Bullying in Schools: Guidelines for Intervention and Prevention

Pamphlet created by PREVNet for the Canadian Association of Principals

© Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network, 2007
PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence) is an active network of Canadian researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Canadian Association of Principals, and governments working together to promote safe and healthy relationships for all Canadian children and youth. Through our partnerships, we are building bridges between the current research understanding of bullying problems and the current practices of those who work with children and youth.

Through our partnership with the Canadian Association of Principals, PREVNet has created this pamphlet to provide you with up-to-date information about bullying and victimization and research-based guidelines for intervention and prevention of this destructive relationship problem among your students.

More information about any of the topics presented in this pamphlet can be found on our website:

www.prevnet.ca

There, you can also find other online resources, including toolkits, posters, tipsheets, public service announcements, research communiqués, and questionnaires that are designed for children and youth, parents, and professionals, including teachers.
# Table of Contents

What is bullying?  page 4  
How do children and youth bully others  page 6  
Prevalence of bullying in Canadian schools  page 7  
Why worry about bullying in Canadian schools  page 7  
Understanding and addressing bullying requires a “binocular” view  page 8  
A Developmental perspective on bullying interventions  page 9  
A Systemic perspective on bullying interventions  page 11  
Scaffolding  page 13  
Social architecture  page 14  
Matching level of risk to the intensity of interventions  page 16  
Strategy pillars for social change  page 18  
  Education pillar  page 19  
  Assessment pillar  page 20  
  Intervention pillar  page 22  
  Policy pillar  page 25  
Formative consequences  page 28  
Bullying and victimization among students with Exceptionalities  page 30  
PREVNet recommendations for intervention and Prevention programs  page 35
What is Bullying?

Bullying is a form of aggression based on a power differential: Children who bully are in a position of power relative to the children who are being victimized. The power advantage of the children who bully can arise from many aspects of the relationship:

- Advantage in size, age, strength, intelligence, etc.
- Advantage in social status with peers (e.g., more popular, more socially dominant).
- Knowledge of another's weakness (e.g., obesity, learning problems, family issues, disabilities) and using it to cause distress.
- Membership in a dominant group in society and using that power against members of a less dominant group in the forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism.

As bullying unfolds over time, the power differential between the children who bully and those who are being victimized increases. As bullying continues and the power differential consolidates, victimized children may become increasingly vigilant and sensitive to subtle bullying behaviours. Consequently, it becomes more and more difficult for victimized children to extract themselves from a destructive bullying relationship because they lack the power to shift the dynamics in the relationship and to put a stop to this form of abuse.

Bullying can be best understood as a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions. Because bullying is a dynamic interaction that unfolds and consolidates over time, interventions are required to disrupt the processes that maintain the interactions and to enable individual children to move out of their roles in bullying.

1 In writing and speaking about bullying problems, PREVNet tries to avoid using labels such as: bully and victim. Through research, we have come to recognize that bullying unfolds within the context of relationships, in part, as a function of group dynamics, rather than arising solely from an individual's personal characteristics or stable traits. Furthermore, some children and youth who bully are sometimes victimized and visa versa.
Children who bully require:

- Interventions to develop understanding and reduce their tendencies to use power aggressively.
- Formative, rather than punitive, consequences - interventions that not only provide a clear message that bullying is unacceptable, but also build awareness, skills, empathy, and insights, and provide youth with alternatives to bullying.

Children who are victimized require:

- Interventions to protect them from peer abuse
- Interventions to enable them to establish positive relationships within their peer groups.

Interventions that address the relationship problems of children who bully and those who are victimized are necessary, but not sufficient. To promote positive relationships, all children involved in bullying incidents, perpetrators, victimized youth, as well as bystanders, must be included in bullying interventions. The relationship solutions need to extend beyond the students, to include relationships with teachers, within the family, and in the community.

Visit www.prevnet.ca for more information

**Prevalence of Bullying in Canadian Schools?**

Bullying is a problem that transcends national boundaries. On the World Health Organization (WHO) survey of Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children, 45% of Canadian boys and 32% of girls reported that they had bullied another student at least once during the school term. Similarly, 42% of boys and 35% of girls reported that they had been victimized during the school term. The high proportions of Canadian students who reported bullying or being bullied confirm that this represents an important social problem (King et al., 1999).
How do Children and Youth Bully Others?

**Physical bullying** includes hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property.

**Verbal bullying** includes name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, insults, slurs, humiliating or threatening someone, racist comments, or sexual harassment.

**Social bullying** includes rolling your eyes or turning away from someone, excluding others from the group, getting others to ignore or exclude, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish, and damaging reputations and friendships.

**Electronic or Cyberbullying** includes the use of email, cell phones, text messages, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships.

**Racial bullying** includes treating people badly because of their racial or ethnic background, saying bad things about a cultural background, calling someone racist names or telling racist jokes.

**Religious bullying** includes treating people badly because of their religious background or beliefs, making negative comments about a religious background or belief, calling someone names or telling jokes based on his or her religious beliefs in an effort to hurt them.

**Sexual bullying** includes leaving someone out, treating them badly, or making them feel uncomfortable because of their sex, making sexist comments or jokes, touching, pinching or grabbing someone in a sexual way, making crude comments about someone’s sexual behaviour or orientation, or spreading a sexual rumour.

**Disability bullying** includes leaving someone out or treating them badly because of a disability, making someone feel uncomfortable or making jokes to hurt someone because of a disability.

Although physical bullying can cause significant harm to a child’s body, the other forms listed above cause psychological harm. Such offensive, degrading, and rejecting behaviours undermine and destabilize victimized children’s sense of themselves, of their place in school, and of their place in the world.
Why Worry About Bullying in Canadian Schools?

Children who continue with patterns of using power and aggression in bullying, or those who suffer prolonged victimization, experience a range of psycho-social problems that may extend into adolescence and adulthood.

