

The Story of “Olivia’s Letters”

How young people can make a difference

Olivia is a 14-year-old girl who experienced bullying and cyber bullying during her middle school years. Things got so bad that her mother decided to home school her. The bullying started in sixth grade when Olivia had an epileptic seizure at school one day. Epilepsy is a disorder that causes disturbances in the electrical signals of the brain. These disturbances are called seizures and can cause changes in a person's sensations or state of consciousness and/or uncontrolled movements of certain parts of the body or of the whole body. Epilepsy is not contagious and can be treated with medication. According to the San Francisco Chronicle¹, after the seizure, Olivia’s classmates began bullying her by:

- Calling her names
- Dragging her backpack through the mud
- Hitting and threatening her
- Creating an “Olivia Haters” web page online to make fun of her
- Wearing anti-Olivia bracelets at school

Dan Olweus, an expert on bullying, says a person is being bullied when he/she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons.

“What are other ways that children can be bullied? How would you feel if you were Olivia? What would you do if you saw her classmates making fun of her? What would you do if you saw the website that made fun of her?”

One day a newspaper reporter wrote an article about bullying and included Olivia’s story. Two sisters, Emily and Sarah, were students at a nearby high school and were shocked and saddened by Olivia’s story. They decided to do something about it. They started a letter-writing campaign to help support Olivia. They asked their classmates to write her positive letters of support. Many students from the sisters’ school wrote positive letters. The letters made Olivia feel much better. “I feel less alone . . . It makes me feel I have support,” Olivia said about the letters she received.

Can you think of someone who might need a letter of support? Maybe you have seen someone get picked on or bullied, and you would like to let that student know that you would like to help or support him or her. Maybe you know how he or she feels because it has happened to you. Use the space below to write a letter to someone you think has been bullied or treated unkindly. Here are suggestions of what you might include in your letter, but you can use your own words.

- I’m sorry this happened.

¹ Lelchuk, I. Bullied girl alone no more. *San Francisco Chronicle*. May 23, 2007.

- I want you to know that. . .
- I am here if you need to talk.
- I will help you by. . .

Teacher Instructions:

Have each student use the letter form on the next page to write a letter of support to someone who has experienced bullying behavior. If a student cannot think of anyone s/he knows who has been targeted by bullying behavior the student can write a letter to Olivia. After students have completed the assignment the teacher can ask to review the letters. This should be voluntary, and it is acceptable if a student does not want to share his or her letter with the teacher. Let the students know that they can choose whether or not they actually want to send or give their letters to individuals. If students want to send their letters to Olivia, the teacher can collect the letters and send them to the following address:

Olivia's Letters, c/o Janet Buder
775 East Blithedale Ave #106
Mill Valley, CA 94941

