Implementing Bullying Prevention Programs in Schools: A How-To Guide

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This document represents a "how to" guide for school personnel trying to determine how to implement effective bullying prevention and intervention programming. It offers ideas on how to think about the process and how to identify and evaluate the right program for their community.

I: What are the most important elements that an effective prevention program needs to have?

Effective youth education/prevention programs all have the following elements. In considering which curriculum to implement, schools need to make sure to look for these research-based approaches:

1. A **structured curriculum** that provides youth with materials over at least **several sessions** and includes:
    a. detailed information on how to implement each lesson
    b. lesson materials
    c. specific text for presenters
    d. procedures for training teachers or other presenters.

    One-shot assemblies or pulling a few bits and pieces from a program is not going to make a difference for your youth.
2. The program teaches youth **new skills**. These should be spelled out in the program materials. Research shows that this is critical to helping youth change their behavior. Lecture-only programs do not do this.
3. Activities must let youth practice these new skills in **active ways**. The programs that schools consider should include some combination of classroom discussion periods, engaging and thought-provoking activities, and role-playing.
4. For bullying in particular, the program needs to take **a whole school or community approach** to prevention. The best programs all offer training for school staff, involvement of parents, and assistance to help the school improve its response to bullying concerns and reports.

A number of reviews support the importance of these elements to effective prevention:

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. American Journal of *Community Psychology*, 45, 294-309.

Kerns, S. E. U., & Prinz, R. J. (2002). Critical issues in the prevention of violence-related behavior in youth. *Clinical Child And Family Psychology Review*, 5(2), 133-160.

Nation, M., Crusto, C., Wandersman, A., Kumpfer, K. L., Seybolt, D., Morrisey-Kane, E., & Davino, K. (2003). What works in prevention: Principles of effective prevention programs. *American Psychologist*, 58(6/7), 449-456.

Ttofi, M. M. & Farrington, D. P. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology,* 7, 27-56.

II: What do effective bullying prevention programs teach?

Schools can look for **bullying specific education programs** or can consider implementing **social-emotional learning programs (SEL**), which teach youth skills necessary to successfully navigate their interpersonal relationships and regulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These skills include but are not limited to: empathy training, effective communication skills, perspective taking, emotion management, problem solving and goal setting. These are not only skills that enable youth to function better in school, but also ones that are valuable life skills and necessary for being successful in the 21st century workplace.

Bullying prevention programs will also address the specific needs of students and staff in recognizing, reporting and effectively dealing with bullying incidents. The most effective bullying prevention programs have SEL components embedded in them. A very strong approach would be to implement both types of programs. Schools can think about SEL programs as a foundation upon which the bullying specific content should be delivered.

The best SEL programs teach youth the following skills:

1. Self-regulation (controlling impulses; focusing, sustaining and shifting attention; listening to and remembering information; empathy training)
2. Perspective taking (appreciating similarities and differences; recognizing and identifying feelings of others; understanding that feelings can change and are complex)
3. Emotion management (recognizing and identifying one's own feelings; learning strategies for calming down strong emotions; managing stress/anxiety)
4. Problem-solving (learning a process for solving problems; goal setting)
5. Communication skills (being assertive; being respectful; negotiating and compromising)
6. Friendship skills (cooperation, including others, joining in with others)

The best bullying prevention programs should ideally include the above SEL skills and the following:

1. Training for all school staff and parents on the "psychology" of bullying

2. Training for all school staff and parents on procedures for how to effectively handle bullying reports, including the school's process for and policies around dealing with bullying reports
3. Training for teachers on how to deliver the program, including some training around managing relationships and behaviors in the classroom as well as monitoring their own behaviors that are modeled for students
4. Training for "Coaches"- people who will work one-on-one with both the students doing the bullying and the students being bullied
5. Guidance around establishing policies and procedures, even if it's just a checklist for schools to make sure they are in compliance with district/state/federal laws
6. Classroom curricula that:
   - Teach students what bullying is: how to recognize when it's happening to you or someone else
   - Clearly state and reiterate rules, processes and consequences regarding bullying
   - Teach students assertiveness and communication skills that will help them refuse bullying, whether it is happening to themselves or someone else
   - Teach students skills and strategies for being an effective bystander: supporting the person who was bullied, not joining in, reporting, diffusing the situation if possible
   - Teach students skills and the process for reporting bullying, including who to report to
   - All skills must be practiced and reinforced
7. Guidance around consequences of bullying
   - Recommendations for appropriate and graduated consequences, including reparative practice options and mental health interventions, when necessary.

III: How do I find an effective bullying prevention or social-emotional learning (SEL) program?

Research on bullying prevention and intervention programs is very active and more information on evidence-based anti-bullying programs will become available as studies are completed.

The bullying prevention program with the most extensive research support at this time in the United States is ***Steps to Respect*** (http://www.cfchildren.org/steps-to-respect.aspx), a curriculum developed by the Seattle-based Committee for Children. Rigorous evaluation has shown that the Steps to Respect program successfully increased positive bystander behaviors in youth, and decreased physical bullying by children according to teacher reports.[1] There is also research support for the ***Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*** (http://www.olweus.org) although the most successful research has been conducted in European countries and evaluation results in the U.S. have been mixed. ***KiVa***, an

[1] Brown, E. C., Low, S., Smith, B. H., & Haggerty, K. P. (2011). Outcomes from a school-randomized controlled trial of Steps to Respect: A bullying prevention program. *School Psychology Review*, *40*(3), 423-443.

evidence-based Finnish program (www.kivakoulu.fi/there-is-no-bullying-in-kiva-school) has shown effectiveness in Finland and there are current efforts to translate the program into English.

Research has also found that SEL programs are successful at improving social emotional skills and reducing conduct problems, among other benefits.[2] Although evidence for particular SEL programs varies and is ongoing, below are some programs with support:

- Second Step (http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step.aspx)
- The RULER program (http://therulerapproach.org/)
- Roots of Empathy (http://www.rootsofempathy.org/)
- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (http://www.prevention.psu.edu/projects/PATHS.html)
- Tribes Learning Communities (http://tribes.com/about/a-model-program/casel-select-program/)

The positive outcome data that we have available to date has primarily been found in programs implemented in elementary and middle school settings. While research on bullying prevention continues to develop, we encourage school personnel to look for programs that: 1) meet as much of the criteria as possible in Sections I and II above; and 2) can provide outcome data and information about ongoing evaluation. We also recommend that schools collect data themselves in order to track bullying attitudes and behavior and assess a program's effectiveness

The following websites and databases can help schools learn more about other anti-bullying, school violence, and social-emotional learning programs:

- The Department of Education: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/
- The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL): http://casel.org/in-schools/selecting-programs/
- The Promising Practices Network: http://www.promisingpractices.net/programs.asp
- The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence: http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/
- Department of Justice (OJJDP): http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/search.aspx
- The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/#4
- Target Bullying website: http://www.targetbully.com/Prevention_Intervention.php
- World Health Organization's (WHO) Violence Prevention Alliance: http://www.preventviolence.info/evidence_base_complete.aspx

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[2] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.

- Child Trends: http://www.childtrends.org/links/
- Find Youth Info: http://findyouthinfo.gov/