Children who bully are at risk for:
- Delinquency and substance abuse (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, & Henderson, 2002)
- Sexual harassment (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002)
- Dating aggression (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2002)
- Adult Criminality (Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1979)

Children who are victimized are at risk for:
- Depression (Craig, 1998)
- Anxiety (Goldbaum, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2003)
- Somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomach aches) (Bigby, 2003)
- School absenteeism (Farrington, 1993)
- Aggression (Goldbaum et al., 2003).

Children involved in either bullying or victimization, or both, require intervention because this combination of power and aggression underlies many societal problems related to interpersonal violence. *There is a concern that the lessons learned in bullying within peer relationships at school will carry over to other relationships as children move through adolescence and into adulthood.*

Social-Emotional Difficulties and Education

In addition to "reading", "riting", and "rithmetic", "relationships" have been identified as an essential fourth "R" for the academic curriculum. When children experience social-emotional difficulties, it impacts their classroom behaviour and academic learning. Research findings indicate that students participating in social-emotional learning programs have better attendance, better classroom behaviour, score higher on achievement tests and are less likely to be disciplined, than those who do not participate in social-emotional programming (Hynel, Schonert-Reichl, & Miller, 2006). Like any academic subject, children must be taught and given support to learn how to recognize and manage their emotions, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, and engage in healthy relationships.

*Please visit the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning website (CASEL; www.casel.org) for further information.*
Understanding and Addressing Bullying Requires a "Binocular" View

The traditional focus of research on bullying has been on the aggressive behaviour of the child who was bullying and the need to protect the victimized child, with some attention to the bystanders.

Our research over the past 18 years has taught us that to understand and effectively address bullying, we need a "binocular" view. With only one lens, the focus is limited to the individual needs of children involved in all roles within bullying: those being aggressive, those being victimized, and those who are bystanders.

This singular view, however, falls short in providing a thorough understanding of the problem. By adding a second lens, as with binoculars, we expand the focus to include children's relationships. This second perspective takes into account the social dynamics in children's peers groups—and the roles that adults (e.g., family members, school staff, other significant adults) play in shaping children's experiences. Together, these two lenses offer a more comprehensive perspective on bullying problems. This deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues will lead us to recognize the multiple approaches required to address bullying problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Developmental Lens</th>
<th>The Systemic Lens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A focus on the child and his/her developmental needs, strengths, and challenges</td>
<td>A focus on the child's relationships and the strengths and challenges associated with them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-Social skills
-Attitudes
-Behaviours
-Peers
-Family
-School staff
A Developmental Perspective on Bullying Interventions

Through a developmental perspective, we recognize changes through childhood and adolescence in:

- the salient issues for children
- the challenges they face
- the relationships of importance to them.

Both the individual child’s behaviours, as well as the ways in which others react to the child, become consolidated and increasingly resistant to change with development. In choosing interventions for bullying, therefore, it is important that they be designed to meet the specific needs of girls and boys at different developmental stages.

A developmental perspective also highlights the need for early intervention: the earlier a problem is identified and addressed, the more likely that behaviours can be changed. The call for early intervention is particularly relevant for bullying and victimization.

Without support, children who bully learn how to use power and aggression to dominate others as they diversify in adolescence to use sexual harassment and dating aggression (Connolly et al., 2000; McMaster et al., 2002; Pepler et al., 2004). Children’s experiences of being systematically victimized, and ensuing stereotypes, seldom consolidate or stabilize before ages 8 to 9 years (Goldbaum et al., 1993). Therefore, intervention programs that focus on children in the early elementary grades may be able to prevent vulnerable children from developing social interaction patterns of bullying or from falling into a stable victim role from which it may be difficult to escape. Although early intervention is recommended, it is not sufficient: Children need support for bullying problems throughout their school careers.

Children who are involved in bullying others or being victimized, in spite of efforts by the school may require referral for more intensive mental health interventions in the community.
In support of the recommendation for early interventions, there appears to be stronger positive effects on bullying problems among elementary school students compared with high school students. With age, interventions to reduce bullying become increasingly challenging for a number of developmental reasons:

- Younger children are generally more accepting of adults’ authority, curriculum activities, and school policies.
- Younger students are generally more willing to talk to teachers and parents about bullying.
- Younger students are more trusting and confident that adults will be able to assist with bullying problems.
- 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.
- Students’ empathy for and attitudes about victimized peers become somewhat more negative in adolescence, particularly among boys (Olweus & Endresen, 1998).

Given the developmental changes in childhood, interventions in elementary school, cannot be expected to inoculate students from problems that arise in senior public 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 behaviour patterns, reputations, or roles.

A developmental perspective of the changes that occur as children grow older informs interventions in several ways:

- Early interventions prevent problems.
- The nature of bullying changes with age, consequently, how we intervene changes.
- Students rely on adults less with increasing age, as they develop skills and have an increased capacity to lead interventions (i.e., peer mediation and mentoring may be important in high school).
A Systemic Perspective on Bullying Interventions

Bullying problems extend beyond the children who bully and who are victimized. The systemic perspective highlights the need for changes in awareness and behaviour strategies not only for those children who are directly involved, but also for their peers, their teachers, their parents, and beyond in the broader community.

Peers

PREVNet researchers and others have highlighted the central role of peers in bullying: they serve both to reinforce and perpetuate bullying problems and to defend victimized students (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999). Therefore, interventions must occur within and beyond the classroom and be broad in scope to promote positive interactions and social experiences for all children. Interventions to counter the peer processes that exacerbate bullying focus on supporting positive interactions, discouraging bullying, promoting empathy for victimized children, and encouraging children to intervene in bullying. As the frequency of bullying is higher outside the classroom, efforts to promote positive interactions must extend to the playground, halls, washrooms, lunchroom, school bus.

