

The Role of Teachers and Other School Staff in Bullying Prevention

School educators and staff play an important role in preventing and intervening in bullying, and in modeling healthy relationships. Educators and school staff play a critical role in creating a climate of support and empathy inside and outside of the classroom. Principals have a central role in monitoring the prevalence of bullying in schools, championing prevention and intervention efforts, and instituting policies and strategies to prevent and intervene in bullying.

Key Research Findings

- A common denominator among successful school-based bullying prevention and intervention programs is a proactive principal who prioritizes the program and supports staff to devote time to the program.¹
- The school principals' commitment to allocate time and resources to bullying prevention-related activities is associated with improvements.²
- Teachers and school staff are in a unique and influential position to promote healthy relationships and to intervene in bullying situations.^{3,4}
- The degree of improvement in bullying indicators is directly related to the extent to which a school-based program is taken up and implemented.⁵
- Over half of bullied children do not report being bullied to a teacher.^{6,7}
- Teachers who participated in a bullying prevention program felt more confident about handling bullying problems, had more supportive attitudes about victimized students, and felt more positively about working with parents regarding bullying problems.⁸
- Both teachers and students report that teachers do not know how to effectively intervene, which prevents students from seeking help and contributes to teachers ignoring bullying.^{9,10}
- Teachers are the key agents of change with regard to adoption and implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program in school.¹¹
- Labeling an incident as bullying can be important, as it influences whether children tell an adult, as well as how adults respond to the child's report.^{12,13}
- Whether the child "fits" expectations about how victimized children are supposed to behave and seek help influences school adults' perceptions and responses to bullying incidents.¹⁴
- The involvement of teachers in bullying situations when they were children and the outcomes of those bullying situations influence their abilities as adults to intervene and the strategies they choose for intervention. Teachers' previous experiences also relate to whether or not teachers themselves bully their students.^{15,16}
- Teachers have less empathy and intervene less frequently when they witness social bullying even though students identify social bullying as being at least as distressing as physical bullying.^{17,18}
- Students want teachers to take an active role both in classroom management of bullying and in promoting problem solving of student conflicts.¹⁹
- Girls are more likely than boys to seek help from adults, including school staff, when victimized by bullying.^{20,21}

- Individual school boards and principals vary in their willingness and ability to implement programs.^{22,23,24,25}

Key Themes

- Teachers and students report that teachers do not know how to successfully intervene when they witness, or are told about, a bullying situation.
- Teacher responses to bullying vary and can be affected by the characteristics of the child being victimized, the teacher's personal experiences with bullying during childhood, and the principal's leadership within the school.
- The majority of students who are victimized do not seek help from teachers.

Implications

Education

- Since individual school boards, principals, and teachers vary in their willingness and ability to implement programs, and since the involvement of school staff is necessary to reduce bullying and increase student help-seeking behaviors, pre-service training for teachers may represent the best bullying prevention strategy.^{26,27,28,29}
- Educational opportunities should be made available to all teachers and school staff to understand the prevalence and emotional impact of bullying on students.
- Student education and discussion sessions regarding what constitutes bullying and appropriate help-seeking strategies, as well as a clear understanding of what will happen when bullying experiences are reported, are essential.

Assessment

- Surveys should be conducted with teachers and principals to index knowledge and attitudes towards bullying, current prevalence of bullying, as well as prevention and intervention strategies undertaken at their schools.

Prevention and Intervention

- Pre-service training for teachers and ongoing professional development is essential.
- Opportunities for teachers to practice intervention strategies (e.g., role playing) are helpful to increase confidence and comfort.
- Group or individual time should be set aside for school adults to reflect upon their own attitudes and experiences regarding bullying as well as their modeling of healthy relationships.

Policy

- Faculties of Education should institute policies that require students to take courses about the different forms of bullying, the psychosocial and physical impacts of bullying and victimization, and the ways they can help to prevent

and intervene in bullying incidents, as well as how to promote positive school and classroom climates.

- Government legislators for education need to establish policies that require teachers and principals to be educated about bullying and victimization (i.e., forms, strategies for prevention and intervention, etc.) consistently throughout their careers.

¹ Pepler, D., Smith, P. K., & Rigby, K. (2004). Looking back and looking forward: Implications for making interventions work effectively. In P. K. Smith, D. Pepler, & K. Rigby (Eds.), *Bullying in Schools: How successful can interventions be?* (pp. 307-324). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Olweus, D. (2004). The Olweus bullying prevention programme: design and implementation issues and a new national initiative in Norway. In P. K. Smith, D. Pepler, & K. Rigby (Eds.), *Bullying in Schools: How successful can interventions be?* (pp. 13-36). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Pepler, D. J. (2006). Bullying interventions: A binocular perspective. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, *15*, 16-20.

⁴ Salmivalli, C., Kaukiainen, A., & Voeten, M. (2005). Anti-bullying intervention: Implementation and outcome. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *75*, 465-487.

⁵ See note 4 above.

⁶ Fekkes, M. Pijpers, F. I. M., & Verloove-Vanhorick, S. P. (2005). Bullying: who does what, when and where? Involvement of children, teachers and parents in bullying behavior. *Health Education Research*, *20*(1):81-91

⁷ Li, Q. (2007a). Bullying in the new playground: Research into cyberbullying and cyber victimization. *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, *23*, 435-454.

⁸ Alsaker, F. (2004). Bermese programme against victimisation in kindergarten and elementary schools. In P. K. Smith, D. Pepler, & K. Rigby (Eds.), *Bullying in Schools: How successful can interventions be?* (pp. 289-306). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Bauman, S. & Del Rio, A. (2006). Preservice teachers' responses to bullying scenarios: Comparing physical, verbal, and relational bullying. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *98*(1), 219-231.

¹⁰ See note 5 above.

¹¹ See note 2 above.

¹² Mishna, F., Pepler, D., & Wiener, J. (2006). Factors associated with perceptions and responses to bullying situations by children, parents, teachers, and principals. *Victims & Offenders*, *1*, 255-288.

¹³ Mishna, F. & Alaggia, R. (2005). Weighing the risks: A child's decision to disclose peer victimization. *Children & Schools*, *27*(4), 217-227.

¹⁴ See note 12 above.

¹⁵ See note 5 above.

¹⁶ Twemlow, S. W., Fonagy, P., Sacco, F. C., Brethour, J. R. Jr. (2006). Teachers who bully students: A hidden trauma. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, *52*(3), 187-98.

¹⁷ See note 7 above.

¹⁸ See note 5 above.

¹⁹ Crothers, L. M., Kolbert, J. B., & Barker, W. F. (2006). Middle school students' preferences for anti-bullying interventions. *School Psychology International*, *27*(4), 475-487.

²⁰ Li, Q. (2006). Cyberbullying in schools: A research of gender differences. *School Psychology International*, *27*, 157-170.

²¹ Hunter, S. C., Boyle, J. M. E., & Warden, D. (2004). Help seeking amongst child and adolescent victims of peer-aggression and bullying: The influence of school-stage, gender, victimisation, appraisal, and emotion. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. 74(Pt 3), 375-90.

²² See note 7 above.

²³ See note 5 above.

²⁴ See note 1 above.

²⁵ Dake, J. A., Price, J. H., Telljohann, S. K., Funk, J. B. (2004). Principals' perceptions and practices of school bullying prevention activities. *Health Education & Behavior*. 31(3), 372-87.

²⁶ See note 7 above.

²⁷ See note 5 above.

²⁸ See note 1 above.

²⁹ See note 25 above.