

BULLYING AT SCHOOL: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Understand what bullying looks like. Bullying is commonly defined as the long-standing physical or psychological abuse of a student who is unable to defend himself by either an individual or group of other students. Most researchers estimate that between 14 and 20% of students in schools will experience bullying at least once during their academic career (Elinoff, Chafouleas & Sassu, 2004). Outcomes for both bullies and their victims are bleak; victims of bullying are more likely than non-victims to report physical and mental health problems, including psychosomatic complaints, and contemplate suicide. Bullies themselves are more likely to drop out of school, spend some amount of time in prison, and become abusive spouses (Elinoff, Chafouleas & Sassu, 2004).

General Recommendations for Teachers and School Faculty:

- 1. Become familiar with the school's definition of bullying, bullying prevention policies, and the code of conduct.** This will ensure that the same policy is being enforced throughout the school.
- 2. If available, attend a bullying training prevention program or in-service** in order to learn more about bullying and their obligations as a teacher related to this issue.
- 3. Clearly explain** to your class what behavior you consider to be bullying. **Establish clear rules** against bullying and define both desirable and unacceptable behavior.
- 4. Educate students on certain issues related to bullying.** Specifically, raise awareness by providing students with information about different participant roles and group mechanisms involved in bullying. Also, emphasize that certain beliefs about bullying are false, such as the belief that bullied students are at least partly to blame for their victimization, that bullying makes the victims tougher, and that teasing is simply done "in fun."
- 5. Conduct an assessment of your students' beliefs regarding bullying** by creating and distributing a questionnaire and then implementing any bullying training appropriately.
- 6. Insure close supervision** during recess periods and in hallways and bathrooms, as this is when most bullying occurs.
- 7. Know that students' incidences of bullying or being bullied decrease with age.** Therefore, primary school teachers need to be the most aware of incidences of bullying in their school.
- 8. Be aware of indirect and subtle bullying** in the form of social isolation and intentional exclusion, especially among girls.

9. Be careful to observe students who are cautious, sensitive, anxious, quiet, and boys who are physically weaker than average or who are physically handicapped or overweight, as they are at a higher risk for being bullied than other students. Usually, they do not retaliate or act assertive, and they may lack friends or social support.

10. Create a social environment where there is warmth and acceptance of all students and one where there are high standards for student and teacher behavior toward one another. Teacher attitudes toward aggression partly determine how teachers will react to bullying situations. Avoid emphasis on competitiveness at school and avoid sex-role stereotyping (e.g., males need to be strong and tough). Make the classroom a ‘safety zone’.

11. Teach specific skills and strategies in the classroom such as emotional awareness, seeing others' perspectives, alternative thinking strategies, and problem solving. Strategies for teaching these skills can include class discussion, role play, and practice.

12. Use mentoring techniques to build solid relationships with the students in order to help them feel like they belong. Create a trusting environment where students feel they can confide in their teacher when the situation presents itself.

13. Provide positive feedback to children who exhibit appropriate social behaviors and model interactions that do not include bullying or aggression. Frequently praise students by specifically describing their positive behavior.

14. Encourage students to reach out to other students. Enlist classmates to help alleviate the plight of victims by not encouraging the bully, and to include others in group activities.

15. Encourage “bystanders”, or those who witness the bullying incident, to speak up against bullying. Instruct them on the importance of telling adults about the bullying they see, effective ways to intervene in a bullying situation, and how to reach out in friendship to victims of bullying. According to research, most students act in ways which are prone to maintain and encourage bullying rather than diminish it, even though attitudes of most children have been found to be against bullying. Teach them that their silence makes the bully more powerful and contributes to the harm done to the victim.

16. Watch your tone-and your message. It is important to examine the tone of voice used when speaking to students. Avoid undue criticism. Children learn by example, and someone who is belittled may resort to such tactics when dealing with peers.

