

# The bullied become 'avengers'

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**Mar. 7, 2001** - Friends of the 15-year-old accused of this week's high school shootings in suburban San Diego said the boy was repeatedly bullied since moving to California last year. According to friends, Charles Andrew "Andy" Williams had his shoes stolen off his feet, his skateboard swiped twice and was beaten up at least once. Like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two suicidal gunmen who killed 12 students and one teacher at Columbine High School in 1999, Williams saw himself as an outcast. And he promised revenge.

"If you look at the whole profile of kids who have been shooters, they can be classified as avengers," said Bill Porter, a psychologist with Cherry Creek schools. "They feel like they're avenging something that's happened to them." In Colorado, attention to bullying has increased after it emerged as a common thread in most school shootings.

"To say that it doesn't exist would probably be wrong. It existed when I went to high school 30 years ago," said Columbine principal Frank DeAngelis. "But does that make it right? We need to come up with ways to teach students to treat people with respect and dignity." Attorney General Ken Salazar has toured the state since Columbine, holding town-hall forums on the problems in schools. And everywhere he has gone, Salazar has heard one word: bullies.

"Uniformly within those schools, students told us of incidents of bullying," Salazar said. Andy Williams was made fun of for everything from his small size to his pale skin to being the new kid, his friends and acquaintances in Santee, Calif., said this week. One parent even warned him not to commit a "Columbine."

Bullying goes on every day, starting in elementary school, Porter said. Despite the best efforts of teachers, parents and students, many kids feel that there's no way out, he said. And as Williams was led away in a police car after Monday's shootings, his face was eerily serene, Porter said.

"What these kids are focused on is having some sense of power. They say, 'If someone else isn't going to protect me, I have to assume some sort of power,'- " Porter said. "When you looked in his eyes in the photos, he was almost happy, as deviant and distorted as that is," Porter continued. "He was not doing it in angry, vengeful fashion but almost gleefully. We've seen that in other situations where the shooter is almost euphoric." Kids need to stand up for themselves and for their schools to help combat bullies, Porter said. Telling adults about problems, avoiding confrontations and looking out for one another all help take the power away from bullies, he said.

Fifty percent of bullies identified by the National School Safety Center, a California-based advocacy group, later commit crimes. And 25 percent become career criminals, according to the group's statistics.

And according to Salazar and statistics from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado, 10,500 high school students in this state stay home one day each month from fear of bullies.