

At Paxson, my role as a School Counselor involves universal teaching in the classrooms. The students learn about Kelso's Choices for solving small and big problems. One important topic of this teaching is the difference between conflict and bullying. Here are some important aspects of that teaching.

What is conflict? Conflict is a struggle between two or more people who have differing ideas or desires. Oftentimes, conflict is a kid-sized problem. Conflicts are a normal part of relationships. At Paxson, students are taught that they are strong enough and smart enough to try to solve conflicts on their own.

What is bullying? Bullying behavior is very different from conflict. Bullying is a serious form of aggression that is intentional and repeated with the intent of gaining power over another person. The person doing the bullying purposely says or does something to hurt the target of his/her behavior. Bullying is a big problem and needs adult attention.

Why does it matter what we call it? Because of the severity of bullying, it's important that we understand the language ourselves and help kids differentiate between bullying and conflict. The misuse of the words can lead to binary thinking (ie: "bullies" are mean, victims are innocent) and even "labeling" of children. Kids are not bullies. Bullying is a behavior, not an identity. Teasing and mean behavior are never okay, but it's also important to be sure that we're reserving the word "bullying" for true bullying situations—situations that are aggressive, intentional, and involve power imbalance. Additionally, it's important to teach our children that they have power and skills to address conflicts with their peers.

What should I do if my child says he/she is being bullied? Hearing that your child is being mistreated is never to be taken lightly. To determine if bullying is truly happening, ask your child lots of questions to understand the severity of the problem. Ask your child what steps were taken to solve the problem and remind him of the skills he has. For example, "What did you do to solve the problem?" "Did you get help from an adult at school?" It's also helpful to reach out to your child's classroom teacher to be sure the teacher is aware.

This is the Land Acknowledgement that is read in the announcements every Friday morning by 5th Grade Students:

"We acknowledge that we are learning on Indigenous land. Paxson Elementary School, and all of Missoula, is on the original homelands of the Salish and Kalispell people. We honor the people who have always cared for this place by showing gratitude and respect for the land and its people through our thoughts and actions."

Families First Workshops offered at the Life Long Learning Center and other places

- **Communication So They Will Hear You** 10/5
- **Let's Talk About Bullying, Peer Pressure and the Internet** 10/9
- **Positive Parenting Practices** 10/24
- **Helping Kids Solve Conflicts** 11/2
- **Learning Disabilities: Thriving at School** 11/29
- **Trauma** 101
- **Love and Logic** 10/3-10/17
- **Health Snack Options for the Whole Family** 10/14

Parenting Classes run throughout the year at different locations. Child care is provided. You may sign up at Families First or through the Adult Lifelong Learning Center.

For more information, go to www.missoulaclass.com or call the MCPS Adult Education Life Long Learning Center at 549-8765.