School Staff

The relationships between teachers and their students are crucial for both social and academic development. Teachers are the critical agents of social change in bullying programs. They have an essential role in creating a respectful classroom, in managing their classrooms effectively, in promoting communication about bullying, and in responding in a supportive manner to the children involved in bullying. With training, teachers are able to recognize the problems of bullying and intervene early to make a difference in bullying problems before they become part of the classroom fabric. Together, principals and teachers are key in achieving success in school-based interventions. These adults are responsible for creating a climate that discourages bullying and encourages students to support and include vulnerable children. We know that principals’ commitment to allocate time and resources to bullying-related activities is associated with improvements (Oliveus, 2004). We also know that teachers who participate in bullying prevention programs feel more confident about handling bullying problems, have more supportive attitudes about children who are victimized, and feel more positively about working with parents regarding bullying problems (Alaaker, 2004).
**School Context**

The majority of bullying interventions begin with a Whole-School Policy that defines the problem, the roles and responsibilities of all those in the school community. Such interventions focus on reducing bullying as well as promoting caring and respectful relationships in a positive school climate. In terms of the whole school approach and the focus on enhancing relationships among all members of the school community, there are fewer obstacles in elementary schools compared to high schools:

- The structure of large middle and secondary schools creates distances between the principal and students
- The rotational system for classes makes it difficult for teachers to be familiar with the strengths/challenges of individual students
- Unless students have a trusting relationship with an adult at school, they will be reticent to report bullying
- Without the opportunity to observe and interact with the same students throughout the school day, it is more difficult for teachers to detect bullying

**Family**

Parents are essential partners in school-based interventions for bullying. Parents of victimized children are often aware of the children’s distressing experiences long before the school recognizes the problem. Parents can raise their concerns with teachers and help in finding ways to support their children in social interactions. Parents of children who bully are also important in the interventions; however, they may not be easy to engage. One way to engage these parents is to inquire about the child at home: children who bully peers often bully their parents and siblings.

**Community**

Although bullying problems occur most frequently at school, bullying is not just a school problem. Bullying can unfold in any context where children come together. To enhance the potential for change, connections with the community can be established to extend an understanding of bullying and to promote consistent responses to bullying problems. Community partners and resources can also be drawn in to support schools in meeting the needs of its most vulnerable students. PREVNet is working together with many organizations to develop consistent messages and responses to bullying in every setting where children live, work, and play.
Scaffolding

When considering bullying intervention and prevention strategies to meet the strengths, challenges and developmental needs of the individual child, the notion of scaffolding is critical. Scaffolding is a metaphor (Bruner, 1971; Vygotsky, 1986) for conveying adults’ role in anticipating and providing temporary structure and support to allow children to rise above their normal level of performance. As children develop mastery in a skill or behaviour, the scaffolds can be gradually dismantled, only to be set up again to support the next developmental challenge. In terms of bullying and/or victimization, the scaffolding metaphor suggests that we consider the supports required to provide children with the skills, capacities, and social cognitions to move out of the bullying and victimization roles that are damaging to development, and into healthy relationships (Pepler, 2006).

Scaffolding can be programmatic, such as social skills training (e.g., Juvonen & Graham, 2004; Pepler, Craig, & Roberts, 1995); however, the vast majority of scaffolding experiences are moment-to-moment. An example of moment-to-moment scaffolding might occur before the school day starts, when the teacher of a child being victimized rehearses strategies with him/her to join friends and avoid peers who bully at lunchtime.

Adult scaffolding can enable children who are victimized to acquire and rehearse essential relationship skills such as:

- self-calming strategies
- ignoring provocation
- identifying and joining caring peers
- problem solving
- communicating assertively

For victimized children, it is the combination of supportive scaffolding to promote relationship skills and essential support and protection from adults, and within the peer group, that will enable them to escape the torment and gain confidence in developing friendships.
Adult scaffolding can enable children and youth who bully to:
- take the perspective of another
- regulate emotions and behaviour
- develop the capacity for empathy
- appreciate that others have rights
- generate alternative solutions to problems
- find new ways to excel and engender admiration and attention
- communicate honestly
- experience gratification through helping others.

Anticipating when a child may experience problems and providing some momentary coaching to think of the other, to stay cool, or to remember expectations, may enable children to refrain from bullying and to interact positively.

Adult scaffolding can enable children who are bystanders in bullying to:
- develop empathy for the children who are being victimized
- recognize the critical role that they play in maintaining and exacerbating bullying problems
- recognize the dynamics that draw them into bullying and encourage their participation
- learn positive ways to stand up for victimized students

Children who are bystanders may need similar programmatic and moment-to-moment support in developing and practicing strategies to intervene and/or report to adults who can help when they observe bullying (Pepler & Craig, in press).

The adult scaffolding must be individually constructed for the strengths and weaknesses of the particular child – one size does not fit all. Scaffolding can be strengthened through consistent support at school, at home, and in the community.

**Social Architecture**

To meet the strengths, challenges and developmental needs of a child’s relationships, the metaphor of “social architecture” is useful (Pepler, 2006). Social architecture refers to the opportunity to structure children’s peer groups to promote positive peer experiences and to minimize or deconstruct negative peer experiences.
In terms of bullying intervention, social architecture can function to reorganize children’s group structures in three ways:

1. To separate the child who is bullying from the victimized child and from the peers who reinforce the bullying behaviour through their attention and joining. While separated, these children require supportive scaffolding to develop relationship skills, rather than exclusionary discipline. Children who bully require support for positive relationship skills, in the form of formative consequences, so that they can be quickly reintegrated into the peer group.

2. To embed victimized children within a positive peer context. These children often become isolated as a result of their victimization. When organizing children in groups (i.e., for a group project) teachers often ask the children to choose their own working groups. Inadvertently, they set up a victimization situation, because a marginalized child is unlikely to be chosen, and more likely to be actively rejected in a public display of humiliation. This example highlights the need for adults to be aware of the social dynamics among children and ensure that marginalized children are embedded in a constructive, positive, peer context.

3. To promote a generally positive, respectful, accepting, and supportive climate within a social group. Within a supportive, collaborative climate children who are bystanders in bullying will recognize their responsibilities to intervene and will come to trust that adults will follow through with constructive responses to bullying problems. The leadership for this form of cultural change comes from the adults who are role models and who promote healthy relationships.

