Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Bullying is a school and community problem around the world leading to psychosocial and behavioral problems later in life. Prevention and intervention programs can help school communities to deal with this problem, and consequent short- and long-term effects of bullying others and/or experiencing victimization.

Key Research Findings

- Review papers are available and useful for identifying effective and ineffective bullying prevention strategies and programs.[1,2,3]
- The majority of bullying programs were successful at reducing bullying and victimization at school.[4,5]
- Some programs have negative results – bullying problems increased. This negative trend highlights the need for regular evaluation.[6,7]
- Having a bullying prevention program is better than not having one.[8]
- The same program did not have similar effects in all schools[9] and success depended on: programmatic and moment-to moment interventions, quality of the implementation of the program, adult leadership, and student involvement and leadership.
- Successful interventions are comprehensive and systemic:[10,11]
    - Not one solution fits all schools or communities.[12,13]
    - Peers are central to bullying dynamics and solutions.[14,15]
    - Adults support and model for children's healthy relationships.[16,17]
    - Successful bullying prevention programs involve the community.[18,19]
- Recommended elements for bullying prevention programs:[20]
    - Define bullying.
    - Identify multiple forms of bullying.
    - Address specific issues found in schools (e.g., fairness, social skill development).
    - Focus on healthy relationships and explanation of bullying dynamic.
    - Provide training materials and guides for educators, students, parents, and school staff.
    - Take a multi-faceted approach, including school-wide education, routine interventions, and intensive interventions.
    - Address peer processes that can promote prevention and stop bullying.
    - Make the program systemic (i.e., involve parents, peers, classes, staff, and the wider community) and ongoing (i.e., fully integrate into the curriculum).
    - Include interventions and support for students who are bullied and those who bully.
    - Develop protocols for safe reporting of bullying incidents.
    - Include an evaluation component.
    - Create safe intervention programs for bystanders.
    - Promote a healthy social school environment.
    - Promote development and/or improvement of students' social behavior.
- Although some researchers have found that bullying prevention programs do not produce significant declines in rates of bullying and victimization, the evaluation

PREV/Net

Networks of Centres
of Excellence
Réseaux de centres
d'excellence

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

analyses aggregate over many youth and do not take a person-oriented approach. Consequently, potential decreases among certain groups of youth (e.g., children who bully in moderate amounts) are obscured by the lack of changes seen among other groups of children (e.g., the children who have never bullying, and therefore do not have any room for decreases).[21]

Key Themes

- Bullying prevention programs are available for use within elementary, middle, and high schools. The programs that include the critical components listed above are likely to be effective in creating positive changes within the school environment.
- The evaluation procedures used to investigate the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs should take a person-oriented approach (i.e., based on the students' levels of risk and intensity of involvement). By avoiding aggregation across many children or adolescents involved in differing levels of bullying (from no involvement to high involvement), we can understand which students are most (and least) responsive to the programs.

Implications

Education
- Teachers should receive pre-service education about the implementation of in-school bullying prevention and intervention programs, and the important role they play in the effectiveness of the program at their school.
- Principals should receive consistent, periodic education sessions to receive information about the latest bullying prevention and intervention programs available and how bullying prevention and healthy relationships can be integrated into curriculum.
- Principals should also receive information about the elements that make a bullying prevention or intervention more effective (see research findings above).

Assessment
- Pre and post assessments that take a person-oriented approach are crucial for judging the effectiveness of bullying prevention and intervention programs within particular schools and school boards.

Prevention and Intervention
- Having a bullying prevention program is better than not having one.
- Early experiences and development lay foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.
- Early intervention is more effective than later.
- Start early, before the problem begins and have regular check-ins.
- Developmentally tailor interventions.
- Different forms of bullying need to be targeted at different ages.
- Assess and identify those at highest risk for involvement.

- Those involved early will experience the most problems and require the most intensive interventions.
- Youth who are involved in bullying at high and chronic rates may require additional support at both the individual level (e.g., addressing aggression and increasing empathy) and within relationship contexts (e.g., addressing the affects of peer reinforcement).
- Individual-focused attention (i.e., scaffolding) is important, as youth differ in their experiences with bullying perpetration and victimization.

Policy

- Government legislators for education need to establish board-wide standards for bullying prevention and intervention programs within schools. There should also a policy that requires pre and post testing to be conducted for these programs, ensuring that programs are helping and not hindering the development of healthy peer relationships.

---

[1] Baldry, A. C. & Farrington, D. P. (2007). Effectiveness of programs to prevent school bullying. *Victims & Offenders. Special Issue on Early Intervention, 2,* 183-204.

[2] Smokowski, P. R. & Kopasz, K. H. (2005). Bullying in school: An overview of types, effects, family characteristics, and intervention strategies. *Children & Schools, 27,* 101-110.

[3] Craig, W., Pepler, D., & Shelley, D. (2004). Summary of Interventions to Address Bullying Problems at School. Report prepared for the Ministry of Education, Government of Ontario.

[4] See note 2 above.

[5] See note 3 above.

[6] See note 2 above.

[7] See note 3 above.

[8] Pepler, D., Jiang, D., & Craig, W. *Who Benefits from Bullying Prevention Programs? A Mixed Model Analysis.* Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, Melbourne, July 2006

[9] See note 8 above.

[10] See note 2 above.

[11] See note 3 above.

[12] See note 2 above.

[13] See note 3 above.

[14] See note 2 above.

[15] See note 3 above.

[16] See note 2 above.

[17] See note 3 above.

[18] See note 2 above.

[19] See note 3 above.

[20] See note 4 above.

[21] See note 4 above.