a regular basis.

During the next couple of months, Tera frequently filed bullying reports at school and called her mother in tears.

"It was a daily thing," she said, adding that school officials "did nothing" except, in one instance, to tell her that she was the cause of her own problems.

Her grades have slipped in several subjects. Tera said the only classes she isn't failing are the ones her bullies aren't in. "It's easier for me to concentrate when they're not there," she said.

A juvenile court judge eventually ordered the girl who assaulted Tera to write an apology, serve community service and probation, pay restitution for their ER bill, and have no contact with the victim. Nevertheless, the girl approached Tera later that day at school.

"She said that she'd won and that I'd lost," said Tera.

The harassment continued. The other girls cut off a hank of Tera's hair; she ended up having eight inches cut off. The girls put glue in her hair, tripped her, ran a marker down the back of her shirt, held her cornered in a restroom until she shoved her way out.

Tanya said the ordeal has changed her daughter.

"Tera used to be outgoing, very bubbly. She was the class clown. She was funny. Now, she doesn't want to talk to anybody." In a choked-up voice, she added, "What can I do?"

Tanya and Terry have considered enrolling their daughter in a different school district or an online school. "We're just hoping and praying that high school is different," said Tanya.

Now in eighth grade, Tera, 13, said she wants to be homeschooled, hoping a year away will cool things down. She calls her time at Century Middle School "the bad three or four years of my life (that) I don't really want to remember."

Recalling a meeting with her four persecutors and a school staffer, Tera said, "I had to sit there, (while) they got to tell me they're bullying me because I'm not like other

girls. So, I was like, 'I know I'm not like other people. I'm one-of-a-kind.'"

When the staff member asked if she had anything else to say, she added, "Sometimes I don't want to come to school because of you guys. Then I walked out, and I got in trouble, but I didn't care, because I didn't want to be in that room anymore."

### Recovering from a concussion

For Henry Johnson, a sixth grader at Century Middle School, there have been several instances of name-calling, tripping in the hallways and hitting during this school year that were a result of a misunderstanding with another student.

"It took him awhile to come forward to us," said dad Brian.

"I was worried I was going to be called a snitch," Henry said.

"What do they say? 'Snitches get stitches,'" Brian said.

Henry filled out a bullying report form that was in the middle school office. That situation was eventually resolved, but his parents say they are most concerned about the concussion Henry received during an inside recess in mid-March.

Henry says a different boy intentionally pushed him off a stack of mats. "I fell and hit my head on a whole bunch of metal poles," he said.

His mom Kameron said, "We were concerned about supervision, because our question right away was, there are one or two supervisors in there and all these kids. Where's the support?"

"No one saw him. No one helped him," Brian added.

"He walked himself to the nurse," Kameron noted.

At first, Henry tried to find the boy who pushed him. "I started to walk around the gym. I was really dizzy, nauseous, and my eyes were starting to go black even though I didn't want them to. And then I passed out for I don't know how long. I woke up by myself," he said.

At the nurse's office, Henry was treated for

a split-open finger and sent to lunch, Brian said. A friend told Henry he looked ill and probably had a concussion, so he went to the middle school office and his parents were contacted. They took him to the emergency room.

The Johnsons have been frustrated with the lack of communication between themselves and the school as Henry has dealt with his concussion. Kameron said there wasn't a lot of followup or feedback.

"We have not been satisfied with the punishment of the other kids involved or the lack of support given to our son. We are now taking a more proactive approach and developing a plan to make sure he is given the support he needs," said Brian. A former educator, he would like to see a structured anti-bullying program and the teaching of tolerance at the school.

Establishing relationships where students feel they have a safe adult to talk to or a safe space is key, too, Kameron says. "When you feel isolated, where do you go when someone is giving you a hard time?"

"Henry's got a good support system, so we can talk about it and try to work through it and advocate for him. But what about the kids who don't? How many other kids are going through situations similar to Henry, where they feel targeted? They feel isolated. They don't feel there's anybody they can talk to or it's out of their wheelchair or tool kits - they don't know what to do," she continued.

The Johnsons are glad conversations are being had. "We've been churning with this for months," Kameron said, adding, "No school is immune to it. But it's how you address it and try to fix it and make things better."



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## Springtime on the farm



Submitted photo

These Nigerian dwarf goats were born April 22 on Terry Novak's farm, south of Park Rapids. His daughter, Jordyn, will show them for 4-H as a livestock dairy goat. According to the Nigerian Dwarf Goat Association (NDGA), this breed is a miniature dairy goat of West African origin. "The Nigerian has also been enjoying a rise in popularity due to their small size, colorful markings, dairy characteristics and their wonderful, easy temperament," the NDGA website states.

## BAGSTAD

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As an educational institution, we take the approach of first gathering information about the incident and investigating and then responding to the information in a reasonable way. At times, disciplinary consequences are assigned, including in school suspension, out of school suspension or even expulsion. At each step, we are mindful of our obligation to educate students about their behaviors and the impacts of their choices.

Our school board has passed several policies that we, as administrators, use to guide us when concerns arise related to discrimination, harassment, bullying and retaliation.

At this time, we have

turned a pending complaint of bullying over to an external investigator and an independent investigation will be conducted promptly. The findings of the investigation will be released directly to the school board. We will use the information gained from this process to respond in a reasonable manner and in compliance with the Minnesota Safe and Supportive Schools Act.

Next week, National School Safety Consulting will be working with our middle school staff and students regarding relationships and bullying.

Looking into next school year, I have engaged our school district legal counsel to conduct a training at our fall in-service where all staff will be retrained on the proper procedures for addressing bullying in compliance with the

law and our administrative staff will be retrained regarding investigating and handling complaints.

We are committed as a district to constant improvement and continuing education. I am also currently researching a student-focused training to implement at the beginning of the next school year to make sure that we are sending a clear message about what types of behavior are acceptable and unacceptable and what the consequences are of unacceptable behavior.

From a "big picture" standpoint, I am proud of our staff, students, school and community. I look forward to working with all groups to improve the culture, climate and academic opportunities for all students at Park Rapids Area Schools.

**GUIDA MASONRY**

**AUCTION**

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