

Bullying Prevention Best Practices¹

Use the following checklist to assess whether or not your bullying prevention efforts are utilizing the eight best practices for a effective program implementation.

Regularly assess the social climate.

Adults typically are unaware of the amount of bullying that students experience, the types of bullying that are most common, and when and where bullying occurs. An anonymous questionnaire given to students is a unique tool for probing into the social climate of the school that is typically visible only to them. It can yield vital information about when, where and how often bullying occurs; how children and youth feel about reporting bullying behavior to adults, and how they feel about other kids who report such information. Similar questionnaires given to teachers and/or the staff of youth-serving organization will shed light on the extent to which adults' and kids' perceptions, behaviors and experiences with regard to bullying differ. Administered at the start of each school year and again in the spring, these climate surveys are a versatile tool for informing and guiding school/community bullying prevention efforts.

Make bullying prevention an integral and permanent component of the school environment.

Anti-bullying themes, messages and rituals should be incorporated into school programs and activities. Teachers (with the support of administrators) should set aside 20-30 minutes each week, or every other week, to discuss bullying and peer relations with students. These meetings help teachers to keep their fingers on the pulse of students' concerns, allow time for candid discussions about bullying and the harm it can cause, and provide tools for students to address bullying problems. Anti-bullying messages and strategies should also be incorporated into youth-related activities in the community, including recreational activities, scouting and after-school programs.

Establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying.

Although many school behavior codes implicitly forbid bullying, few use the term or make explicit the school's expectations for student behavior. It is important to make clear that the school not only expects students not to bully, but also to be good citizens, not passive bystanders. Developing simple, clear rules about bullying can help ensure that students are aware of adults' expectations that they refrain from bullying and help students who are bullied. School rules should be posted and discussed with students and parents. Appropriate positive and negative consequences also should be developed for following or not following the school's rules.

Provide ongoing training for school staff, and increase adult supervision in locations identified as "hot spots" for bullying.

Administrators, teachers, coaches, bus drivers, cafeteria workers and other adults should receive training to help them better understand the nature, dynamics and impact of bullying; how to respond when they observe bullying or it is reported to them; and how to work with others at the school to curb and prevent bullying. Designated staff should hold follow-up meetings with children who are bullied and, separately, with children who bully. The parents of affected students should be involved whenever possible. Teachers and other school staff should be assigned to monitor

¹ www.bullyingprevention.org - Website from The Colorado Trust's 3 Year Bullying Prevention Initiative

hallways, playgrounds, bathrooms and other locations identified by students as “hot spots” for bullying.

☐ Form a team responsible for coordinating bullying prevention efforts.

The formation of an inclusive leadership team sends a strong message that bullying is a problem that must be addressed in partnership. The effectiveness of the team is enhanced when there is as much balance as possible in roles. The 10- to 12-member team should include a school/district administrator; a teacher from every grade level; parents and students; a counselor, school nurse or mental health professional; and community or neighborhood representatives. The group should meet regularly, and be led by a committed chairperson with strong organizational skills and an ability to facilitate discussion, problem solving and decision-making.

☐ Garner the support of school staff, parents and other key partners.

A defining characteristic of successful prevention and intervention strategies is a strong sense of partnership among school/district staff, families and the broader community. The more time and energy invested in outreach, communication and partnership building over the course of a bullying prevention initiative – and particularly early on – the less likely it is to falter at some point, if not fizzle out altogether. A lack of buy-in among key stakeholders can be a major stumbling block to change and improvement, as evidenced by problems such as resistance on the part of teachers to dedicating class time to bullying prevention; conflict over, or outright opposition to, new policies and practices; and failure to develop a leadership team capable of advancing school/community bullying prevention efforts.

☐ Give young people an active and meaningful role in bullying prevention efforts.

Solicit and take into consideration all students’ ideas, opinions and feedback. Older students should be involved as both participants and leaders in planning, implementation, partnership building and other key activities. Keep in mind that the great majority of kids are neither perpetrators nor victims of bullying, but many witness it on a regular basis. Consideration of these students is crucial to the development of a strong anti-bullying plan because they are the majority, and they are the students who are most likely to be won over to creating change. Prevention and intervention strategies should focus on increasing empathy and support for those who are victimized by bullying, raising awareness of individual responsibilities, and encouraging action by the majority of children who do not approve of bullying.

☐ Develop cultural competency strategies, skills and programs that are inclusive and enhance communication and relationship building.

Cultural competency is an ongoing process and practice that builds the capacity of individuals and institutions to develop a climate that understands, accepts and respects the unique contributions of all people, regardless of ability, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographic region, health, language, mental health, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or spirituality. Assessing and managing bullying prevention programming through the lens of cultural competency will help identify the work that needs to be done to create a healthier social climate in schools and other youth-centered environments. Unfortunately, cultural competency is the most neglected area of research in the bullying prevention field, and many prevention and intervention models do not address cultural competency appropriately, or at all.

How Restorative Are Your Bullying Prevention Interventions/Models?²

Use the following checklist to assess how effectively your bullying prevention efforts have integrated restorative principles.

- Does the intervention/model address harms, needs and causes?
- Is it adequately target-oriented?
- Are bullying students encouraged to take responsibility?
- Are all relevant stakeholders involved, potentially including bystanders?
- Is there an opportunity for dialogue and participatory decision-making?
- Is the model respectful to all parties?



²Adapted from Zehr, 2002