

PREVENTING AND INTERVENING WITH BULLYING IN SCHOOLS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ALBERTI CENTER



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Overview

- Key issues
- Importance of a comprehensive approach
- Highlights from Alberti Center

Key Issues



Are Schools Safe?

- Violent deaths are rare in schools
 - 2% of all youth homicides and 1% of all youth suicides happen at school

- Violent victimization rate at school (e.g., theft, aggravated assault, rape; 4%) declined from 2009 to 2010 (20 /1,000 students to 14/1,000 students)

- Bullying is a pervasive form of violence
 - 23% of schools reported bullying on daily/weekly basis
 - 28% of 12-18 year-old students reported being bullied during the school year, 6% reported being cyber-bullied

What is Bullying?

- **Intentional acts** of verbal, physical, or written aggression **with the goal of hurting the victim** physically or damaging status and/or social reputation
- By a peer (or group of peers) **operating from a position of strength or power**
- **Usually repeated**



Quick Facts About Bullying

- Occurs from pre-K through adulthood
 - ▣ Peaks in grades 4-7
- Most likely to occur in less closely supervised areas
 - ▣ To/from school, locker room, hallways, online
- Boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying; girls tend to be more indirect, subtle, and target other groups

Banks (2000); Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadock, (2010); Crick & Grotpeter, (1995); Hinduja & Patchin, (2009); Hoover & Oliver, (1996); Nansel et al., (2001); Olweus, (2002); Underwood, (2003)



Common Characteristics of Students who Bully

- Desire for power and control
- Get satisfaction from others' suffering
- Justify their behavior (“he deserved it”)
- More exposed to physical punishment
- More likely to be depressed
- Engage in other risky and delinquent behaviors
 - Alcohol and drug use
 - Fighting

Students who Bully: Complex Picture

- Often popular, high social status
- Report average self-esteem and believe they are superior
 - Most do NOT lack self-esteem
- However, also report being less engaged in school, less supported by others, more depressed



Characteristics of Children who are Bullied

- Have a position of relative weakness
 - Age, ethnic background, financial status, disability, sexual orientation
- Most are passive and lack assertiveness
 - Do nothing to invite aggression
 - Do not fight back when attacked
 - May relate better to adults than peers
- Fewer provoke others (provocative victims/bully-victims)
 - Offend, irritate, tease others
 - Reactive; fight back when attacked

Consequences for Youth who Bully

- More likely to experience legal or criminal troubles as adults (even after controlling for other risk factors)
- Poor ability to develop and maintain positive relationships in later life



Andershed, Kerr, & Stattin (2001); Farrington (2009); Farrington, & Ttofi (2009, 2011);
Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler (1994); Olweus (1993); Ttofi & Farrington (2008)

Consequences for Targets of Bullying

- Emotional distress
- Loneliness, peer rejection
- Desire to avoid school
- Increased anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation; low self-esteem
- In some cases, may respond with extreme violence (two-thirds of school shooters were victims of bullying)



Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski (1995); Boulton & Underwood (1992);

Crick & Bigbee (1998); Egan & Perry (1998);

Hinduja, & Patchin, (2009); Kochenderfer & Ladd (1996);

Nickerson & Sltater (2009); Olweus (1993); Perry et al.

(1989)

Importance of a Comprehensive Approach



Social Context of Bullying

Culture &
Community



School
(Staff/Peers)



Family



Bully, Target, and
Bystander



Adapted from Swearer &
Espelage (2004)

Peers and Bullying

- Peers see 85% of bullying incidents, most do not try to stop it (and many join in), because:
 - ▣ “It’s none of my business”
 - ▣ Fear of retaliation (by bully or other peers)
 - ▣ Target must have done something to deserve it
 - ▣ Actions will not be effective



School Staff and Bullying

- School staff are often not involved because:
 - ▣ Most students do not report it to adults
 - ▣ May not see it or notice it
 - ▣ Beliefs that this is a common part of childhood
 - ▣ May not know what to do
 - ▣ In some cases, fear of bully

Bullying is more likely to thrive in school environments where

adults ignore or dismiss it and where students are not

connected and engaged (academically and socially)

Possible Family and Community Contributors to Bullying

- Children who bully
 - Less warmth, involvement, supervision; lack of clear rules
 - Harsh/corporal punishment
 - Parental discord, violence, and/or child abuse
 - Exposure to violent TV/video games

- Children who are bullied
 - More intense, positive, and overprotective parenting (boys)
 - More threats of rejection and lack of assertion (girls)

- Children who intervene
 - More open, trusting relationships with mothers
 - Supportive context in which to report and intervene

What can Schools do?

