



Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools

FACT SHEET

FS-SC08

2001

Bullying Prevention: Recommendations for Schools

The Role of Schools in Preventing Bullying

The school should be a safe and positive learning environment for ALL students. In order to achieve this goal, schools should strive to:

1. Reduce, if not eliminate, existing bully/victim problems among students in and outside of the school setting;
2. Prevent the development of new bully/victim problems; and
3. Achieve better peer relations at school and create conditions that allow in particular, victims and bullies to get along and function better in and outside of the school setting.

Recommended General Rules for Improving Overall School Climate

Two general conditions must exist in order to prevent bullying: (1) adults at schools should be **aware** of the extent of bully/victim problems in their own schools; and (2) these adults should **involve** themselves in changing the situation.

Schools and classrooms should establish and stick to rules to prevent bullying. Adults must clearly and consistently communicate that bullying is not acceptable behavior. The following rules target all students:

1. We will not bully other students.
2. We will try to help students who are bullied.
3. We will make it a point to include ALL students who are easily left out.
4. When we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell a teacher, parent, or adult we trust. Students should be assured that telling an adult is not "tattling," but instead students are showing compassion for victims of bullying behavior.

It is important to note that these rules target all students, not just the bullies or victims. The introduction of these rules establish classroom norms or "structures" that can contribute to the prevention of bullying.

Consequences of Bullying Behavior

Establishing rules against bullying necessitates creating positive or negative consequences for following or violating rules. The best results are obtained through a combination of generous verbal praise or other social reinforcements for positive activities and consistent negative consequences for aggressive, rule-violating behavior. Teachers should establish a positive, friendly, and trusting relationship with the class and each individual student. This is especially true for aggressive, acting-out students who may have had negative experiences with adults. It is easier for a student to accept criticism if he/she feels appreciated and liked. Teachers should also be aware of their own behavior. Teachers often serve as "models" for students who respect them and may wish to emulate them. Likewise, students will not respect the teacher or classroom rules against bullying if the teacher is sarcastic, unfair, or abusive.

School-Level Interventions

School-level interventions are designed to improve overall school climate. These interventions target the entire school population.

- *Establish a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee:* This committee will coordinate all aspects of a school's violence prevention efforts, including anti-bullying efforts.
- *Administer an Anonymous Questionnaire Survey:* A student questionnaire can determine the nature and extent of bully/victim problems in the school.

- *Hold a School Conference Day:* Raise school and community awareness and involvement by creating a long-term anti-bullying plan. In addition to school personnel, selected students and parents should participate.
- *Improve Supervision and Outdoor Environment:* Provide adequate number of adults ("teacher density") during lunch, recess, and breaks in an effort to intervene quickly in student conflicts.
- *Involve Parents:* Conduct meetings with and disseminate information to parents at the school to make them aware of the school's anti-bullying plan of action.

Classroom-Level Interventions

Classroom-level interventions are designed to improve an individual classroom's social climate. These interventions target the entire classroom.

- *Establish Classroom Rules Against Bullying:* Involve students in creating rules against bullying in order to develop a student's personal responsibility for conforming to those rules.
- *Create Positive and Negative Consequences of Bullying:* Establish social reinforcement (i.e., praise, friendly attention) for positive behavior and sanctions for undesirable behavior. The negative consequence should cause discomfort without being perceived as malicious or unfair. Negative consequences should be appropriate and related to the behavior. Extra assignments, such as homework or copying from a dictionary, should not be used.
- *Hold Regular Classroom Meetings:* Provide a forum for students and teachers to develop, clarify, and evaluate rules for anti-bullying behavior.
- *Meet with Parents:* Hold general classroom- or grade-level meetings with parents to improve school-family communication and keep parents informed about anti-bullying efforts.

Individual-Level Interventions

Classroom-level interventions are designed to change or improve the behavior of students in general. These interventions target specific students who are involved in bullying, either as bullies or victims.

- *Serious Talks with the Bully or Bullies:* Initiate immediate talks with the bully/ies. These talks should include:
 - documenting involvement of participation in bullying,
 - sending a clear, strong message that bullying is not acceptable,
 - warning the bully/ies that future behavior will be closely monitored, and
 - warning that additional negative consequences will be administered if bullying behavior does not stop.
- *Serious Talks with the Victim:* Talks with the victim and his/her parents should occur after a bullying incident. These talks should include:
 - documenting specific bullying episode(s) that includes: How did the bullying start? What happened? How did it end? Who participated and in what way?;
 - providing victim with information about the teacher's plan of action in dealing with the bully/ies; and
 - attempting to persuade the victim to immediately report any new bullying episodes or attempts to the teacher.
- *Involve the Parents:* When a bullying situation is discovered, the teacher should contact the parents concerned. Depending on the situation, meetings can be held together with the parents of both the bully/ies and the victim, or to minimize tension meetings can be held with each family separately. A teacher might want to invite the school psychologist, guidance counselor, principal, or vice principal to attend.
- *Change of Class or School:* If anti-bullying measures are in place and the problem persists despite these measures, moving the aggressive student(s) can bring about change. If possible, the aggressive student(s) should be moved before considering moving the victim. This solution should not be taken lightly, and all concerned parents and teachers should plan and consult with each other.

References

- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Olweus, D., Limber, S. & Mihalic, S.F. (1999). *Bullying Prevention Program: Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Nine*. Blueprints for Violence Prevention Series (D.S. Elliott, Series Editor). Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado.