



## Jennifer Johnson challenges Students to become Up-Standers

by Nancy King, SHG Development Director

Jennifer Johnson, a School-based Mental Health Specialist for Southeast Health Group, presented a program on bullying to the 6th, 7th and 8th graders at Manzanola School on Tuesday, October 13th. Johnson joined the Youth and Family Services team in August, and holds a master's degree in counseling and an endorsement in school counseling. She is one of eight counselors available throughout the Arkansas Valley and High Plains region to support students in the school-based program.



“Bullying is a key issue for me as a counselor,” said Johnson. “One in four students is bullied regularly, and 160,000 students across the U.S. miss school every day for fear of being bullied.”

Bullying is about power, specifically when one child holds power over another child, and

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it can take many forms. Bullying can happen in the hallways, on the playground, over the internet, or in

text messages and emails. It is usually invisible to parents.

When a child is bullied, it brings on fear, loneliness, sadness, and depression. Bullied students are often angry, stressed and anxious. It can cause suicidal thoughts and physical symptoms, such as stomachaches and headaches.

Johnson says, “It’s a challenge to stand up to a bully, but there are ways to do it. You can ignore the bully, stand up for yourself (without becoming a bully), hide your feelings about how the bullying is affecting you (even though it is painful), and tell an adult.”

Bystanders can also have a powerful influence on bullying. “If you are watching someone else being bullied, you can send a message to the bully that their behavior is unacceptable,” said Johnson. She challenged the students to become “up-standers”—someone who stands up to protect the person being bullied. Research shows that when one person stands up to a bully, the bully will change his or her behavior within 10 seconds.

Up-standers refuse to laugh or give the bully attention for their bad behavior. They walk away and don’t become part of the bully’s audience. “It’s not about starting a fight or bullying the bully, it’s about helping the student who is being bullied get away from the situation,” said Johnson. Up-standers often befriend students who are bullied and help them to process what just happened. They notice students who appear isolated and invite them to join activities.

“Our job is to help keep schools places where students can learn,” said Johnson, “And students can’t learn when they are afraid.”

***For more information about school-based mental health and substance use disorder services, call Southeast Health Group at 1-800-511-5446.***