



Bullying Prevention

What Works in Preventing School Violence

Resources

Olweus, D. (1993) *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. 1-800-216-2522

This book includes detailed information on bullying, general suggestions for reducing bullying, and a guide to help teachers and parents recognize if a child is being victimized or bullies others.

Olweus, D. & Limber, S. (1999) *Blueprint for Violence Prevention: Book Nine. Bullying Prevention Program*. Denver, CO: C & M Press.

This book describes a comprehensive bullying prevention program, gives empirical evidence on its effectiveness, provides timelines for implementation, and includes program evaluation procedures.

Supplemental lesson plans for the Bullying Prevention program (targeted at middle school children). Currently may be obtained at a cost of \$5 by contacting Dr. Susan Limber, Institute for Families in Society, University of South Carolina, Carolina Plaza, Columbia, SC 29208
Phone: 803-777-1529
Fax: 803-777-1120

Hoover, J.H. & Oliver, R. (1996). *The Bullying Prevention Handbook: A Guide for Principals, Teachers, and Counselors*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.

This handbook describes a specific bullying prevention program in detail as well as providing instructions, materials, evaluation tools, and checklists.

Garrity, C., Jens, K., Porter, W., Sager, N., Short-Camilli, C. (1994). *Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Elementary Schools*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

This handbook provides detailed anti-bullying program information, handouts, role play scenarios, instructions, training curriculum, and a resource guide.

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Producer of videos, posters and books for students and teachers on taking action against bullying.

Bully OnLine
<http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/>
Provides insight and information on all types of bullying including child bullying, bullying in schools, and bullying by adults

Telecom Police Stop Bullying Campaign
<http://www.nobully.org.nz/>
Website provides information for students, parents, and teachers

In the last few years, incidents of violent retribution by victims of bullying have led to an increased awareness of the problem of bullying. While bullying is often overlooked, a large number of students report having been bullied during school. Bullying is a serious threat that may have detrimental psychological effects on children such as low self-esteem, depression, and suicide.

Bullying prevention programs are a school-wide effort designed to send a message that bullying will not be accepted in school. Well designed and implemented programs can create an improved climate by educating staff and students to recognize and respond to instances of bullying.

Overview

A student is being bullied or victimized when exposed, repeatedly over time, to intentional injury or discomfort inflicted by one or more other students. This may include physical contact, verbal assault, making obscene gestures or facial expressions, and being intentionally excluded. Bullying implies an imbalance in power or strength in which one child is victimized by others.

Surprisingly large proportions of students are bullied in schools. In the United States approximately 20% of students report having been bullied.¹ Most incidents occur in places with little adult supervision, such as playgrounds and hallways. Bullies are typically larger than their victims and have more positive attitudes toward the use of violence than other students. Victims are less popular, often without a single friend in class. Bullying victims tend to be more anxious and insecure than other students and commonly react by crying, withdrawal, and avoidance when attacked. Unfortunately, such reactions may only reinforce the bullies' sense of power over the victims.

Bullying has serious consequences not only for victims and perpetrators, but the entire school. Victims report feelings of vengefulness, anger, and self-pity after a bullying incident.² Left untreated, such reactions can evolve into depression, physical illness, and even suicide. In addition, students who engage in aggressive and bullying behaviors during their school years may take part in criminal and aggressive behavior after adolescence. In classrooms exhibiting high numbers of bullying problems, students tend to feel less safe and are less satisfied with school life in general.³

Bullying is often tolerated and ignored. Teachers rarely detect bullying, and intervene in only 4% of all incidents.⁴ In addition, students' attitudes regarding bullying indicate the belief that bullied students are at least partly to blame for their victimization, that bullying makes the victims tougher, and that teasing is simply done "in fun."⁵ Students who report bullying believe that nothing will be done.