It is the adults’ role and responsibility to be aware of the positive and negative social dynamics in children’s family, peer group, school, and community systems. When adults understand that a child is experiencing problems with bullying, it is their responsibility to restructure the social context of the peer group to reduce the potential for negative dynamics for both the child who is bullying and for the child who is being victimized, as well as for bystanders. When social architecture is combined with supportive scaffolding, the potential to move children from troubled behaviour patterns and interactions to healthy relationship pathways is strengthened.
Matching Level of Risk to the Intensity of Interventions

All school children are not equally at risk for involvement in bullying and/or victimization. PREVNet researchers and others have identified three groups of children who are either bullied or victimized, or both, and require varying intensities of intervention.

1. Children who are relatively uninvolved in bullying or victimization (75-80%).
2. Children who are occasionally involved in bullying or victimization (10-15%).
3. Children who are frequently involved in bullying or victimization (more than twice a week) or have a stable involvement over time (5-10%). These children experience the most serious problem behaviours. Some of these children may be especially at risk if they both bully and are victimized.

The bottom portion of the triangle represents those children who are not involved in bullying and victimization. For the majority of peers who are uninvolved, a primary prevention or universal program directed at developing awareness of bullying and empathy, as well as empowering children to intervene on behalf of victims, will likely be sufficient.

The middle portion of the triangle represents those children who have transient involvement and who experience problems at the times when they are involved in bullying or victimization.
Children involved in bullying occasionally or in a transitory way will benefit from a secondary prevention or indicated program specifically designed to interrupt the continuity of these peer relationship problems. These children may exhibit warning signs that indicate risk for future involvement in bullying and/or victimization, such as individual and social relationship difficulties. For bystanders, interventions that build friendships and peer support would increase the likelihood of peer intervention in bullying.

Children in the top portion of the triangle experience the highest rates of bullying and victimization as well as associated emotional, behavioural, and social problems. For these troubled children, an intensive tertiary or selected intervention is required and needs to focus on the serious emotional, psychological, physical, educational, and social adjustment difficulties that they experience. Programming also requires supports be provided for children’s relationship problems within significant social systems, such as the family, peer group, school, and community.

*Children who bully may require support in the following domains:*
- Alternative problem-solving
- Withstanding peer pressure
- Emotional and/or behavioural regulation
- Empathy
- Social Skills
- Positive leadership

*Victimized children may require support in the following domains:*
- Developing friendships
- Promoting domains of competence
- Protection
- Social skills

The interventions to support these children can be drawn from existing programs that address the specific problems. In addition, *it is the moment-to-moment interactions that at-risk children have with their teachers, fellow students, parents, and others that help them develop skills for positive relationships.* In the course of a day, there are many teachable moments when problems appear to be developing or when they arise. A few moments of support at critical teachable moments may enable children to develop skills and understanding so that they can move beyond their involvement in bullying and/or victimization.

It is important to recognize that the small group of high-risk children often have needs that require more support and more intensive interventions than a school can provide. For these children, it is critical to join with parents and link with community agencies that provide mental health services to children and their families.
Strategy Pillars for Social Change

The primary goal of PREVNet is to translate and exchange knowledge about bullying to enhance awareness, to provide assessment and intervention tools, and to promote policy related to the problems of bullying. The PREVNet vision is to bridge research and practice by disseminating understanding and effective practices related to bullying through the government and NGO channels to every community in Canada. Through these partnerships, the outcomes of the changing understanding and practice will enhance social opportunities, promote mental and physical health, promote the development of healthy relationships, and prevent crime.

The work of PREVNet falls within its four foundational pillars: Education, Assessment, Intervention, and Policy. These pillars represent a multi-faceted approach to successfully preventing and intervening in bullying.

- The Education Pillar develops awareness to change attitudes and build commitment to address bullying problems among all Canadian citizens and organizations involved with children and youth.

- The Assessment Pillar provides universal assessment tools to evaluate the extent of bullying/victimization problems for children and adolescents, their families, schools, and communities.

- The Intervention Pillar provides guidelines to empirically-based programs and tools to reduce problems of bullying and victimization.

- The Policy Pillar in collaboration with organizations and governments, develops specific policies that speak to the concerns of bullying, not only among children and adolescents, but for all citizens of Canada.

Why we need four pillars?

More often than not, awareness about bullying is the result of a particular incident. Consequently, the primary focus, at least initially, is on intervention — what can be done to help the person who is being victimized? What do we do with the youth who is doing the bullying? How do we effectively intervene to ensure that it stops?
Education Pillar:
What do we need to understand about bullying?

The Education pillar comprises evidence-based materials that will help to understand bullying and victimization and its impact on all children and youth. The educational component is developmental and systemic. The education strategy informs children, adults, peers, schools, and communities. The Education Pillar focuses on the following questions:

What is bullying?
How do bullying and victimization develop?
Who is at risk for being involved in bullying?
What are the consequences of involvement in bullying?
Who influences bullying?
How do other children participate?
What are parents’ roles?
What are the roles of other adults?
What is the role of organizations?
What is the role of communities?
What works to prevent bullying?
What can children involved in bullying do?
How can peers help?
How can parents help?
How can other adults help?
How can organizations help?
How can communities help?

PREVNet can help to answer these questions through training manuals and workshops, quick reference guides, research communiqués, continuing education courses, and public service announcements.

Visit www.prevnet.ca for education materials.
Assessment Pillar: What is assessment?

Assessment is a formalized method of determining the extent and nature of bullying problems. Assessment provides an initial understanding of the problems of bullying and ongoing assessments measure how effectively these problems are being handled. Assessment tools should address:

- How often it happens and how long has it been going on for?
- Who is involved and what are they doing?
- When and where does it occur?
- How do other children participate?
- How do the children themselves handle bullying problems?
- How do other children handle bullying problems?
- What do the children themselves think about bullying?
- What do other children think about bullying?
- How do adults handle bullying problems?
- What are adults’ attitudes about bullying and intervention strategies?
- How does the school handle bullying problems?
- What does the school do to prevent bullying problems?
- What is the understanding, commitment, and resources of the school?
- What is the level of communication among the adults at the school?
- What is the level of current community involvement in the school?

