

Tailoring Prevention and Intervention for Different Grade Levels

Children experience significant changes in physical, emotional, psychological, and social capacities with age. Thus, prevention and intervention programs require tailoring to ensure they identify and address the critical issues, challenges, and relationships within each developmental stage. The fact sheet on the development of bullying identifies many of the salient changes that occur with age. Both individual behaviors, as well as the ways in which others react to the child or youth, become consolidated and increasingly resistant to change with development.

Key Research Findings

- Younger children are generally more accepting of adults' authority, curriculum activities, and school policies.¹
- Younger students are generally more willing to talk to teachers and parents about bullying.²
- Younger students are more trusting and confident that adults will be able to assist with bullying problems.³
- Older students – especially those involved in bullying and other antisocial activities – may explicitly reject teacher influence and values advocated by the school. In some ways, therefore, it may be more difficult, but just as necessary, to intervene with older students.⁴
- Students' empathy for and attitudes about victimized peers become somewhat more negative in adolescence, particularly among boys.⁵
- There appear to be stronger positive effects on bullying problems among elementary school students compared with high school students.⁶
- Although early intervention is recommended, it is not sufficient: Children need support for bullying problems throughout their school careers.⁷

Key Themes

- Younger children are more responsive to adult intervention and support around bullying and victimization than older students.
- Students rely on adults less with increasing age, as they develop skills and have an increased capacity to lead interventions (i.e., peer mediation in high school).
- Prevention and interventions for bullying and victimization are required for youth of all ages.

Implications

Education

- Bullying prevention and intervention materials need to address the issues that are most salient to students at different developmental stages.
- With increasing age, students can participate in developing the education materials.

Assessment

- Assessment tools for bullying and victimization need to be tailored to students' developmental level and focus on the salient forms of bullying and relevant relationships (e.g., peers, romantic partners).

Intervention

- Interventions to prevent bullying and promote healthy relationships should start in the early childhood and school years in order to prevent the development of later problems and to take advantage of young students' responsiveness to programs.
- Adults need to support students of all ages in addressing bullying problems. Even though the role of students and their involvement changes with age, adult leadership and support are required for all ages.
- With increasing age, students can take a greater leadership role in bullying prevention and intervention programs.
- In elementary and middle schools, students can participate in bullying prevention and intervention efforts by:
 - Sitting on a Safe Schools Committee.
 - Leading specific initiatives at the school.
 - Educating younger students about bullying and what they can do about it.
 - Participating in Circles of Support or being a big brother or sister to younger students.
- In high schools, students can participate in bullying prevention and intervention efforts by:
 - Creating Student Council positions so there is structural support from students to lead violence prevention initiatives.
 - Conducting assessments, education events, and preparing lessons on violence prevention.
 - Participating in peer counselling, peer mediation, and other peer support programs.
 - Educating educators and parents on electronic, as well as other forms of bullying, and identifying for them ways they can help and intervene effectively.
 - Standing up and supporting students who are victimized when it is safe for them to intervene.

Policy

- Given the marked and diverse developmental changes through childhood and adolescence, interventions in elementary school cannot be expected to inoculate students for problems that arise in middle and high schools. Therefore, support for children's relationship capacity is essential throughout the school years so that new bullying problems can be addressed as they emerge, rather than when they have become established behavior patterns, reputations, or roles. Policies to prevent bullying and related behaviors need to exist for students in all grades.



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- Policies need to be responsive to students' changing behaviors, capacities, and relationships.
- The roles, responsibilities, and responses of students in bullying incidents should reflect their need to learn essential relationship skills as their increasing capacities with age.

¹ Smith, P.K., Pepler, D., & Rigby, K. (Eds.) (2004) *Bullying in Schools: How successful can interventions be?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Craig, W. M., Pepler, D. J., & Blais, J. (2007). Responding to bullying: What works? *International Journal of School Psychology, 28*, 15-24.

³ See note 1 above.

⁴ See note 1 above.

⁵ Olweus, D., & Endresen, I. M. (1998). The importance of sex-of-stimulus object: Age trends and sex differences in empathic responsiveness. *Social Development, 7*(3), 370-388.

⁶ Rigby, K. (2002) *A meta-evaluation of methods and approaches to reducing bullying in pre-schools and in early primary school in Australia*, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.

⁷ See note 6 above.