

Martial Arts Teacher Shows Five Steps In Handling Bullies

By Carole O’Keeffe
The Virginian-Pilot

LYNNHAVEN- The best defense against a bully is a well-thought-out and practiced defense.

Bullies find their glory in making others feel smaller, said Geoffrey A. Cielo, president of King Tiger Martial Arts in Green Run.

“It makes them feel better to make someone else feel as bad as they do,” the Salem resident told fifth-graders at Plaza Elementary on Dec. 15. The two other fifth-grade classes heard his presentation over the next two days.

Sometimes bullies have a bad home life, Cielo said.

“Their grades aren’t that good. They have a bad life all the way around. They don’t feel good and they need something to make them feel better,” he told them.

The martial arts master visited Plaza Elementary to teach the students a five-step process for getting a bully off one’s back.

First step: Walk away.

“That takes the wind out of them,” Cielo said. “The best fight is one you walk away from. Nobody gets hurt.”

If the bully is ignored, he or she usually will stop. And if that doesn’t work, he said, try step two: Forcefully tell the bully to stop. Being loud about it tells the bully he or she is bugging you, Cielo said. Plus, it calls attention to the problem.

“It makes the bully the center of attention,” he said. The bully looks bad at that point.

Should the bully continue his mission, Cielo told the students to tell an adult – the third step.

But even then, the bully might stop for a while and come back later to get a different reaction.

The schools’ code of conduct says students can expect an environment free from threat and physical aggression.

If a student who is being hassled retaliates by hitting or kicking, he or she is likely to be suspended.

The fourth step: Put distance between yourself and the bully – and then run.

Only as a last resort does Cielo advise using physical self-defense tactics, and then only if one is qualified to do so.

Each student was given a certificate to attend a self-defense class at his studio.

“Do not do self-defense unless trained,” he advised.

Cielo, 36, began his training when he was 7, taking private lessons where he lived in New Mexico. Those basic skills were honed as a Naval Academy cadet.

Today, Cielo is an adjunct faculty member at Tidewater Community College. He teaches the bully class at his studio. In the schools, he accepts no fees for sharing his knowledge.

Teacher Amber Turner, 26, said that self-esteem and peer relations are important to this age group.

“Bullies can be overwhelming and extremely intimidating. So being armed with what to say and appropriate ways to react can set them at ease,” she said.

Being prepared lessens the possibility they will react out of fear or anger, she added.

When a child reports to her that he is being bullied, she first talks to the other child.

“There are two sides to every story, and I will bring both kids together and try to piece together what happened.”

Student Kirsti Ferguson said she has been bullied at one time or another. She asked the bully to stop and when he didn't, she told the principal.

That worked for a while, she said, “until he decided he wanted to bully me more.”

If she is bullied again, Kirsti will follow the five-step plan.

“I will ignore him and walk away, then ask him to stop and tell the teacher. I will never use self-defense unless I have to,” she said.