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Donna Mazyck:

Welcome to the NASN School Nurse Chat Podcast. I'm Donna Mazyck, executive director for the National Association of School Nurses.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

And I'm Jade Bland-Slaffey, NASN’s nursing education and practice specialist and lead nurse conference planner.

Donna Mazyck:

The focus of today's podcast is bullying, a topic that will be presented at NASN in 2020 virtual conference by today's guest, Donna Clark Love. Ms. Love will speak at conference on Toppling the Tyrant: The Bully at Work, which will be a general session. And then, later that day, she will present her Power Hour session titled Handling Bullying Culture in Schools and on Nursing Teams. Ms. Love is an internationally recognized expert and trainer in the area of bullying prevention. She has been featured on national news to highlight successful bullying prevention and intervention programs. She conducts administrative and teacher in-service trainings, parent and community presentations, and student leadership workshops. Ms. Love also shares research-based turnkey systems any company or organization can use to assess, address, and stop workplace bullying. Ms. Love, it's a pleasure to speak with you today.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Yes. Welcome, Ms. Love.

Donna Clark Love:

Well, thank you. And I'm very honored to be here, and I look forward to visiting with you all.

Donna Mazyck:

Well, we'd like to start with getting a sense of what got you started on building your expertise on bullying issues?

Donna Clark Love:

Well, I think I wanted to become an expert when I was targeted in the seventh grade. I was a new student, I moved from West Texas to the Valley girl area in Southern California. I had a Texas accent, I wore Wrangler jeans, and I looked very different from the Valley girls, and I spoke differently. And I was targeted by the eighth grade bully, which made my life miserable for that year. So, this really motivated me to actually become a teacher, and when I became a teacher, I wanted to be an advocate for those that were being mistreated. And I began as a teacher to speak to my students to do some research on bullying before bullying was even a buzz word. People were not talking about it that much then.

Donna Clark Love:

And I began to do presentations for parents of my students and other parents. As I was speaking, I saw the need to speak more. I was hired as a district administrator, and I worked with 53 schools on school violence. And in my school district, there was gang warfare; there was a lot of animosity between the North and South side of the freeway. And I knew that I really needed to have programs that addressed all of these issues, and I also was scared that I would have maybe a school shooter or a lot of violence. So, I researched, and I started working with the Department of Education in developing curriculum and programmatic ways that we could address bullying. I became a spokesperson for the Department of Education, and I wrote programs that could be carried out in K through 12 schools.

Donna Clark Love:

And what I found and how I think I became an expert is by working in the trenches. I had to carry out the research to the schools, so I began working hands on with families and with training staff and with administrators. And I found what works and didn't work, that sometimes things that are written on paper, some of our greatest research practices, does not work until we carry it out and we find how to refine everything that we have learned, and I really found out what worked and didn't work. So, I was working in this field before bullying was a big buzz word. And so, my expertise comes from these experiences and also working internationally. I worked in Belize, when their country was experiencing the highest amount of violence and the whole world, and I was able to work with teachers and government officials on how do we stop the violence? And we started with bullying, and we moved on the continuum to address other violent behaviors.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Ms. Love, your background is just very fascinating and very interesting, and especially how you got to this point in as far as teaching and building your expertise in bullying with schools. And so, that just leads me to the next question is just, why do you think school nurses might be at risk of experiencing bullying?

Donna Clark Love:

There are risk factors for nurses. One is the loneliness, the seclusion or isolation. Many times you're their only health professional at your school, and/or sometimes you're traveling to multiple schools and you're alone. You're doing your work, sometimes you're overwhelmed with your caseload of students that you're seeing. You're isolated and you're not having time to build a support system. And sometimes on the school campus, your clinic or your place of residence is renewed from the hubbub of what's happening, and there's a lack of communication. And this can result in being scapegoated.

