



Community-Based Bullying Prevention: Tips for Community Members

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Often, it is repeated over time and can take many forms. Bullying is a common occurrence in the lives of children. Nearly every child will experience bullying at some time. Students report consistently high rates of frequent bullying in studies representative of urban, suburban, small-town, and rural schools. Between 15–25 percent of students are bullied and 15–20 percent report bullying others (Melton et al., 1998; Nansel et al., 2001).

Serious effects and school disruptions from bullying

Students and school staff know how destructive bullying can be within schools that do not consciously address the problem.

- Teasing and bullying were first on the minds of most children when asked what threatens their safety and emotional well-being (Kaiser Family Foundation & Children Now, 2001; Schoenberg et al., 2003).
- Victims of bullying have higher rates of anxiety and depression, and lower self-esteem even as adults.
- Bullying has been linked with serious school violence, shootings, and hazing incidents (Nansel et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).
- Bullying behavior can be a sign of antisocial or violent tendencies that may lead to delinquent and criminal behaviors.

Adults are responsible for creating safe learning environments. When bullying is overlooked by adults, children and youth are less likely to report it because they expect nothing will be done.

Why bullying prevention needs to be community wide

Bullying, a common and harmful experience in many children's social development, is largely preventable. Community wide strategies can help to identify and support children who are bullied; redirect the behavior of children who bully; and change the attitudes of adults and youth who tolerate bullying behaviors in peer groups, schools, and communities.

Some of the benefits of a community wide approach are:

- *Adults often fail to notice bullying.* Children and youth report that bullying typically happens in unsupervised areas. The more adults who are watching for bullying, the better.
- *Although much bullying happens at school, bullying doesn't stop at the schoolhouse door.* It also occurs in the community—wherever children and youth gather.
- *School-based bullying prevention programs benefit from input and support from the community.* The commitment of parents and community members is vital to developing good programs and sustaining them over time.
- *Bullying prevention messages are likely to be more effective if they come from many adults in a community—not just from educators and parents.*

Community wide strategies to stop bullying

1. Involve youth, parents, professionals, and volunteers in promoting bullying prevention

- Engage a diverse group of parents, youth, and caring adults to explore how residents perceive the problem and what solutions they recommend.
- Be certain to involve youth at every stage in planning, implementing, and evaluating your bullying prevention efforts. That's the best way to tap into their world and know what will work.
- Knowledge and resources already exist within your community. Seek out interested partners from a variety of sources: educators and guidance counselors, health and mental health professionals, child development and family centers, social service agencies, local police and law enforcement, neighborhood associations, high school students, colleges and universities, service organizations, faith-based organizations, volunteer groups, and businesses.
- Keep in mind, that more than 70 public and private sector health and safety, mental health, education, faith-based, law enforcement, and youth-serving organizations are partners in the *Stop Bullying Now!* Campaign. They signed on to spread the message and promote community-based coalitions. Consider contacting local chapters, members, and staff of the national associations and service organizations who are Campaign Partners (see Campaign Web site).

2. Assess strengths and needs in your community

- Study the problem locally to make informed decisions on prevention and intervention strategies.
- To coordinate the "right mix" of bullying intervention and prevention, you'll need to describe the nature and extent of bullying in your community. Who is most affected?

What kinds of bullying are most prevalent? Where does bullying occur? How responsive are children, youth, and adults to bullying that they observe?

- You'll also want to assess what already is being done in your community to address bullying.
- Consider assessing your community and school needs using opinion surveys, interviews, focus groups, and open forums (i.e., convene meetings with community leaders, businesses, parent teacher associations, and churches).

3. Raise community awareness

Bullying is a complex problem that is often misunderstood. Don't expect the entire community to be well-informed. Some believe the myth that bullying is a normal part of growing up. It is critical to raise community awareness about bullying and dispel common myths.

The groundwork for a local awareness campaign is already done. The Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) National Bullying Prevention Campaign gives you information and dynamic, multimedia resources to bring attention to the impact of bullying on young peoples' lives, "what works" in bullying prevention, and how to reinforce the Campaign's message to "Take a Stand. Lend a Hand. Stop Bullying Now!" Everything you need to create a local media campaign is easily accessible and online in the Communications Kit at www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov.

- Distribute printed materials. Reprint brochures and fact sheets; create newsletters; and add the *Stop Bullying Now!* logo to your own written materials and distribute them throughout your community.
- Encourage local radio stations, TV broadcasters, and newspapers to release the Campaign's public service announcements during prime viewing times.

- Introduce tweens, 9- through 13-year-old youth, to the Campaign in schools, after-school programs, and community groups. Send them to the Web site to learn about bullying in games, polls, and the webisodes (animated comics), and solicit their ideas and reactions to the real-life tales of bullying.
- Advocate for appropriate anti-bullying and harassment policies in schools and other institutions.
- Continually assess the effectiveness of your community's efforts.

4. Develop a comprehensive community strategy to address bullying

- Use the assessment results to define bullying, set goals, describe how the schools and broader community will prevent bullying, and respond to bullying incidents that occur.

References and Resources

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