Assessments need to be appropriate for the age and gender of children or adolescents for whom they are intended. They also need to be systemic, such that they assess the nature of the problem for individual children involved in bullying or victimization, peers involved as bystanders, parents, other adults, and the broader school climate.
Bullying is a relationship problem and therefore requires a relationship solution. In assessing this relationship problem, the assessment needs to evaluate the relationship between and among individuals, as well as the broader relationship among the individual and the culture of the school. In preventing the problems of bullying, all of these relationships need to be positively supported and enhanced.

*How do you assess bullying and victimization in school?*

There are many different approaches to assessing the problems of bullying and victimization, each provides a slightly different perspective. Children and adults have different views of bullying which can be tapped through various assessment methods. An understanding of bullying problems can be developed by asking many people and assessing in many different ways. The method of assessment will depend on the nature of the school, their resources, and the types of information that they are concerned about. Information can be gathered through tools such as:

- Questionnaires completed by children, parents, peers, and other adults (e.g., teachers)
- Interviews
- Observations of children’s behaviour
- Daily check-ins
- Anonymous reporting of problems
- Anonymous reporting of problem areas (hot spots)
- Focus groups
- Internet surveys
- Incident tracking forms
- Marking bullying incident locations on a map.

Please visit www.prevnet.ca for links to online assessment tools.

PREVNet is developing and piloting a web-based assessment tool in collaboration with its partners, including Canadian Association of Principals, that schools can use to assess bullying and intervention efforts.
Intervention Pillar

Bullying is a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions. The PREVNet Intervention Pillar comprises evidence-based materials with a focus on building safe and healthy relationships. PREVNet will help develop effective strategies to reduce problems of bullying and victimization and its impact on all children and youth involved. The intervention component is developmental and systemic. It focuses on strategies that are appropriate for addressing the changing nature and influences on bullying. The strategies are aimed at working with children and youth, adults, peers, schools, and communities.

What are the basics for appropriate intervention in bullying problems?

Effective interventions are required to reduce the problem of bullying. Effective interventions are ones that:
- Are evidence-based, age and gender appropriate, and led by adults
- Include involved children, peers, parents, teachers, and community
- Are based on the assessment of the problem and those involved
- Build relationship skills while also reducing negative behaviour
- Have specific outcomes and formalized evaluation procedures
- Involve constant monitoring and support to sustain their effectiveness.

What are the basics for intervening with children who are victimized?

- Critical to provide protection and support for victimized children, with care and attention to integrating and not further isolating the child
- Important to convey your concern and commitment to the child
- Assessment of the child’s vulnerabilities/strengths guides intervention
- Children may need help developing individual skills, as well as engaging them in supportive interactions that help them make friends
- Strategies adopted should reflect the school policy and include support from the family, peer group, school, and community.
- Interventions need to be monitored to ensure bullying has stopped.
What are the basics for intervening with children who bully?

- Children should be held responsible for behaviour but it is important that adults do not ‘bully the bully’ as this generates feelings of hostility, alienation, and is not a relationship solution.
- Assessment of the child’s vulnerabilities/strengths, as well as his/her position in the peer group guides intervention strategies.
- Formative consequences provide a clear message that bullying is unacceptable and also build awareness and requisite skills.
- Interventions may target the development of positive skills/attitudes, insight, responsibility, and positive leadership.
- Strategies to support children who bully can involve support from the family, peer groups, the school, and the community.
- Interventions must be monitored to ensure bullying has stopped.

What are the basics for intervening with bystanders?

Interventions need to help children who watch bullying:
- Understand their role in the bullying problem.
- Understand the impact on the child who was being victimized.
- Think about how to behave differently the next time it happens.

The strategies may involve working with individual children or the larger peer group. Interventions need to be monitored to ensure bullying has stopped. Ensure that adults are ready to listen and respond when bystanders take a stand.

What are the basics for intervening with groups to prevent bullying?

As bullying unfolds within the context of the peer group, interventions that involve groups of children are essential for the prevention of bullying. Prevention strategies educate and engage youth to address bullying and take action. Strategies that have been used in prevention programs include:
- Educating children about bullying.
- Developing rules about bullying that will shape and guide behavioural expectations.
- Cooperative activities and discussions about relationship issues.
- Teaching relationship values.

Such strategies help adults and children recognize that addressing bullying problems is integral to creating a warm and safe climate.
What are the basics for supporting teachers?

Teachers who are committed to addressing bullying problems can prevent or reduce these problems by:
- advocating for individual children
- modeling appropriate relationship skills
- creating a warm/inclusive climate
- promoting positive attitudes and values
- supervising, managing, and monitoring children’s interactions
- promoting positive group activities
- ensuring their safety and inclusion of all children
- intervening consistently
- address early signs of relationship problems to prevent bullying.

Please visit www.teachsafeschools.org for links to intervention tools and information on other classroom management techniques.

What are the basics for supporting parents of children?

Parents have a central role in addressing bullying problems because they are the most important adults in children’s lives. In addition to the general strategies listed for teachers, parents are champions for their children. They have a special role in recognizing, communicating, and seeking support for their children’s strengths and vulnerabilities. By keeping the lines of communication open with children, parents can ensure that their children’s needs are met and that they are safe in all of the places where they play and learn.

What are the basics for schools to address bullying problems?

As a starting point for the bullying intervention, schools needs to develop a policy addressing bullying problems. A policy is a written document that identifies aims in relations to bullying behaviour, together with a set of strategies regarding education, assessment, and intervention to be followed. The document is supported by systems and procedures within the school to ensure that its aims and strategies are effectively implemented, monitored, maintained, and reviewed.