Donna Clark Love:

For instance, a teacher sends you a student and thinks the student needs to go home because the student is sick, and you make a decision to send the student back to class, it causes conflict with the student, as well as the teacher. Sometimes parents are upset that you're sending their child home. They have to take off work. You get caught in the maze of the lack of communication with all stakeholders, and you're targeted for that. Sometimes there's a misperception of the nursing role among faculty because you're not included in important conversations. All of this, our lack of support from nursing administrators or from your colleagues, this sets you up to be at risk or intimidating or harassing scapegoating behaviors.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

And that makes total sense, Ms. Love, because I don't know if you know this like old saying that we have in nursing, but it's like, "Nurses eat their young," type of thing. Where it's that whole concept of, quote unquote, the more seasoned nurse not really liking the new mindset or approach of a newly positioned nurse, which causes us as a profession, not just within school nursing but within nursing in general sometimes, to have good quality individuals walk away from the profession, unfortunately. And then, the other piece is that, when I think about bullying sometimes, I think, "Well, okay, it could be peer-to-peer or it could be coming from someone higher up." So, what would you say to those listeners who are tuning in right now that may have already signed up for our virtual conference, others that might just be on the fence and not quite sure? What could they find compelling about coming and attending your two sessions for our conference?

Donna Clark Love:

Well, I think that some of the nurse practitioners have attended previous bullying workshops, and they may think that, "Oh, I already know everything about this topic. I'm sick of this topic." But I want to tell you is that I'm going to provide a fresh approach, a new approach, to dealing with bullying behaviors. And I use a sense of humor, I'm going to do real life scenarios, I'm going to bring to life this topic. Some of you that are listening to this podcast may not think that you have bullying at your school or that you're experiencing bullying, and by attending this, you're going to see that sometimes we tolerate unacceptable behaviors and we don't even understand that it's bullying. So, if you come to these sessions, you're going to learn some strategies that you can use at home if you have siblings with your family, or if you have children that are fighting and bullying each other, you can use in the workplace, you can use wherever you go. So, it's going to be practical life application strategies that you can take with you. And we're going to have fun, too. We're going to laugh.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Yeah. Well, it sounds very interesting, Ms. Love. I really look forward to it.

Donna Clark Love:

Good.

Donna Mazyck:

That's wonderful. You mentioned that sometimes people don't even know they're experiencing bullying, and as you speak at the NASN conference on Toppling the Tyrant, can you give us a window into what a typical personality characteristic, or several characteristics, of a tyrant is?

Donna Clark Love:

Okay. So, the definition of a tyrant is someone that rules with power, usually they're abusing their power, and a tyrant on a campus can be that person I call the Screaming Mimi. That person that intimidates others, overbearing, the person that walks in her like a tank, and that runs over other people, and they believe that their opinion is the most important; and they like to berate and humiliate others.

Donna Clark Love:

But let's look at the other side, the tyrant that I call the Two-Headed Snake. This is the person that's talking behind other people's backs, the spreading gossip. This is the tyrant they made pretend that they're your best friend, but they're mis-aligning you with others. And I think it's critical that we look at all of these personality types that can be the bullies on campus, and we stop saying, "Oh, that's just their personality," we stop allowing different personalities to abuse us or mistreat us or disrespect us, that we need to address these personalities.

Donna Mazyck:

That's helpful to know. Ms. Love, we can identify or even experience some of those characteristics in people we worked with, but we don't always know how to address them.

Donna Clark Love:

Exactly, exactly.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

And I was thinking about your session and actually talking with someone about it, and they didn't at first like the term referred to as tyrant, when they were discussing the whole portion of bullying. But when you put it in that context, Ms. Love, again, it makes absolute sense as to why it would be called that. So, what do you consider... You're already starting to give us a little bit of a taste of that. What are the true signs of bullying behaviors that school nurses can be aware of?

