



## A Systematic Approach to Reducing Bullying: School-Wide Anti-Bullying Programs

*Bullying is currently viewed as one of the most serious public health problems in the United States school systems.<sup>4</sup> This early form of aggressive, violent behavior comes in many forms (physical, relational, and cyberbullying), and although many schools have implemented anti-bullying policies, there are still many questions and concerns regarding how to appropriately address this pervasive problem within schools.*

policy brief

### **Bullying (Physical, Relational Aggression, Cyberbullying) Facts:**

*Bullying* may be referred to as the act of one person threatening/gossiping (relational aggression) or physically assaulting another person for no apparent reason.

*Cyberbullying* is when someone uses technology to send mean, threatening, or embarrassing messages to or about another person. It might be in a text, e-mail, instant message, or on the internet. *The National School Safety Center considers bullying to be the single most enduring and underrated issue in U.S. schools.*

- 160,000 students miss school each day in the U.S. to avoid being bullied<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 15 to 20 percent of all students are victimized by bullies at some point in their school career<sup>2</sup>
- A survey reported that American children 8 to 15 years of age rated bullying as a greater problem than racism or pressure to have sex or use alcohol and other drugs<sup>3</sup>
- 25% of children who bully will have a criminal record by the time they are 30 years old<sup>2</sup>

*Cyberbullying:*

- 43% of teenagers reported that they have experienced some form of cyberbullying<sup>2</sup>
- A survey of 1,500 middle school students found that 37% were being bullied or threatened online<sup>2</sup>
- About 4 in 5 teens think that bullying online is easier to get away with or to hide from their parents than bullying in person<sup>2</sup>
- Over half of all cyberbullying is not reported to adults at all<sup>2</sup>

### **Consequences of Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying:**

*Bullying affects everyone in the school*

- Victims have lower self-esteem and a variety of negative emotional responses, including being scared, frustrated, humiliated, angry and depressed<sup>2</sup>
- Victims of bullying are 5 times more likely to be depressed and far more likely to be suicidal<sup>2</sup> when compared to their peers who are not victims of bullying
- School bullies are more likely than their peers to drop out of school, have difficulty holding jobs, have problems sustaining relationships, be abusive toward their spouses, and have aggressive children<sup>2</sup>

### **School-Wide Bullying Prevention**

Schools can decrease bullying as much as 50% with a comprehensive school-wide prevention program.<sup>2</sup> School officials should be aware of the fact that cyberbullying is simply another form of bullying, so interventions that address bullying broadly should

also be effective for preventing cyberbullying.

- **One preventive intervention** is for schools to develop school-wide anti-bullying policies that encourage and reward students for respecting each other and for recognizing the right of each student to be free from bullying.<sup>2</sup>
- **The anti-bullying policies** should be translated into rules that are posted in every school setting as reminders to students and staff of the behavioral expectations.<sup>2</sup>
- **One of the best school-wide strategies to prevent bullying** is to create a climate of fairness and trust, where others actively intervene rather than act as bystanders, and provide mutual support through positive peer support systems.<sup>2</sup>
- **To address cyberbullying in particular, school personnel should carefully monitor computer use at school, block access to certain websites, and provide specific trainings on cyberbullying for all school staff and parents.**<sup>2</sup>

### **The Three Tiered Model of Prevention and Intervention<sup>4</sup>**

- Tier 1: Primary prevention should include a school-wide anti-bullying policy that affects all students, all parents, and all staff including teachers, administrators, support staff, and playground staff.
- Tier 2: Targeted strategies focus on those children who have been identified as at-risk for being a bully or victim.
- Tier 3: Tertiary prevention programs are targeted at students with severe needs, including those students who are perpetual bullies and victims, and those who have threatened violence to peers and/or teachers and staff.

### **Policy Recommendations:**

#### **Local Educational Agencies:**

- The School Board and District Level Administrators are responsible for ensuring the implementation of a school-wide comprehensive bullying program that focuses on traditional bullying and cyberbullying, and emphasizes strategies based on the Three Tiered Model of Prevention and Intervention.
- Provide necessary supports so schools can implement effective anti-bullying programs that follow best practice guidelines.
- Ensure availability of adequate staff training opportunities and materials necessary for implementing the program.

#### **State Education Leaders and Policymakers:**

- Include the Three Tiered Model in anti-bullying programs to ensure that schools are following best practice guidelines and focusing on systemic change.
- Support funding for professional development of school employees focused on implementation of an anti-bullying curriculum at all grade levels and training in conflict mediation.
- Provide support to schools to help guide them through the data-based decision making and program evaluation process, so they can gain the capacity to sustain their bullying prevention efforts.

### *Selected References*

1. National Education Association (1995). *Youth risk behavior survey data results*. Retrieved from [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)
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3. The Kaiser Family Foundation (1999). *Kids ready to talk about today's tough issues before their parents are: sex, aids, violence, and drugs/alcohol*. Retrieved from <http://www.kff.org/youth/hivstds/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14687>
4. Walker, H.M., & Shinn, M.R. (2002) Structuring school-based intervention to achieve integrated primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention goals for safe and effective schools. In M. R. Shinn, H. M. Walker, & G. Stoner (Eds.), *Interventions for academic and behavioral problems II: preventative and remedial approaches*, 1-26. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

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