



Mercy Notes

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Stress, Bullying and Suicide

President Obama and other national leaders responded quickly to recent media coverage of gay youth suicides, threatening to pull the federal funds of schools or universities that do not prevent bullying. They were responding to news stories focused almost entirely on gay victims and largely ignoring other suicide risk factors, as well as the thousands of other troubled kids who ended their own lives. For more information, visit www.mrc.org.

This article (www.aolhealth.com) blamed gay youth suicides on conservative parents and “children who took on the attitudes of their parents and of the society at large.”

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) presents the risk factors for suicide at www.afsp.org and other sobering facts at www.afsp.org/files/College_Film/factsheets.pdf.

Bullying is intolerable, but selecting one characteristic and ignoring the risk factors for all young people is political cherry picking that could result in federal overreach, as discussed in www.washingtontimes.com.

Bullying

How prevalent is bullying? It is more than we realized. A large national survey by a nonprofit character-building group found half of all high school kids admit they have bullied a classmate at least once, 47 percent have been bullied in the past year and almost one-fourth of students feel unsafe at school, as noted at www.dailybreeze.com.

A study of over a half million students found one in six students is regularly bullied at school. Over one-third of older students admitted they would join in bullying someone they do not like. More disturbing is that a lot of the bullying occurs in classrooms with teachers present. Read more at www.msnbc.msn.com.

It is tough to find a safe haven from bullying today, thanks to the 24/7 presence of social media. Often, parents do not even know their children are being bullied. Kids themselves do not always recognize bullying. Read a psychologist's opinion on the difference between teasing and bullying at www.psychologytoday.com.

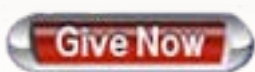


photo by Bob Knight



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Stuck on Specifics

While 45 states have enacted anti-bullying laws, only 10 states “enumerate,” or name, specific categories of students that are likely to be bullied, such as by race or gender orientation. Gay advocates say schools must adopt policies that enumerate specific protections for gay kids. They are running into opposition from conservative groups, as detailed at www.governing.com. Christian youth advocates stress *all* kids deserve protection from bullies. They say gay advocates have found a topic everyone can agree on, using it as a Trojan horse to introduce inappropriate material into classrooms and indoctrinate youth. For more information, read www.californiafamilycouncil.org/OutlawingBullyTalk.

One ACLU attorney fears government overreach could ultimately silence students’ right to free speech, as explained at www.washingtonpost.com.

Kids Under Greater Stress

Politicians appeared to promote a cause célèbre while ignoring the facts about youth suicide. They also failed to acknowledge our increasingly coarse anti-family, anti-Christian culture and the unique pressures of today’s youth.

Young people today are under more stress than their peers of the Great Depression. Researchers attribute higher stress levels to an increasingly secular society teaching kids to focus on wealth, looks and status. The mental health data of over 77,000 youth from the years 1938 through 2007 was analyzed and reported at www.wusa9.com.

Kids are also under greater pressure than ever to succeed academically and plan successful careers.

Of college students responding to a 2009 American College Health Association survey, 46 percent said they felt hopeless at least once in the previous 12 months. One-third was so depressed they could barely function. Read further at www.nytimes.com.

More troubling than the fact that almost one-fourth of teens considered suicide is that less than a third of parents

have any idea their kids are this stressed. Forty-two percent of teens suffer stress-induced headaches, and about half of teens and almost half of tweens are so stressed they are losing sleep.

Disintegrating Community, Faith and Family

Overwhelmed parents may not notice their kids are in trouble. Almost 10 percent of adults are depressed, according to [a recent study](#). A record 43 million Americans — one in every eight — rely on food stamps, up from 26 million before the recession. Unemployment hovers close to 10 percent, depending on region, and social service agencies are noting a new trend, middle-class public assistance applicants. For more information, visit www.governing.com.

The decline of marriage, family and faith is weakening families and damaging the resilience of adults and children. Some argue weaker citizens mean a weaker nation. Dr. Pat Fagan, director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute at the Family Research Council, completed a survey called “Index of Belonging and Rejection.” He found

only 45 percent of American kids spent their childhood in intact families. And those from broken homes are more likely to live in poverty, struggle in school and suffer more mental health problems. Read further at <http://downloads.frc.org>.

Our coarsening culture does little to uplift kids. Instead, pop stars and Hollywood bombard young minds with increasingly vile entertainment. Even Christian kids are singing along to songs glorifying violence, sex and self-abuse. Read <http://townhall.com>.

How We Can Help

This is a call for churches to step up and find ways to reach young people and strengthen families. Our Lutheran school system is crucial for helping children navigate the troubled waters of today’s culture.

Adults need to pay attention. Do kids look unhappy or exhausted? Find out if they are struggling with something that is taking a toll. Be aware that the children of deployed soldiers in our congregations may be under extra stress. For more information, read the article at www.medicinenet.com.

The Numbers on Suicide

- Over 34,000 people in the U.S. die by suicide each year.
- Every 60 seconds, someone attempts suicide. About every 15 minutes, someone succeeds.
- In 2007, over 4,000 young people between the ages of 5 and 24 ended their lives. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention provides a look at suicide by age group compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics at www.afsp.org. Suicide statistics vary slightly by source, but experts say more than 90 percent of people who die by suicide suffered a psychiatric illness before death, commonly depression or substance abuse. About half of them suffered, often untreated, for at least two years.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for those between the ages of 18 and 65, accounting for 28,628 suicides in this age group in 2007. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15 through 24, after homicide and accidents.
- The National Institute on Chemical Dependency says almost 25 percent of high school students have seriously considered suicide during the past year. Eight percent attempted suicide.