Please visit www.teachsafe-schoools.org for links to school policy and mission statements.
Policy Pillar

The keystone for initiatives to prevent bullying and victimization is a policy that specifically identifies bullying and establishes steps that will be taken to address bullying problems. The solution to the problems of bullying requires a systemic response that includes not only the perpetrator and victim, but also others in the youths' lives.

There are six basic elements required within a policy:

1. A clear definition of bullying

The definition must focus on power and aggression in bullying and encompass physical, verbal, social, and cyber bullying that is both direct and indirect. The definition should extend to sexual harassment, racial harassment, and derogatory behaviours and comments based on disadvantage or differences. The definition should highlight the critical features of a power differential that augments with repeated bullying interactions and the negative consequences of involvement in bullying. Experiences that are "unwelcome" because they cause distress to the victim should be identified as bullying, thereby recognizing the inherent distress of the victim. The definition should point to the role of bystanders as part of the problem or part of the solution, when they intervene is some way to prevent or stop bullying.

2. Stated contextual parameters of the policy

A policy on bullying should set the expectations for interactions among children, youth, and adults throughout the community, such as students, teachers, principals, playground supervisors, school bus drivers, group leaders, etc.. It is essential that the definition and restrictions relating to bullying and harassment apply to all members of the school. The role of peers in bullying must be highlighted. As bystanders they promote bullying; as interveners they can play a role in reducing bullying. Adults who, by definition, are in a position of power relative to children in all of these contexts, must be extremely cautious of not abusing their power through bullying and not modeling the use of power and aggression. As principals, you are encouraged to reflect on your use of power with students and teachers in your school community.
3. A clear statement of concern and commitment to resolve problems of bullying

The policy must alert everyone within the community to the concern for bullying and the strong commitment to respond to problems when they are uncovered. Communication is the key to identifying bullying. Children who are victimized, as well as peers who observe bullying, must be encouraged to intervene positively and/or to report the problem to an adult. There are barriers, however, to open communication regarding these problems. Children fear retaliation from those who bully, disclosing prolonged victimization is perceived as shameful, and adults often dismiss the reports as only minor problems. It is critical to direct attention to the victimized child's distress and to demonstrate a commitment to protect the child from further abuse. When trying to untangle a bullying situation, it is essential that adults listen carefully to what a child is telling them about the experiences of victimization and put themselves in the powerless child’s shoes. It is only through this form of sensitive attending that adults can truly understand the extent of a victimized child’s distress and respond appropriately.

4. Clear procedures and processes to resolve concerns of bullying

Policies need to specify strategies for assessing the problem, implementing the procedures, and following-up after an incident has taken place. A bullying policy defines the roles and responsibilities of all members within a community for each of these tasks. While all members of the community should be concerned and address bullying problems, a specification of individual roles and responsibilities ensures commitment and action to support those children involved. For the children who experience victimization or witness it, there must be an identified adult who is prepared and sensitized to receive the reports of unwelcome behaviours or comments. The specified adult must be able to assess the degree of distress and potential risk for the victimized child. The child’s risk can be determined by assessing how severe the bullying is, how long it has been occurring, how frequently it occurs, and how pervasive it is (see Pepler & Craig, 2003). Depending on the severity of the problem, the identified adult will follow one of several procedures to support the victimized students and address the problem with the child(ren) who bullied. In the case of minor bullying, the interventions by the trained adults to support victimized children may be as simple as
listening attentively, reviewing the child’s responses, coaching the child in assertive responding, and establishing a follow-up strategy to ensure that the bullying has stopped. When bullying is serious and the child is at high risk for continuing distress, procedures must be implemented to ensure that the bullying stops.

5. Specified support for the children or youth who have been victimized

The strategies adopted to support the victimized child may encompass many of the systems in which the child lives: the family, the peer group, the school, and perhaps community support beyond the setting in which the bullying occurred. The procedures adopted should not further victimize the student by removing him or her from the context in which the bullying occurs (e.g., school, sports team). An assessment of the victimized child’s vulnerability and potential strengths will help in formulating plans for building the child’s confidence and reputation within the social group (Peppler & Craig, 2000). The adult responsible for supporting the victimized child must ensure that there is no retaliatory aggression by maintaining close communication with those involved.

6. Specified formative consequences and support for the children or youth who have been perpetrating the bullying.

In all cases, children and youth should be held responsible for their bullying behaviour. In responding, we recommend establishing formative consequences that not only provide a clear message that bullying is unacceptable, but also build awareness and skills to promote the students’ responsibility, and positive leadership (Peppler & Craig, 2000). In this way, the consequences for bullying can provide an opportunity to educate and support children and youth who are having difficulty. The policy to support aggressive children and youth can specify that subsequent steps be taken to garner support within other salient systems in the children’s lives, such as the family, peer group, school, and community. At no point should we give up on aggressive children or youth and essentially declare them unsalvageable by denying them access to support. If we remove the highest risk youth from schools with all of their potential for supportive relationships, we exclude them from the opportunity to receive interventions in a safe context.
Formative Consequences

Formative consequences not only provide a clear message that bullying is unacceptable, but also build awareness and skills to promote the students' responsibility, and positive leadership (Pepler & Craig, 2000). The effectiveness of formative consequences in reducing bullying has not been evaluated in isolation, however, this form of consequence is an element of other empirically-evaluated programs (Olweus, 1991, 1993). Formative consequences provide support for children and youth to learn the relationship skills and acquire insights that they are lacking. In this way, the consequences for bullying can provide an opportunity to educate and support children and youth who are experiencing difficulties. When children bully, their privileges can be withdrawn and replaced by an instructive activity. The list below provides some suggestions.