Donna Clark Love:

When we talk about true bullying, we have to look at this, we have to look at the standard definition. True bullying has these characteristics: that there's an intention to harm, it's happening over a period of time, it's happening repeatedly, and many times it's an imbalance of power. So, we've got to have these components to consider it true bullying. Since bullying is a buzzword, everything gets looped into that, and we have to know what is true bullying and how is it displayed among our adults, as well as our students.

Donna Clark Love:

And I just want to separate this, that if you have a colleague that's having a bad day and that colleague may lash out at you, and then maybe 15 minutes later, this colleague says, "Oh my gosh, I'm having a bad day. I apologize for what I said to you. I took it out on you. It is not your fault." So, a true bully does not have that empathy gene. A true bully will lash out, and they don't even, many times, feel like they've done anything wrong. They feel entitled to treat you that way. So, the difference... Sometimes when I talk to schools, I talk about in organizations that many times the true bully is missing that empathy gene, and they were not going to apologize for their behavior. So, I want people to know the difference in how certain behaviors are displayed.

Donna Clark Love:

And I'll talk about in my workshop, and many times we miss these covert bullying behaviors, which we're being assigned an unreasonable workload, information is withheld from us as a nurse when we need to make critical decisions, so these are those insidious, slow, covert bullying behaviors that we may miss. And then we have our overt bullying behaviors which, many times, and sometimes they're demonstrated by parents. Very aggressive and abusive towards us, making... Sometimes people make unfair comparisons between us if we're a new nurse and the veteran nurse, and it can be just belittling opinions. And so, these are types of behaviors that we see the ones that are overt that we miss the covert ones.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Thank you for that response, Ms. Love.

Donna Clark Love:

Yes.

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Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Well, welcome back. If you're just tuning in, we're speaking with Ms. Donna Clark Love, bullying expert, author, and international speaker. Ms. Love, we know that bullying behaviors can be passive or aggressive or sometimes a mixture of both. Sometimes we encounter those that have passive aggressive tactics, the ones that are not quite in your face, but they're there. So, how would you, or how would someone, know if their workplace has a problem with bullying, whether it be peer-to-peer versus supervisor, as you mentioned before, someone who's just having a bad day?

Donna Clark Love:

Well, usually when I walk into schools, within 30 minutes, I know if there is bullying, intimidation, or harassment occurring on that campus. I feel the tension. And many of our workplaces, there's this pervasive silence that we only talk about certain topics. No one is talking about the elephant in the living room. We may have two or three active bullies, I call them. Many campuses will have someone that other people are scared of. Everyone avoids this person. They do not want to make a mistake around this person. It can be the leader, it can be a nurse administrator, it can even be a colleague in a nurses meeting, can be the principal, it can be a teacher. And what's going on is that there are conflicts that are not being resolved. There's an atmosphere of oppression.

Donna Clark Love:

When I talk to nurses, I'll talk about what happens inside is that you may feel this inner tension, you may feel crazy inside, and you feel this relief when you leave your campus. And this is not a very conducive, unified work atmosphere if these things are going on. And it starts with I see there's a lack of respect and common courtesy with colleagues, and this tolerance of unacceptable behaviors that becomes the norm. And the biggest is there's a lack of communication that no one knows what the left hand or right hand is doing.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Your topic is very timely for us, especially with the overall theme of our conference being Having a Seat at the Table: Winning Together for Student Health. But the other piece about the whole bullying concept is retaliation, so how do school nurses handle or deal with the aspect that maybe they do address, or maybe have tried to address, bullying, whether it be among their supervisor or their peer and feel that they were retaliated, or the possibility of being retaliated against?

Donna Clark Love:

Well, in the state of Texas, we have a bullying law for schools and it addresses about retaliation. That if you are retaliated against that something you make a report and then someone retaliates, then you can take action. And now, some of this action is that you sometimes have to keep going higher till you get help. You follow the protocol with your supervisor, your immediate supervisor, and sometimes you need to go higher. It is never okay, it is never acceptable, to make a report and then to receive some kind of punishment or consequences for making that report. And that means that your anonymity wasn't protected and you need to go higher to address the issue.

