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'Kick Me' Sign Isn't Bullying, Just An Outdated Joke

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Most people consider the “Kick me please” sign on someone’s back a classic prank—up there with “Is your refrigerator running? Well ya better go catch it!”—but to an Upper East Side School, doing this is cause for suspension, especially if the kid who did it is only nine and doesn’t know it’s against the Discipline Code’s infraction A37, engagement in bullying behavior.



After the boy was suspended for two days last month from PS 158 for placing a Post-it with “Kick me please” on another kid’s butt (that is a bit worrisome), his mother [told the New York Post](#) about the incident, sparking some debate in the playground. The mom said that he was “playing around,” but another parent said the note was “maliciousness—it’s not kid’s play” (even though it really is a kid playing). The *Post* quoted other children explaining it was just teasing.

Since the Columbine massacre 11 years ago, lawmakers and educators have become stricter with bullying. In 2008, the city made bullying officially banned. A Department of Education spokeswoman told the *Post* the incident was only “just the latest incident between the students.” The spokeswoman also said the principal followed procedure by offering counseling and by meeting with both the parents and students.

Despite the supposed severity of the “Kick me” sign, I don’t think anyone should be punished, except maybe the educators for being overzealous in their suspensions. I went to school close to Chicago that was [in the news recently](#) for online bullying. Some jerky kids created a Facebook page to write mean things about other students (like how Susie was a slut or Carl is a pussy). So when I hear about a “Kick me” sign leading to suspension, I worry. Not because it’s against the Discipline Code to bully, but because PS 158 is busy paying attention to obvious, silly pranks instead of sneaky, online and emotional bullying. Instead of suspending a nine year old with a strict warning, tell him not to do it again. Give him a time-out and start looking for kids who may actually be victims or perpetrators of emotional schoolyard torture.

Bullies aren’t stupid and victims are never obvious. I’m disappointed that the UES school can’t see when something is serious or not. The only crime here is this kid’s desperate need for a new, more modern, joke.

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