Why Bullying Programs Succeed or Fail

Article

By Melinda Bossenmeyer, Ed.D.

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By Dr. Melinda Bossenmeyer, Ed.D.

This is a poem
 written by Natalie, a high school student.

I used to get bullied, and
I didn't know what to do
I wouldn't want to come to school
I'd pretend I had the flu

But now things are so different
School's a better place to be
Because of the peer mentors
And what they did for me.

Natalie is not alone in her experience with school bullying. In fact, all fifty states have passed anti-bullying legislation which is indicative of the growing concern over bullying in schools.

The tipping point has been the school shootings in which three fourths of the shooters' school histories are indicative of being a victim of bullying or experiencing on-going harassment. Additionally, 75% of students who carried weapons at school brought them to attack others because they felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or previously injured by others while at school. (Data from the Secret Service Safe Schools Initiative.

On a related issue, 50% of boys and 30% of girls who admitted bullying others at school carried a weapon. Conversely 36% of boys and 15% of girls who were bullied reported carrying a weapon.

Clearly bullying has captured the nation's attention. Research indicates that 30% of middle school students report being involved in bullying within the last semester. Victims make up 17% and perpetrators make up 19%. Forty-eight percent of elementary school students report being bullied within the last year.

BULLYING PREVENTION FOR TEACHERS TRAINING

Teachers will learn:
• To identify bullying
• Define bullying
• Roles in bullying
• Difference between teasing and taunting
• Components of state bullying prevention requirements

Direct Response to Bullying
• AEIOU Strategy for responding

Research on:
• Where bullying occurs
• Hot spots for bullying
• Boys who bully
• Girls who bully
• At Risk Groups for Bullying
• Cyberbullying

Strategies for
• Preventing bullying
• Eliminating bullying on playground
• Eliminating bullying in classrooms
• Eliminating bullying in schools

Meets Bullying Intervention Teacher training requirements for school staffs.

Meets State Legal Training Requirements for policies and procedures to follow in bullying incidents.

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What is bullying and how does it differ from fighting? Bullying has three components. 1. Negative behavior with intent of harming. 2. Behavior repeated over the course of time. 3. Relationship in which there is an imbalance of power between the victim and bully. Boys' bullying often takes on the look of physical bullying, including fighting, hitting, kicking or shoving. A common characteristic of the victim is that they have difficulty defending themselves.

Both girls and boys are victims and bullies. Girls type of bullying usually takes the form of non-verbal threatening bullying and can look like isolation or exclusion from group activities or shunning. A recent movie portrayed that behavior in a film call Mean Girls.

Bullying can have serious consequences for both victim and bully. Research indicates that victims can show signs of headaches, stomachaches, depression, misplaced aggression and difficulty with relationships and academics.

Bullies also suffer as a result of the socially unacceptable behavior going unchecked. Unchecked bullies are three times more likely as their non-bullying peers to end up with a criminal conviction by age 24. Research indicates that bullies are in desperate need of positive, pro-social role models including peers and adults.

Schools have wrestled with bullying programs for years. The next section will deal with schools and bullying programs that work and those that don't.

Bully Programs that don't work
1. Zero tolerance Policies- While good intentioned, doing nothing but eliminating bullies from schools is neither feasible or effective. Since research indicates that 20% of students bully another at some time in their school career, kicking out 20% of the students obviously won't work.
2. Group therapy for students who bully also does not work. First and foremost, the bully needs good role models. Containing them with like offenders , while well intentioned is a recipe for disaster and an over exposure to non social behaviors.
3. Conflict Resolution Programs- Since bullies victimize, putting the bully and victim together can be extremely upsetting to the victim. Mediation is not the appropriate response. No one deserves to be bullied.

What works in School Wide Bullying Prevention Programs
The research is clear on what works. The following ten points outline the components of effective school wide bullying programs.

1. School wide approach. First and foremost the foundation of any bullying prevention program requires school wide approach and commitment. Buy in from the staff and administration is not only appropriate but essential. This requires changing the norms for social behavior and school climate. The school wide message needs to be: Bullying is wrong. It violates school rules and will not be tolerated. It must stop immediately.
2. Assessment. Successful intervention programs assess bullying by administrating an anonymous bullying questionnaire to students. This questionnaire should identify bullying "hot spots" on campus and also serve as a baseline for future reference and success indicators.
3. Buy In. Get staff and parents on board with the new bullying program. The majority of the staff should be onboard for the program to be successful.
4. Bullying Prevention Leadership Team. Form a group to coordinate and provide direction for implementing a bullying program. This team should commit to ongoing reviews of the bullying situation, training, data and lessons to be implemented.
5. Staff Training. Train staff in bully identification, prevention, and intervention. The staff needs to be trained on how to intervene to stop bullying. For on the spot intervention refer to the "Stop Bullying Now Program" which is a link at the bottom of this pod cast and an outstanding resource for schools.
6. Policies and Rules on Bullying. Establish and enforce school rules and policies on bullying. Align these with state legislation and district bullying policies.
7. Bullying Intervention and Supervision is a key. Supervisors/teachers should be present in identified hot spots in which bullying occurs.
8. Intervene consistently to observations of bullying behavior. Bullying requires separate follow up meetings as needed. Policies and consequences should be predetermined and clearly communicated.
9. Implement a classroom instructional component in which lessons and discussions on school environment keeps tabs on the bullying situation. A 20-40 minute weekly meeting with mini lessons and instruction on bullying preventions strategies is needed. It is best if an anti-bullying theme can be incorporated throughout the curriculum and school events.
10. Continuous program with no end date. Revisit bullying prevention themes and intertwine them in classroom curriculum.

Most research on bullying boils down to 4 rules that schools should adopt regarding bullying.
1. Do not bully.
2. Help others when you see bullying occur. (Step in or get help of an adult.)

3. Include others (invite students to be a part of games and activities.)
4. Tell an adult at home or school if you experience bullying.
5.

Systemic changes in the school environment in the form of school climate initiatives take time to implement bringing about the change.

For additional resources on bullying programs and schools visit

 Stop Bullying Now ⬅, a program from the Department of Health and Human Services.

How teachers should respond to bullying. Peaceful Playgrounds Featured Article & Infographic

Bullying Prevention Training for Teachers Course & Certification- Course and Certification (1 hour)