Donna Mazyck:

Ms. Love, what we understand from our conversation with you is that bullying is a complex problem with complex solutions, and we appreciate your research and your intent to translate research that's out there, evidence that's been discovered and uncovered, so that it can be practiced in school settings. Could you share at least one solution for how we can stop bullying?

Donna Clark Love:

I would love to. No matter where I speak, this question will come up, and how do we stop it? What is the solution? Of course, there's not one solution, but I want to talk about something, a solution, that I feel we're missing and that we're not doing. And what it is, is going back on the continuum of bullying behaviors and we go back to the very beginning when we start living our lives with an attitude of gratitude and learning to respect all people, and that means that we practice common courtesy, good old fashioned respect, the, "Thank you. I'm sorry." When we make a mistake, we make our amends. We own our part. That we practice kindness, that we agree to disagree.

Donna Clark Love:

And when I go into schools, this is what I find. I find educators that have been inundated with all of these protocols. They have to write this report for bullying. They have to justify that it's true bullying. They don't even know sometimes who to report to. So, what happens is that we ignore these common, rude behaviors because we question ourselves, we say, "Oh, is that bullying? Oh, I don't think it is." So, we walked down the hall, and we ignore it because we don't want to write a report and we don't know who to report it to. Let's get back to addressing mean. If we see... and we don't have to even name it, call it bullying. Let's address behaviors that are unacceptable. If someone calls someone else a name, someone belittles someone for their answer, let's address that. Let's begin having our voice and standing up for our peers when we see these behaviors around us that are unacceptable.

Donna Clark Love:

And I'll give an example of someone that goes through the drive through restaurant, they get their order, and the order is wrong; they didn't put mayonnaise on their cheeseburger. And so, what happens is the person in the car will berate the person helping them for not getting the order right. And our kids watch this, and it's this common courtesy that we got to get back to and respecting all people and having a voice to stand up for those that are being mistreated. Let's be kind, let's go back to the pro-social skills that many of us learned when we were children, that are not being taught in many homes. I mean, I could get on my soap box forever about this, but I feel very strongly about it.

Donna Mazyck:

And we'd like to invite those who are planning to learn more and to take those simple steps to at least begin at the beginning, to practice common courtesy, respect, and addressing unacceptable behavior. Come and join us for the virtual NASN 2020 conference session on Thursday, July 2nd. Donna Clark Love will be talking from the topic, Toppling the Tyrant: The Bullying Work, and that'll happen from 11:00 AM Eastern time to 12:00 PM Eastern time. And then, she'll follow up with her Power Hour session, which is called Handling Bullying Culture in Schools and on Nursing Teams, and that'll take place from 2:50 PM to 3:50 PM Eastern time. Thank you so much, Donna Clark Love for being our guest for this NASN School Nurse Chat Podcast.

Donna Clark Love:

Thank you, Jade and Donna and NASN. And I so appreciate y'all for interviewing me today.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Nice. Yes, thank you.

Donna Mazyck:

We look forward to talking to you, and we thank all of our listeners for joining us today.

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Join us for the Virtual NASN2020 Annual Conference, starting on Monday, June 29th through Friday, July 3rd, 2020. NASN will be tackling workplace bullying, including bullying among peers and bullying in schools, with international speaker, author, and bullying expert, Donna Clark Love. Learn tips and strategies that will help you to address the bullying culture on your job or among your peers. If you would like to hear more on this topic, join us for Donna Clark Love's general session, Toppling the Tyrant: The Bully at Work, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM Eastern, and her Power Hour session, Handling Bullying Culture in Schools and on Nursing Teams, from 2:50 PM to 3:50 PM Eastern. Sign up today for Virtual NASN2020 via [www.NASN.org](http://www.NASN.org) .