To encourage empathy

- Help students learn the language of emotions to identify their own feelings and those of others (e.g., shame, embarrassment, anger, fear, sadness, etc.)
- Have students who bully create a poster or drawing of what it must feel like to be bullied. Talk about the feelings that children who are bullied might experience.
- Have the students who bully learn about the prevalence, nature, and consequences of bullying and write a paper or make a presentation about their findings.
- Have the students who bully interview an adult or older student about their bullying experiences and the impact it had on them.
- Have the students read a novel about bullying and write a character study (e.g., Blubber by Judy Blume)
- Have the students watch a movie about bullying (e.g., Mean Girls). Encourage them to focus on the feelings of the victimized character. Help them to identify these feelings by looking out for facial expressions, body posture, and tone of voice.
- Have your students identify instances of bullying in the media and talk with them about their reactions to these instances.
- Talk with your students about their own strengths and weaknesses and how they can use power to help, not hurt, others.
To make amends

Bullying is wrong and hurtful. It is a relationship problem that requires a relationship solution. The goal is to repair the relationship in a way that is genuine and caring and restore the relationship to a respectful foundation. Sometimes children aren’t at a point where they are able to restore a relationship. At the least, the child needs to find ways to be respectful of other students and their rights to feel safe.

If students can restore the relationship in a genuine way, without being forced, teachers and principals can help them find a way to make amends

- If they are sorry for their behaviour and genuinely want to make amends, have the students write a letter or card of apology to the children who were victimized.
- Encourage the students to make a verbal apology that includes taking responsibility for the behaviour and indicating what they will do to ensure the children who were victimized feel better. It is important that the children who were victimized want to participate and that the apology is given privately rather than publicly.
- Encourage your students to repair or restore property or personal belongings that were damaged as a result of the bullying.

To help students associate power with kindness & prosocial activities

- Encourage the students who bully to perform 5 acts of kindness and describe how they felt after completing each act.
- Encourage the students who bully to observe others and look for acts of kindness. Have the students describe what they observed and how they think the people felt.
- Have the students accompany a teacher or playground supervisor during recess and lunch and assist in resolving disputes among students.
- Identify strengths and abilities possessed by the students who bully and provide them with opportunities to highlight these skills in ways that help others.
Bullying and Victimization among Students with Exceptionalities
(adapted from Cummings, Pepler, Mishna, & Craig, 2007)

Children and youth with exceptionalities are at increased risk to be marginalized in the peer group because of their exceptionalities and hence, are more vulnerable to victimization by peers who have higher status and more social power. Research also suggests that children and youth with exceptionalities may be more likely to bully others. Without supportive relationships with peers and with adults, children and youth who have physical, learning, intellectual or emotional disabilities may be less able to achieve important developmental tasks and full quality of life.

To promote inclusiveness and respect for diversity, educators must actively teach about exceptionalities and model the ability to see the whole child whose exceptionality is but one aspect of their identity.

Strategies for talking about exceptionalities

Talking to children frankly about differences and disabilities is a healthy approach. Teachers may find it anxiety provoking to discuss disabilities with their students. They may also be concerned about how to have conversations with children and youth in a way that doesn’t embarrass and further marginalize the child with the exceptionality. We suggest that teachers invite an older student or an adult spokesperson with a disability to address the class about the disability and its social impact (including experiences with bullying). It is essential to help students understand what they can do to support a child with exceptionalities and what they might be inadvertently doing that could make the exceptional child’s experiences more difficult.

Teachers may also choose to have a “private” classroom discussion. Planning such a discussion beforehand with the child or youth and the parents can diminish the teacher’s and the child’s anxiety. Determine whether the student would prefer to explain the exceptionality to the class or have the teacher do it, what information the student wants to share, and whether the child would feel comfortable receiving assistance from classmates on an ongoing basis. Including the child in planning is respectful and empowering.

In a classroom discussion, teachers should first highlight the commonalities between the student and classmates, and only then
move to a straightforward discussion of the exceptionality. The teacher can invite classroom members to participate in the discussion and ask questions. It is critical that the teacher be ready to use “teachable moments” to guide students in open, tactful, and respectful communication. Teachers should include genuine positive statements about the strengths and talents possessed by the student with the exceptionality. The discussion should be ended with a clear statement of expectations that all members of the classroom will be respectful, helpful and caring to one another.

Promoting Acceptance and Reducing Exclusion

Researchers (Alport, 1954) have proposed that acceptance of others perceived as different can increase if the following four “optimal conditions” are met:

1. Equal status of participants

It is essential for school staff to ensure equal status within the school community of children and youth with exceptionalities. Often children who do not achieve academic or athletic excellence are not given equal opportunity to be recognized, validated and supported. Educators are encouraged to recognize and reward children for other strengths such as caring behaviours, perseverance, honesty, courage, and originality. Teachers should strive to use equitable practices when choosing children for all leadership roles (even those that seem inconsequential), ranging from passing out papers to making announcements at a school assembly.

2. Promoted by authority

It is important that staff officially value the inclusion of all children. Sanctifying the integration of children with exceptionalities in school is nominally the case across Canada. There are systemic inconsistencies in policy, however, such that authorities do not allocate financial and staffing resources adequately to meet the needs of children with exceptionalities (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001). Many teachers experience their students with exceptionalities as burdensome. These perceptions likely arise from systemic and institutional factors (e.g., large class size and lack of support from qualified personnel such as special education teachers and others) rather than from a view of the students’ disabilities. Moreover, physical barriers in many schools make it difficult for children with physical disabilities to participate fully in all aspects of school life.
3. Cooperative rather than competitive alliances

An atmosphere of competition may motivate able students, but is likely to create anxiety and feelings of hopelessness in students with learning or other disabilities who (accurately) perceive they cannot win (Weinstein, Gregory & Strambler, 2004). Carefully structured collaborative learning opportunities allow the diverse strengths and talents of each group member to be appreciated by all. Measuring success on the basis of individual progress on divergent tasks and tests allows each child to experience a sense of personal agency and success.