Read some sobering facts about suicide from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) at www.afsp.org/files/College_Film/factsheets.pdf.

Read tips on how parents, teachers and kids can handle bullying, including parents setting boundaries on technology and practicing scenarios at home with their kids at www.apa.org.

Michael Josephson, president of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, says adults can help kids become more resilient to bullying. "We need to fortify our young people to deal with that, and not take it so personally." Some parents are learning how to help their digitally bullied children. Read more at www.nytimes.com.

Write a letter to the editor if a newspaper's coverage of youth suicide misinforms. Guidelines are available for responsible media coverage, such as from www.afsp.org.

Is your child at risk for suicide? Learn the warning signs at www.sun-sentinel.com. Learn more about risk factors and how to intervene at www.chron.com.

Sources: about.com pediatrics, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, American Psychological Association, bullyingstatistics.org, cnsnews.com, California Family Council, Child Trends, Culture and Media Institute, *Daily Breeze*, Family Research Council, Governing, *Houston Chronicle*, kidshealth.org, Lutheran Counseling Center, Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri, Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota, MedicineNet.com, National Institute on Chemical Dependency, *New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, WUSA.com and Yahoo Health

From the Hill

- Congressman Mike Pence (R-Ind.) is determined to strip Planned Parenthood of all federal funding. The president of the largest abortion provider in the U.S. calls Pence "obsessed" with her group. But the president of the pro-life group Susan B. Anthony List says Rep. Pence "understands that Planned Parenthood is the fulcrum of the abortion movement." Read more at www.politico.com
- Federal regulators have adopted 18 new rules since the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed in March 2010. The Congressional Research Service reports

Further Reading

- [Lutheran Counseling Center](#) in Mineola, New York, offers bullying presentations and other counseling services at area Lutheran schools. [Lutheran Family and Children's Services of Missouri](#) provides counseling services in 16 area Lutheran schools and two public school districts addressing bullying and other issues.
- Read about a teen suicide and the Christian love modeled by grieving young friends in the "Family Counselor" column of the August 2008 issue of [Lutheran Witness](#).
- The November 2010 issue of [Home Base](#), an e-journal published by LCMS Family Ministry Resources, looks at bullying and includes tips for parents.
- Learn more about teen suicide risk factors and warning signs, including medication risks by reading <http://pediatrics.about.com>.

most of the new rules were not stipulated by the health care reform law. The Obama administration allowed public comment on 12 of the new rules only after they were adopted, claiming the ACA required the new regulations be enacted quickly. Read further at <http://thehill.com>.

- The U.S. Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families announced a new website. The Adopt Us Kids website is devoted exclusively to adoption by homosexual couples. Read further at www.cnsnews.com.

Learn More

Log onto <http://thomas.loc.gov> for the complete text of bills and for further information, including the current status of any bill and the names of sponsoring representatives.

To find out how your representatives voted on recent legislation, log onto www.vote-smart.org.

Contact Your Elected Officials

For the name of your U.S. representative or senator, contact your local elections officer or call the **Federal Citizen Information National Contact Center** at 800-333-4636.

For the most recent information about elected national officials, log on to these websites or call the following Capitol switchboard numbers:

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202-224-3121 • www.senate.gov

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Brief Notes

- A nonprofit group hired by the federal government is revising the nation's kidney donation network to favor younger, healthier transplant recipients over older, sicker patients. One physician and bioethicist calls it age discrimination. Another says it will force a discussion of rationing a scarce healthcare resource. A board member of the group revising the guidelines says people on the transplant list should consider the greater good. The public can comment on the proposal until April 1. Read more at www.washingtonpost.com. Read the proposal at <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov>.
- Read about an alarming and under-reported rise in suicide among our military troops at www.congress.org.
- The American Medical Association (AMA), whose support was critical in passing the Affordable Care Act, is now roiled in conflict over the issue. A block of conservative doctors in the group almost won a battle to rescind AMA support of the health reform law and push

for its repeal. The battle is expected to renew in June 2011. Read more at <http://healthaffairs.org>.

- Economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman says the U.S. debt can be resolved through "a combination of death panels and sales taxes." Read www.newsmax.com.
- A recent Physicians Foundation survey found 67 percent of respondents held "very negative" views of the Affordable Care Act after its passage. Months later, negative views were either unchanged or more negative. Only 10 percent expect the law to improve health care. Most say they plan to retire, see fewer patients or spend less time with patients. Read further at <http://blog.heritage.org>.
- A federal appeals court recently denied the right of a pro-life nurse to sue the hospital that employs her after she was forced to take part in a late-term abortion. Read further at www.lifenews.com.

State Watch

- Arizona legislators are considering a number of pro-family bills. **H.B. 2416** would ban telemed abortions. ("Telemed" is short for "telemedicine," where medical consultations occur through electronic communications.) **S.B. 1188** would give preference for adoptions to married parents, and **H.B. 2565** would protect the religious rights of university students. Read more about these and other pending pro-family bills at www.azpolicy.org.
- A bill to recognize civil unions was struck from the House in Wyoming. Legislators said civil unions are inten-

tionally introduced in states as a stepping stone to gay marriage. Read <http://trib.com>.

- Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed a law legalizing civil unions for same-sex couples. The director of an ACLU gay advocacy group called it a victory in the ACLU's ongoing efforts to enshrine gay marriage throughout the U.S. Read more at www.prnewswire.com.
- Montana lawmakers are under pressure to either determine the rules for physician-assisted suicide or ban the act entirely. For more information, read <http://billingsgazette.com>.

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