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Ne-Yo Joins Boys & Girls Clubs Stop Bullying:Speak Up Campaign

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With his signature hats and dapper clothes, Grammy-winning R&B singer/song writer [Shaffer "Ne-Yo" Smith](#) sets himself apart from contemporaries who belt out x-rated lyrics.

More importantly, he uses his fame to help kids through the [Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Stop Bullying: Speak Up](#) campaign and his nonprofit, [The Compound Foundation](#), with business partner Reynell "Tango" Hay that empowers foster youth to become productive, successful and independent adults.

"With the Internet and YouTube, celebrities have become lazy and don't think they have to be role models today. But whether you want to be or not, kids will emulate you. Your life is not necessarily yours," Ne-Yo says.

The talented entertainer who records and writes Grammy award-winning music for Beyoncé Knowles, Mary J. Blige and Justin Bieber knows first-hand the importance of strong role models and safe havens like the Boys & Girls Club (BGCA).

"After my dad checked out, I grew up in a house with all women," he says. "I had no male figure to emulate on how to walk and talk like a man, so I had lots of feminine mannerisms. Kids were cruel all the way through high school. At first, I didn't know what 'gay' meant, but I knew it wasn't me." The BCGA in the rough Las Vegas suburb where he grew up became his daily refuge after school.

"It was either that or get into trouble, and I knew my mom wouldn't tolerate trouble," he says. He credits the organization with providing a refuge from bullying and male role models, particularly a coach who made sure he played in the last quarter of every basketball game, even though he wasn't a good player.

As a way of giving back, Ne-Yo helped launch the http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/tv_shows/.../stopbullying/index.html target="_hplink">Cartoon Network's participation in the Stop Bullying: Speak Up campaign at the James BCGA in Las Vegas during National Bullying Awareness Month in October. The network's contributions include 4,000 bullying prevention kits, themed comic books and posters that give BCGA staff members teaching tools.



It Takes a Village

Joe Mollner, a retired commander of the St. Paul, Minnesota police department and current senior director of delinquency and gang initiatives at the BCGA, heads up Stop Bullying: Speak Up campaign. "In a recent study, 75 to 85 percent of kids admitted to witnessing bullying," Mollner says. "It doesn't stop when the bell rings. We want kids to be the catalyst to affect change, and parents are a key component."

Mollner points out that although bullying has always been around, the problem is much more serious today than when it took place only face-to-face. "The problem has exploded with cyber bullying because it reaches so many people," he says. "Once [kids put it] out on the internet, it can go anywhere. They don't understand the consequences."

Serious bullying can even result in injury or death or with the victim taking his or her life. "It shouldn't have to go that far," Mollner says. "Our staff members and parents need to know what's going on at the computer."

According to I-Safe.org, numbers are on the rise. In a 2009 study, 42 percent of kids report being bullied online, and one in four have been harassed more than once. More than 35 percent have been threatened online with one in five reporting more than one occurrence.

Weapons have also escalated the problem exponentially. Mollner reports that gangs reportedly break into stores to steal guns, then bury them in plastic bags in parks and other locations where they might come in handy to victimize others or protect themselves. Seventy percent of boys and 40 percent of girls bullied outside school reported carrying weapons for protection.

Schools are supposed to provide safety. Instead, they're often mine fields for bullying. In a 2009 National Youth Survey overview by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 19.9 percent of students reported being bullied at school during the preceding 12 months. Five percent admitted they didn't go to school because they didn't feel safe on the way.

Serious bullying can turn deadly. In the CDC teen study, 13.3 percent had considered committing suicide during the preceding 12 months and 6.3 percent had made serious attempts once or twice.

Bullies often attack their victims in full view of others. One boy was beaten, dragged through the snow, then hung up by a jacket on a tree as a crowd stood silently by. In another well-documented incident, a boy was killed on school grounds by club-wielding teenage thugs as other students videoed the incident on their cell phones. When the videos went viral, law enforcement officers were able to identify the perpetrators.

"Bystanders have to take a stand," says Mollner. "As long as we as a community allow it to happen, bullying will only get worse."

What's a Parent to Do? Tips from [StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov):

- Talk with your child. Express your concern and make it clear that you want to help.
- Empathize with your child.
- Work together to find solutions.
- Document ongoing bullying, including cyberbullying.
- Help your child develop strategies and skills for handling bullying.
- Be persistent. Bullying may not be resolved overnight.
- Stay vigilant to other possible problems that your child may be having.
- Share your concerns with a counselor at your child's school.

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