4. Common goals

It is important to create over-arching goals and a common identity within schools, including a sense of belonging to the community and to the classroom. To create a sense of classroom loyalty and caring, teachers of younger students guide students at the beginning of the year to generate their own classroom rules about caring for each other and not bullying others. Older students can participate in a classroom ‘pledge’ ceremony in which all members of the classroom take an oath to respect one another. Successful schools have school celebrations and school traditions that unite students across grades and classrooms. Middle and secondary schools can foster a broad range of collaborative activity clubs and interest groups, along with traditional competitive and noncompetitive athletic teams. This allows diverse opportunities for students to interact and experience belonging and common goals.

Scaffolding for Children with Exceptionalities

Children with exceptionalities who are experiencing problems with bullying or victimization require adult scaffolding to develop relationship skills. The acquisition of these skills will be attained more quickly if the scaffolding is readily available when needed, left in place as long as needed, and consistently applied by adults.

When bullying comes to the attention of a teacher, it is their responsibility to respond in a way that provides protection and ensures the dignity of children who have been victimized. Some children with exceptionalities minimize victimization (e.g., “it’s not that bad,” or “I don’t really mind”). The adult must affirm concern, and scaffold children’s understanding that they are entitled to respect from others and scaffold their ability to discriminate healthy
from abusive relationships. Children need support to find new ways to connect with peers (e.g., joining a group or interest club).

Some children may be able to openly discuss their victimization. Scaffolding children’s ability to create a coherent narrative can help them make sense of the experience, and can bring considerable relief. Adults should reassure children that they are not alone and do not have to feel ashamed. Adults should assess the particulars of the situation so that an appropriate safety plan can be developed. It is important to scaffold children’s ability to problem solve by encouraging them to brainstorm strategies, and together evaluate and choose the best strategies (e.g., identify peers who could “buddy” with them, reaching out to other peers, and staying close to the playground supervisors). It is imperative that adults remain in contact with the children, in an unobtrusive way to avoid embarrassment, to find out how the strategies are working.

Children who consistently bully others tend to minimize the behaviour, see it as “a joke,” and appear indifferent to the distress they are causing others. It is vital for children who bully to be aware that an adult who knows about the situation will remain in touch with the child who is victimized, and that any further bullying behaviour will be known to the adults responsible. We recommend involving other children who may be joining in the bullying. The goal is to scaffold all involved children’s capacities to place themselves in the shoes of the child who is being victimized, thereby changing the dynamics within the peer group so that the bullying behaviour no longer engenders attention or admiration. Consequences should be formative. The adults who are intervening should adopt a calm but firm attitude in order to model respect and emotional containment, and to scaffold the child’s ability to take responsibility.

Social Architecture for Children with Exceptionalities

- Break up groups of children and youth who tend to engage in bullying behaviour when together
- Select children’s teams, groups, and seating arrangements so children with exceptionalities aren’t marginalized
- Create cooperative learning activities within small diverse groups of children that require a diverse range of skills and strengths. This way, children with exceptionalities will experience success
- Coach students in effective peer intervention techniques and how to avoid peer pressure to bully others
PREVNet principles for addressing bullying and victimization among students with exceptionalities

It is essential to promote positive interactions to enable children with exceptionalities to achieve optimal development and experience inclusion within the peer context. Three principles arise from this model:

- Exceptional children require positive validation of their strengths.
- Exceptional children need adults to provide temporary structure and support to promote their development and to enhance their ability to cope with their weaknesses.
- Exceptional children need adults to create healthy social contexts so that they are constantly included in positive peer experiences wherever they live, work, and play.

Active adult direction is essential to promote positive peer relationships for exceptional children. This support can only be provided if the adults themselves are informed and open in discussing diversity related to disability. Therefore, we can suggest guiding principles for children who comprise the social context for exceptional children.

- Peers require adequate knowledge of an exceptionality to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of an exceptional child.
- Peers require adults to be clear about the equal role and value of children with exceptionalities.
- Peers require adults to establish clear expectations that exceptional children are to be included and that bullying is unacceptable and will consistently be addressed.
PREVNet Recommendations for
Intervention and Prevention Programs
(Craig, Pepler, & Shelley, 2004)

1. All schools need a program to address bullying and victimization.

2. Programs need to be evaluated, because some have negative effects.

3. Evaluations should assess the program before it is implemented, at the end of the program, and at regular intervals to ensure the program effects are maintained over time.

4. A successful approach to preventing bullying should be based on PREVNet’s four pillars: Education, Assessment, Intervention, and Policy.

5. Bullying prevention programs need to be implemented at all levels: primary, junior, intermediate, and high school.

6. Bullying programs need to be developmentally appropriate.

7. Programs at the intermediate level are most likely to be successful in reducing bullying problems.

8. In high school based interventions, student involvement and leadership is critical.

9. For interventions to be successful, adults need to lead and guide them.

10. Bullying prevention programs need an educational component for students, staff, parents, and all adults that clearly define the different types of bullying.
11. Assessments of bullying and victimization should include the ways in which boys and girls bully (physical, verbal, social, sexual harassment, dating aggression)

12. Bullying prevention programs need to include a parent education component regarding bullying: a parental assessment of bullying, procedures to ensure communication between the school and parents about school programs designed to prevent bullying, and children’s involvement in bullying.

13. Bullying prevention programs need to include a community component.

14. Bullying prevention programs need to include three levels of program:
   • Universal programs aimed at the entire school population,
   • Selected programs aimed at working with those who may become involved in bullying and victimization
   • Tertiary selected programs that address the problems and relationship skills and capacities for those who experience regular victimization and/or bully others

15. Specific strategies (e.g., no blame approach; method of common concern) regarding empathy, are aimed at changing peer processes while at the same time supporting individuals who may be at risk. Such strategies need to be incorporated into our universal bullying prevention programs.

16. Bullying prevention programs need to target cognitive, social, and emotional—behavioural processes.

17. The most effective interventions are a minimum of 2 years.

18. Educators need to lead the intervention and in order to lead effectively they require training.

19. Bullying prevention programs will be more successful if they have a plan to maintain the program over time.

20. Assessments should be conducted so that the program can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular school.