17. Do not ignore instances of bullying. Send the message that “bullying is not accepted in our school and we will see to it that it comes to an end.” They should initiate serious talks with both bullies and victims and parents of involved students. To this end, organize a meeting with the “bully” and the victim” and negotiate an understanding whereby both students can agree to “live together in the same school.” Both “bully” and

“victim” should be encouraged to look at their own behavior and decide how they might change to avoid bullying or being bullied in the future.

18. When witnessing a bullying incident, the following steps are recommended:

- **Intervene first by separating the victim and the bully.** Name the behavior, reiterate the rules, and review expected behaviors.
- **Discuss the next step with the victim and ask what they think should be done.** If a child is in danger, you must act even if the child wants you to do nothing. Do not make promises you cannot keep to the child. However, reassure the victim that all possible steps will be taken to prevent a recurrence.
- **Make it clear that the victim is not to blame.** Emphasize that bullying is wrong and bullies will suffer the consequences, not the victim.
- **Enforce consequences for engaging in bullying behaviors in a consistent, immediate, non-violent, and predictable manner.** Examples of consequences include loss of unstructured times such as recess, lunch with peers, or extracurricular activities.
- **After the bullies face their consequences, engage in a reflective activity with them in order to discuss what they did, how their behavior affected the victim, what goal they were trying to reach, and how else they can achieve this goal.** During this activity, guide them in determining more appropriate strategies to express their feelings or resolve conflict. Teach them alternative methods of interaction, help them learn to develop empathy for their peers, attempt to establish that bullying is a violation of human rights, identify their thinking errors, and reinforce their use of calming strategies.
- **Provide the victim with helpful tips to cope with bullying.** They may be encouraged to use humor or silence to deflect an onslaught, encouraged to be assertive and use ‘I’ statements, advised to stay with a crowd or avoid the bully, and reminded not to fight with the bully.

19. Don’t be a “wimp.” Teachers may breed a bully by being overly permissive and thereby sending the message that bullying pays off. Children actually feel more secure when they know teachers will set limits.

20. Consider involving peer groups in developing strategies and solutions for instances of bullying. Heighten awareness and involve students in a solution using instructional videos and student conflict mediator programs.

21. Coordinate efforts with other school personnel (e.g., counselors and psychologists). If necessary, pass the bullying situation on to the school counselor, school psychologist, or principal so appropriate measures will be taken. Work together with school personnel in order to create a school climate where bullying is not tolerated.

22. Involve parents of both bullies and victims in the process by informing them of their child’s positive and negative behaviors and discuss ways to reinforce certain skills at home in order to help them behave better at school.

For Parents of Bullies:

- 1. Strive to increase the feeling of closeness and togetherness in their family by spending leisure time together as a family.**
- 2. Limit the amount of violence children observe on television and in movies.**
Discuss the consequences of violence in real life.
- 3. Both parents should strive to agree on rules** for their child in families where two parents are involved in child rearing. Parents who are consistently unable or unwilling to agree on child rearing practices should consider enrollment in marital counseling or parenting courses.
- 4. Set firm limits to unacceptable behavior.** When limits are violated, non-hostile, non-physical punishment should be consistently applied.
- 5. Monitor child's behavior in and out of school.**

Parents of Victims:

- 1. Take an active role in preventing the perpetuation of their child's victim behavior.**
- 2. Encourage children to participate in extracurricular activities that may help develop confidence** (sports, church groups, community center activities, volunteering, musical groups, etc.)
- 3. Encourage their children to participate in peer group activities that are appropriate for their age;** children should have the opportunity to develop their social skills with their peers without the parents' direct involvement.
- 4. Do not discourage children from developing their own thoughts and beliefs.** Do not attempt to regularly "speak for their children." Recognize and encourage ways that the child is different and unique.

Resources:

Batsche, G. (1997). Bullying. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs II: Development, problems, and alternatives*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

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- www.education-world.com/a_issues/issues103.shtml: Bullying Intervention Strategies That Work.
- www.education-world.com/a_special/bully_2000.shtml: Bullying.
- www.fcps.net/sa/support/bully/parents-role.htm: Parents' Role in Bullying Prevention & Intervention.
- www.stopbullyingnow.com/interven.htm: Comprehensive Interventions.

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