- Have a clear and sensible definition of bullying
- Collect data about its occurrence in your school
- Ensure that behavioral and social-emotional skills are developed to prevent bullying
- Develop and implement anti-bullying policy
- Actively involve students in efforts
- Provide training to staff and parents about bullying and effective responses

Anti-Bullying Policies

- Definitions
- Statement about expected behaviors and prohibitions
- Reporting procedure (ensure confidentiality)
- Investigation and disciplinary actions
 - Continuum of consequences and interventions
- Training and prevention procedures
- Assistance for target

What DOESN'T Work?

- Brief assemblies or one-day awareness raising events
- Zero-tolerance policies
 - May result in under-reporting bullying
 - Limited evidence in curbing bullying behavior
- Peer mediation, peer-led conflict resolution
 - Many programs that used this approach actually saw an increase in victimization
 - Grouping children who bully together may actually reinforce this behavior

What about Anti-Bullying Programs?

- Some evidence to support effectiveness of school bullying interventions in enhancing student and teacher knowledge and skill (actual bullying and victimization rates less likely to decrease)
- More promising results internationally (20-30% decrease in victimization and 17-20% decrease in victimization) for intensive lasting, carefully monitored, evidence-based efforts

Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava (2008); Ttofi & Farrington (2011)



Recognize Signs that Child May be Bullying Others

- Refers to others negatively (wimp, fag)
- Lacks empathy
- Strong need to get his or her own way
- Hostile/defiant attitude
- Angers easily
- Denies involvement or blames others when behavior is addressed

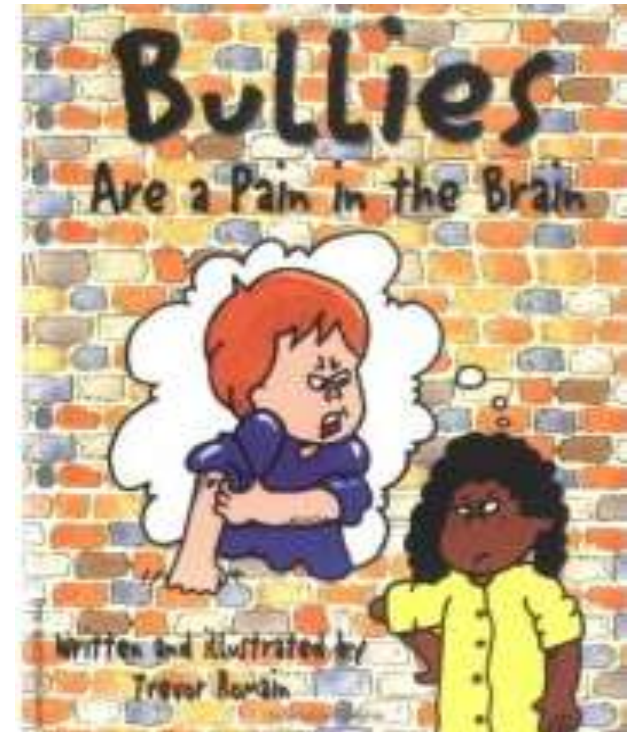
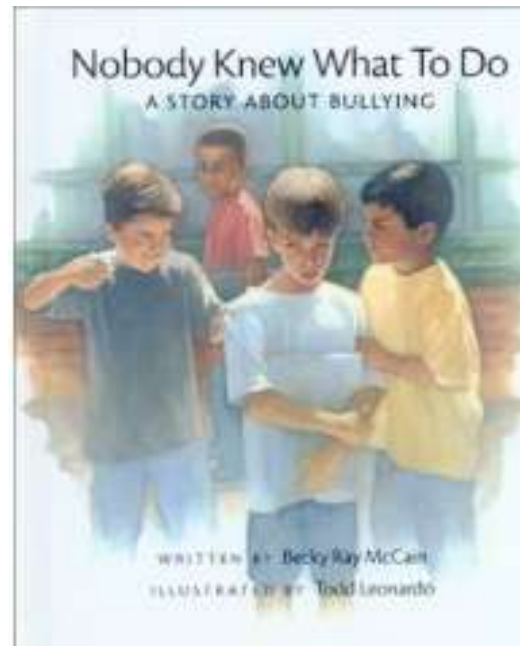
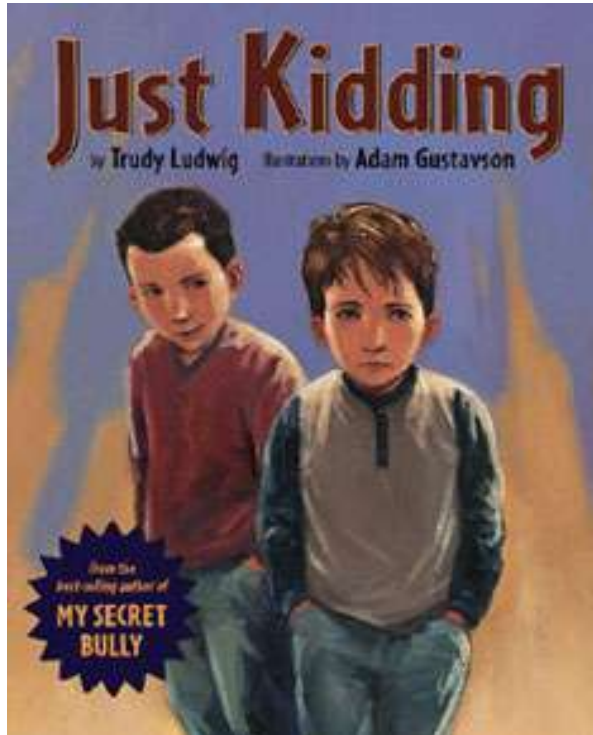


