



For School Administrators: Steps to Address Bullying at Your School

WHY SCHOOLS NEED A BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM

- Bullying can seriously affect the emotional, physical, and academic well-being of children who are bullied.
- Dealing with discipline problems related to bullying incidents can take a good deal of administrator and educator time during a regular school day.
- Bullying can contribute to a negative climate in schools.
- Bullying is more prevalent than many adults suspect.

Everyone in the school environment will benefit from implementation of an effective bullying prevention program. Before implementing any efforts to address bullying or other violence at school, keep in mind that:

- Effective programs require strong administrative leadership and ongoing commitment on the part of the adults in the school system.
- Those programs that show the most promise are comprehensive in approach. They involve the entire school community and include school-wide interventions, classroom activities, and individual interventions.
- Bullying prevention efforts should begin early – as children transition into kindergarten – and continue throughout a child’s education.
- Effective bullying prevention programs should have no “end date,” but should become part of the life of your school. Ongoing staff development is important to sustain bullying prevention programs.

INITIAL STEPS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Following are suggested initial steps that school administrators can take to develop an effective bullying prevention program in their schools:

1. ASSESS BULLYING AT YOUR SCHOOL

- Why is it important to assess bullying at your school?
 - Adults often are not very accurate in predicting the types and amount of bullying among children and youth in school. It is important to ask students about their experiences.
 - Getting an accurate picture of the prevalence of bullying at your school may motivate your teachers, other staff members, parents, and students to take action. If, for example, your teachers perceive that bullying is a rare event at school, it may



- be difficult to motivate them to implement a bullying prevention program. If, on the other hand, teachers see that bullying affects many students at your school, they may be more inclined to focus on bullying prevention.
- Understanding bullying at your school can help you to plan strategies to address the problem. For example, it is important to know where bullying occurs at your school so that you can increase adult supervision in those “hot spots.”
 - Assessing bullying at different points in time can help you to evaluate your school’s progress in dealing with bullying.
- What are good ways to assess bullying?
 - It is a good idea to have students who are able to (grade 3 and higher) complete a written, anonymous questionnaire about their experiences of bullying, being bullied, and observing bullying. Students are likely to feel more comfortable reporting their bullying experiences if they don’t have to include their name or other identifying information on the questionnaire.
 - In addition to surveying students, consider inviting teachers, other school staff, and parents to complete questionnaires about bullying at school. Not only may it be helpful to assess adults’ perceptions of bullying and ideas for bullying prevention in your school, but it also may be instructive to compare adults’ perceptions of bullying with those of your students.
 - Be sure to share summaries of data with students, parents, and school personnel.
 - Form a bullying prevention coordinating committee (a small group of energetic teachers, administrators, counselors, non-teaching staff, and parents) to help you explore the problem of bullying and possible solutions at your school.
 - Talk with your staff members about their perceptions of bullying at your school, their current efforts to address bullying, and their time and motivation to implement a bullying prevention program.
 - Hold an open house or a PTA meeting to solicit parent feedback about bullying and bullying prevention needs at your school.

2. TRACK BULLYING INCIDENTS AT YOUR SCHOOL

In addition to assessing the nature and prevalence of bullying at your school, it also is important to document bullying by tracking suspected and confirmed incidents of bullying. This will help to ensure that children who are bullied receive protection and support and that children who bully are held accountable for their actions.



- In order to effectively track bullying incidents, adults must be vigilant about bullying among students. Offer training for all staff at school that will help them to be more aware of signs of bullying.
- Develop a logical and timely reporting system that will inform school personnel and parents of suspected and confirmed bullying incidents. No single system will work for all schools. Some schools have developed a triplicate incident report form for bullying and other problem behaviors. (One copy goes to the student's teacher, the second copy is filed in the office, and the third copy is sent to the student's parents). Other schools keep a log of bullying incidents in the main office.
- Make sure that teachers and all school personnel (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodial staff) are familiar with the school's reporting procedures and understand their obligation to report suspected or confirmed bullying.
- In addition to filing written reports, encourage school personnel to share their concerns verbally and in a timely way with colleagues (e.g., in grade-level team meetings, or one-on one with other staff). If, for example, the 3rd period math teacher has observed bullying among two students, he or she should make a written report and discuss the issue quickly with the 4th period social studies teacher to make sure that the bullying doesn't continue.
- Consider tracking bullying through the use of computer software programs. Many larger school districts already have software programs to document critical behavior incidents. New upgrades of these programs and customized data fields can be used to track bullying incidents. Some schools may find the cost of such computer programs prohibitive. Free computer programs are available that may help you to analyze and map bullying and other problem behaviors that occur in and around your school. (See, e.g., www.schoolcopsoftware.com).

3. LEARN ABOUT GOOD BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAMS

- With the help of your coordinating committee, research existing bullying prevention programs that your school might adopt.
- Talk with colleagues in other schools who have implemented bullying prevention programs. Often program developers can put you in touch with educators who can share their experiences with implementing bullying prevention programs.
- Assess your school's current prevention and intervention programs. Determine whether they would be compatible with bullying prevention programs that you are considering.
- Share information about programs with committee members and staff. Most programs have fact sheets or other summary information available. Some have trainers who are available to provide brief "overviews" of the program to you and your staff.



- Consider which program best fits the financial constraints of your school's budget.
- Carefully select a program that best fits the needs of your school, with attention to the proven effectiveness of the model.

OTHER WAYS TO ADDRESS BULLYING

- Provide in-services to your staff so that they can learn more about the issue of bullying. Include non-teaching staff who interact with students (such as bus drivers and cafeteria workers).
- Develop clear rules and sanctions related to bullying. Post and distribute the school rules and discuss them with staff, students, and parents.
- Develop strategies to reward students for positive, inclusive behavior.
- Using information gleaned from your student survey, increase supervision in areas that are "hot spots" for bullying and violence at the school.
- Establish a confidential reporting system that allows children to report victimization and that records the details of bullying incidents.
- Ensure that your school has all legally required policies and grievance procedures in place for bullying or harassment. Make these procedures known to parents, students and staff members.
- Receive and listen receptively to parents who report bullying. Establish procedures whereby such reports are investigated and resolved quickly and effectively at the school level in order to avoid perpetuating bullying.
- Ensure that all staff members take immediate action when bullying is observed. All teachers and school staff must let children know that they care and will not allow anyone to be mistreated. By taking immediate action and dealing directly with students who bully, adults support children who are bullied and those who are bystanders to bullying.
- Notify the parents of all involved students when a bullying incident occurs, and seek to resolve the problem expeditiously at school.
- Make referrals to your counseling and/or mental health staff, when appropriate, for further work with children who are bullied and with children who bully.
- Ensure protection for children who are bullied. Such protection may include creating a buddy system whereby students have a particular friend or older buddy on whom they can depend and with whom they can spend time.
- Encourage teachers to hold class meetings during which students can talk about issues related to bullying and peer relations. Encourage teachers to integrate bullying themes throughout the curriculum.



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