

## **Counselor: Teasing, bullying involve many issues**

By JESSIE SALISBURY, Telegraph Correspondent

WILTON – Teasing and bullying are a community issue, problems which must be dealt with by society as a whole, and must involve parents, schools and the general media. Social exclusion is an attack on the soul of the child, causing emotional scars that are hard to heal, and can last a lifetime.

That was the message brought by teacher-school counselor Kim John Payne to a workshop for educators held recently at Pine Hill Waldorf School. On Friday, he presented an introductory public talk attended by about 20 people, including teachers and parents.

Payne, originally from Australia, was trained at Emerson College and in England and has lived in many places around the world, including Asia and Africa. A classroom teacher for many years, he now lives in Amherst, Mass., and is a counselor in private practice as well as a consultant at various Waldorf schools. He works with emotionally disturbed children including those with attention deficit disorder and those diagnosed as hyperactive.

He is a soft-spoken man, using gentle humor to keep the attention of the audience.

Those who bully and tease have been desensitized and can't recognize another's pain, Payne said. "They can't read body language. Boys particularly don't get it, that they are hurting others."

He placed the blame for this condition on many factors.

"In society today," he said, "there is an inner longing children have to meet each other, and there is no time in school for them to talk to each other; they are so over-scheduled. We have to make times for meeting, find a common ground for them to reduce bullying and teasing. Children feel more and more isolated, and have a feeling of aloneness."

He spoke of a young leukemia victim, and the pain associated with that disease and its treatment. "What she said hurt the most was being teased about having no hair (from the chemotherapy). Children tell me they would rather be hit than called names, or have rumors spread about them."

"When you change the bullying culture, everything changes when you focus on kindness," Payne said. "Parents and teachers have to get involved each time something is

People now have little or no time to think, to analyze a problem, he said, "We are asked to go from information to decision without the middle ground, the thinking about it. We've short-circuited the middle. Kids are becoming desensitized to others pain as early as kindergarten."

Another cause is instant gratification, he said, not wanting to wait for anything. Another is the "expertization of medicine. We don't actively engage in the healing process."

Preoccupation with body shape is coming "at a younger and younger age. Thresholds are moving back." He mentioned a popular store where there is no children's department. "They are called pre-teens."

There is a lack of rituals, he noted, the rites and ceremonies which mark passages in life. "They have been replaced by pseudo-rituals such as gangs, and drug use. Kids are stepping into a vacuum. Soul life, the ability to make soul-caring relationships, is under attack by the media. Children are growing up much too soon. (Young people) have replaced real relationships with virtual relationships, the chat rooms. There is no time to talk to real people, or they don't know how. There are real mean things said (in chat rooms)."

Society has changed from the strict moral codes that weren't questioned, he added. "The bonds of family and school begin to break down. We identify ourselves with our work, our changing jobs, with places. There is increasing centralizing (in the schools and workplace) and less teacher responsibility for classroom curriculum. Teachers are teaching to the state tests (which is destroying creativity" and the individual.

He called the children's resulting problems "Soul influenza," the aloneness, the fear of isolation, and said there were two types, "cold" and "hot." The "cold" kind turns inward leading the child to a fear of failure, to joining cults, anorexia or addictions, not just to drugs but to particular kinds of music or movies, involvement in gangs or excessive exercise.

The other, "hot" kind turns outward, and is expressed in bullying, teasing, intense criticism of others, vandalism, extreme materialism or promiscuity.

"The victim of bullying turns inward, feels something must be wrong with him. "That can leave scars for a lifetime," Payne said. "The child says, 'I don't know who I am, what do I do?' The bully is looking for targets. He has a need to get outside of himself." Such behavior is normal for the 9- or 10-year-old, he said.

"That is the age of realizing who they are, a time of insecurity. They start to have their own space and realize it can be invaded and they don't like it. They can see what bugs them in other children, see what bothers others and how they react" to such names as "four-eyes" or "fatso."

These conflicts are normal, he said, "a necessary part of growing. The conflict is wrong when nothing is done about it. Bullying is a community issue. It has to involve the media, parents, schools. A school's anti-bullying policy will have only limited effect (in the outside world). Children have to get involved. Students have to know it is wrong.

seen. Deal with it right then."