Recognize Signs that Child May be Bullied

- Unexplained illnesses, cuts/bruises
- Not wanting to go to school or be in social situations
- Change in behavior
 - Not interested in doing things he/she used to like doing
 - Withdrawn



Talk Openly about Bullying, Friendship, and Relationships



Visit gse.buffalo.edu/alberticenter
for other resources and conversation starters

Teach Good Habits

- Have high expectations for behavior and a low tolerance for being mean
- Be specific about how words and behaviors can help or hurt others
- Teach better ways to respond (All feelings are OK – but not all behaviors are)
- Emphasize the importance of being a friend



Be Present and Positive

- Greet students by name
- Be a model of dignity and respect
 - *“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle”* Plato
- Acknowledge and reward desired behavior
- Arrange for active supervision in “hot spots” (hallway, lunch, recess, before school)
 - Ensure that all adults know intervention and reporting procedures

Teach Children to be Upstanders

- Don't join in... speak up if it is safe to do so
- Band together as a group against bullies
- Tell an adult about the bullying
 - Tattling/ratting = telling an adult to get someone in trouble
 - Telling/reporting = telling an adult because someone's behavior is unsafe or hurtful to another
- Reach out to isolated peers, offer support

Respond Effectively when you Observe Bullying

- Intervene immediately to stop the bullying
 - Name the behavior and refer to school rules against it
 - Apply appropriate consequences (loss of privilege, write about effect on target)
 - Be aware of possible humiliation or retaliation (use caution about how this is done in presence of others)
- Document the incident
- Check in with the victim privately to see if OK

Communicate with Parents

- Be proactive with parents about expectations and policy
- Be timely with communication!
- Focus on the behavior (not the person)
- Avoid blaming or judging (expect denial)
- Emphasize how this type of behavior can be a problem for their child, the other person, and the school environment
- Inform parent about school response
- Work together to help child behave in other ways

Follow-up with Student who is Bullying

- Remove from situation
- Expect denial
- Focus on the behavior (not the person)
- Inform student about consequences
- Communicate with parents
- Plan for preventing re-occurrence
 - Assess function of the behavior (Need for power/control? Attention? Reaction to perceived or actual victimization?) and plan accordingly



Follow-up with Student who is Bullied

- Listen and empathize – allow to tell story
- Ask how you can work together to support and stop
- Assure that action will be taken with bully
- Assess factors contributing to victimization and intervene accordingly
 - Enhance social support (peers and adults)
 - Encourage involvement in an activity in which he or she can experience success
- “Check in” regularly about bullying
- Monitor for signs of depression, suicide, or violence and refer to mental health professional

Highlights from Alberti Center



Alberti Center Mission

To further our understanding and to reduce bullying abuse in schools by providing research-based tools to actively change the language, attitudes, and behaviors of educators, parents, students, and wider society.



Dr. Jean M. Alberti

Current Research Projects

- Bullying, anxiety, self-care, and wellness study (grades 5-8)
- Bullying, victimization, and school climate
 - Before and after Dignity Act implementation
- Evaluation of PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training Curriculum
- Gender, empathy, and peer relationships/norms and student roles in

Proposed Research Projects (grant proposals)

- Changes in students' attitudes and bullying behaviors in middle school in relation to schools' school climate and bullying prevention efforts
- Development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions to change peer norms and bystander behavior in high school to reduce bullying and sexual harassment

Translating Research to Practice

- Website
 - Resources, presentations, and events!
 - In progress: Bullying Prevention Program Guide, Toolkit for Educators, Findings from needs assessment
- Presentations
- Media interviews and appearances
- Quarterly e-newsletters (sign up!)
- Colloquia and annual conference
- Education.com special issue on bullying – good for parents!

Q & A



- Thank you for your attention and interest in this important topic!
- Find out more at gse.buffalo.edu/albertcenter

...and visit our exhibit table!