Effective prevention programs rely on a number of components to reduce and prevent bullying problems. Through improved supervision, classroom rules against bullying, positive and negative consequences for following and violating rules, and serious talks with bullies and victims, bullying prevention plans strive to develop a school environment characterized by warmth and positive adult involvement. Other aspects include a school conference day to discuss bullying, meetings with parents of bullies and victims, and regular classroom meetings. At the elementary level worksheets, role plays, and relevant literature may be incorporated into existing curricula. Such measures send the message that "Bullying is not accepted in our school and we will see to it that it comes to an end."

What We Know About Bullying Prevention

Individual interventions (e.g., keeping a victim close to a teacher at all times) are somewhat effective but may not significantly reduce overall bullying behavior. However, comprehensive bullying prevention programs have been implemented and evaluated in many countries with encouraging results.

There is an extensive knowledge base showing that well-designed bullying prevention programs can reduce, eliminate, and prevent bully-victim problems, and significantly improve overall school climate. In the year following a comprehensive intervention program, researchers recorded a 50% decrease in the numbers of bullying incidents while also reducing the intensity of these problems.⁶ The program also had a preventative effect, reducing the number and percentage of new victims of bullying. General antisocial behavior such as fighting, vandalism and truancy also decreased while student satisfaction with their school increased.

Using that study as the framework for its program, the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project⁷ reported similar results. Participating schools reported a 17% decrease in children bullied and a 7% decrease in the number of identified bullies. In addition, victims were more likely to report harassment. The Safer Schools-Safer Cities Project⁸ reported encouraging results using a community-wide violence reduction program. In nine of 14 participating schools, there were significant reductions in the levels of bullying over a two-year period.

Making It Work

Effective programs have two key prerequisites: awareness and adult involvement. In order to create a school climate that discourages bullying, school staff and parents must become aware of the extent of bully-victim problems in their own school. In addition, effective bullying prevention also requires a commitment on the part of all adults to reduce or eliminate bullying.

Coordination. All bullying prevention programs recommend a bullying prevention committee at the school level and a coordinator of bullying prevention activities and curricula. Committees typically assess the extent of the problem by designing and administering an anonymous student questionnaire. Using these data, committee members can make recommendations about the components to implement and the materials to be acquired.

Creating Awareness. The amount of training time necessary may depend on the scope of an individual school's program. Most bullying prevention programs recommend a one-half to one-day training session for all staff members in order to educate them about the program and their responsibilities. A new school-wide policy regarding bullying behavior and expectations of staff and students should be presented at this session. Several programs recommend follow-up sessions a few times during the

school term to discuss problems with the program and provide continuing education. In programs where anti-bullying activities are incorporated into classroom lessons, additional training in presenting the material may be necessary.

Ongoing Implementation and Evaluation. Many effective bullying prevention programs use buttons, posters, and mailings to maintain awareness and student interest in the program. Like all intervention programs, monitoring implementation of a bullying prevention program is crucial to its success. Many questionnaires, surveys, and checklists exist that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the program and to identify problem areas. Other methods of evaluation include open-ended interviews with students, analyzing attendance records, and tracking documental incidence and behavioral reports.

Summary

Bullying is a serious matter involving a substantial number of students. Most bullying occurrences are undetected or ignored, leading to detrimental physical and psychological effects for victims, as well as school climate.

Well-conducted, comprehensive bullying prevention programs can be effective in reducing the number of bullying incidents and creating a climate that discourages bullying behavior. Bullying prevention programs use measures at the school, classroom, and individual levels to send a message that bullying is not acceptable behavior and will not be tolerated. Such programs have been found to be effective in reducing bullying incidents by as much as 50%, while decreasing general antisocial behavior and increasing students' satisfaction with their school. Schools seeking to implement bullying prevention programs should conduct an assessment of the problem in their individual school and plan training, materials, and curricula accordingly. Through ongoing implementation and evaluation, administrators can adjust policies and track effectiveness of their program, while maintaining a school-wide commitment to reduce or eliminate bullying and harassment.

— Russell Skiba and Angela Fontanini

References

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About the Safe & Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing and studying prevention-based approaches to school safety. The Project is currently working with schools in districts in Indiana and Nebraska to integrate best-practice strategies in school violence prevention into comprehensive school-based plans for deterring school disruption and violence.

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