

# TIMES CHRONICLE

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## Effects of bullying no laughing matter

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Silence reigned in Jenkintown Middle and High School Tuesday morning.

Jodee Blanco, author of New York Times bestseller "Please Stop Laughing At Me," delivered a powerful seminar on bullying and its effect on students to a full auditorium of students, parents and teachers.

To say that she commanded her audience would be an understatement, as they were riveted by her presentation in which she described her horrific journey through junior and senior high schools.

Blanco was bullied from the time she was in fifth grade until she graduated from high school, she explained. She was a target because she was different, she said.

She talked about Columbine and how it affected her when it first happened. For a split second, her heart went out to the killers before the victims, she said.

"I understand why they did what they did," she said. "They felt like they had no alternative."

The reason she understood was because she too tried to go to school one day and do harm to those who bullied her.

"I was going to cut out the hearts of all those who were breaking mine," Blanco said. She was 15 years old at the time and a sophomore in high school.

Her mother saw the knife and took her to the hospital, where she was treated for depression.

The problem, she said, was that her tormentors didn't think they were doing anything wrong. They were just joking around, she said.

"It is not just joking around,



Chronicle/News staff photo - BILL FRASER

Jodee Blanco, author of "Please Stop Laughing at Me," speaks to Jenkintown students about bullying Tuesday.



You are damaging each other for life. And I know, because as successful as I am, I stand before you as damaged goods," she said.

Blanco chronicled her journeys through junior and senior high, describing events of unthinkable cruelty she experienced. It got so bad she prayed she'd get cancer so she wouldn't have to go to school anymore, she said.

She tried various methods to

try to kill herself, including starving herself, which people mistook for anorexia.

"I was never anorexic," Blanco said. "I just wanted to erase myself. I wanted to die."

Bullying isn't just about being mean, she said, it's also standing by while it happens.

"The person who stands there and lets somebody get abused without doing anything is worse than a bully," she explained.

"Bullying isn't about all the mean things you do, it's also about the nice things you don't do."

She went on to say that letting people eat alone, walk to class alone, get picked last in gym class were all other forms of bullying.

She said that even though Jenkintown was a small community and everyone knows everyone, people still may feel bullied without others knowing.

"Don't be so cocky that you think you know everyone so well," Blanco said. "Torment is sometimes a hidden beast."

Her story has a "kicky" ending, she said. She became a publicist for celebrities before writing her book. At her 20-year

high school reunion, her former bullies apologized.

"They wanted to sit with me. It was amazing," she said.

They also wanted her help. Many of their children were being made fun of in school and needed help and advice on what to do. She ran into the boy she had a crush on all those years ago, and they eventually married.

"My story has a happy ending, but there are kids in this school whose stories won't," Blanco said.

In a switch from her usual presentation, she spoke to parents and teachers at the same time as the students, something she has never done before. The end of her presentation consisted of tips on what adults should and should not do to help with bullying. Among the do's: get the bullied child involved with outside activities and let the child talk about how he or she is feeling. Among the don'ts: don't tell the child to ignore the problem and don't tell the child you know how they feel.

"You have to feed your child's interests when something else is depriving their spirit," Blanco said.