Bullying Prevention Strategies Every School Needs

When Bullying Happens, Everyone Involved Is Impacted

Bullying is hurting children. Centered around power imbalances, this aggressive behavior is associated with depression and anxiety, poor school performance, absenteeism,[1] and sometimes devastating acts of violence.[2]

Whether it happens at school or in cyberspace, education leaders have a responsibility to address and prevent bullying and ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

Comprehensive prevention strategies are shown to reduce bullying and provide protective factors for victims and bystanders, leading to safer schools and increased student success.[3]

When bullying happens, everyone involved is impacted—victims, bystanders, and those who bully.

Bullying by the Numbers

40% of students are victims of bullying at school.[4]

18% of students are victims of online bullying.[4]

38% of students who are bullied at school don't tell an adult about it.[4]

55% of students who are bullied online don't tell an adult about it.[4]

Strategies to Prevent Bullying

1. Create a Positive School Climate

A positive school climate is a powerful factor in preventing bullying.[5] To help foster a positive school climate, you can:

☑ **Build strong relationships**

Teacher-student relationships have a positive impact on students' sense of belonging.[6]

☑ **Make schoolwide policies visible**

Promote school norms and anti-bullying policies throughout campus so students can clearly understand school rules, expectations, and consequences about bullying.

☑ **Create a confidential reporting system**

Victims and bystanders need to know they can safely report bullying instances to adults. This relates to in-person bullying and online bullying.

Learn more about school climate

2. Teach Social-Emotional Skills

Social-emotional learning curricula, such as Second Step® programs, are part of an effective bullying prevention strategy. Key social-emotional skills include:

☑ **Empathy**

Identifying feelings and understanding how someone else may feel can help prevent bullying. By learning empathy and perspective-taking, students can consider the impact of their behavior on others. Research shows students with good perspective-taking skills are less likely to be physically, verbally, and indirectly aggressive to peers.[7]

Strategies to Prevent Bullying

Discover resources for families

☑ **Emotion management**

This important skill can both reduce bullying and empower victims. Studies show students are more likely to bully others if they lack emotion-management skills.[8] By learning to monitor and regulate strong emotions, students gain skills to calm down when upset instead of immediately reacting. By managing their own responses, victims can help keep bullying situations from escalating.

☑ **Social problem-solving**

This ability helps students navigate social challenges successfully. Children who bully and those who are bullied often lack social problem-solving skills.[8] Learning these crucial skills helps students understand a volatile situation and assess possible outcomes and consequences. Bystanders benefit from social problem-solving skills, too.

Students can be instrumental as upstanders, disrupting bullying situations.

3. Communicate with Families

Parents play an important role in supporting school initiatives and modeling positive behaviors related to bullying prevention. Share bullying prevention program information with families so parents can:

- Talk to their kids about bullying so they feel safe coming to adults for support

- Encourage children to practice empathy and good decision-making in and out of school

- Outline rules and expectations around digital citizenship and online behaviors, like writing and sharing messages and images

Explore Second Step® programs

Learn more about bullying prevention and Second Step® social-emotional learning programs at SecondStep.org

References

1. Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

2. Turanovic, J. J., & Siennick, S. E. (2022, February). *The causes and consequences of school violence: A review* (NCJ Publication No. 302346). U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/302346.pdf

3. Committee for Children. (2014). *Bullying prevention in schools starts with social-emotional learning.* https://assets.ctfassets.net/98bcvzcrxclo/4Bl3ja0kYUoowWUK4E4OiC/aede0c4413d4ff6c046ee4deb8fd420c/SEL_Bullying_Paper.pdf

4. Boys & Girls Clubs of America. (2023). *Youth right now: Full survey results 2023.* https://www.bgca.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/YouthRightNow2023_FullSurveyResults.pdf

5. Klein, J., Cornell, D., & Konold, T. (2012). Relationships between bullying, school climate, and student risk behaviors. *School Psychology Quarterly, 27*(3), 154–169. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029350

6. Allen, K.-A., Slaten, C. D., Arslan, G., Roffey, S., Craig, H., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2021). School belonging: The importance of student and teacher relationships. In M. L. Kern & M. L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of positive education* (pp. 525–550). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_21

7. Kaukiainen, A., Björkqvist, K., Lagerspetz, K., Österman, K., Salmivalli, C., Rothberg, S., Ahlbom, A. (1999). The relationships between social intelligence, empathy, and three types of aggression. *Aggressive Behavior, 25*(2), 81–89. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/(SICI)1098-2337(1999)25:2%3C81::AID-AB1%3E3.0.CO;2-M

8. Cook, C. R., Williams, K. R., Guerra, N. G., Kim, T. E., & Sadek, S. (2010). Predictors of bullying and victimization in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analytic investigation. *School Psychology Quarterly, 25*(2), 65–83. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020149