FACT SHEET #2: Bullying Prevention

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BACKGROUND

- Bullying refers to *intentional* actions *repeated over time* that *harm, intimidate, or humiliate another person (the victim),* and occur within the context of an *imbalance of power*, either real or perceived, between the bully and the victim. Bullying may be physical, verbal, or relational (e.g., excluding or isolating others).
- Estimates of bullying prevalence vary across studies and methods, but a 2005 student self-report survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that approximately 28 percent of students had been bullied at school during the past six months and 8 percent had been bullied almost daily.
- Physical bullying is more common among males than females. Females are more likely to engage in relational bullying (e.g., excluding others) than in physical bullying.
- Bullies often experience more negative outcomes in life than do non-bullies, including conduct problems, poor academic achievement, anxiety, depression, delinquency and criminality.
- Victims of bullying also are at-risk for multiple negative outcomes, including anxiety, stress, depression, suicidal ideation, distrust of peers, fear/avoidance of school, and underachievement.

KEY ISSUES

- Bullying differs from other forms of aggression in that it entails an imbalance in power. As with aggression and school violence, bullying occurs within a framework that involves bullies, victims, and bystanders, as well as schools, families, and communities.
- Bullying is not the same as the most common kinds of teasing, peer conflict, and inappropriate behavior. As such, those behaviors should not necessarily be viewed as "bullying."
- Schools should promote a positive school climate that includes school-wide norms of respect and caring and the rejection of bullying. This requires setting clear behavioral expectations for all students in school rules and policies, but also teaching appropriate interpersonal skills for bullies, victims, and bystanders.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

- A number of factors are likely to increase the risk of an individual bullying others – factors that schools should target, where feasible, in prevention and intervention programs. These include:
  o *Individual risk factors*, such as aggressive and oppositional behavior, impulsivity, poor academic achievement, and deficits and deficiencies in social and emotional learning. However, bullies are not necessarily lacking in social skills or self-esteem, and many are quite popular among peers.
  o *School factors*, such as the lack of adult supervision, clear behavioral expectations, supportive teacher-student and student-student relations, and policies on bullying.
  o *Home factors*, such as overly harsh or permissive parenting, parental rejection, family violence, poor role models, and lack of parental involvement.
- A number of factors place students at increased risk of being a *victim* of bullying, and should be included in prevention programs: low self worth, being overly anxious, loneliness, lacking friends, lacking assertiveness, and absence of support from teachers, peers, and parents. Children who are marginalized because of physical appearance, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, etc. can be at risk of being victims of bullying.
- Effective programs focus on preventing bullying by promoting a positive school-wide climate of mutual respect, care, and positive expectations in which school staff and students are well aware of bullying and its negative impact on others and are intolerant of bullying.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a comprehensive school-wide plan to create a positive school climate and norms against bullying, which targets policies, procedures, staff development, and multiple levels of prevention and intervention.
- Emphasize the importance of collaboration and support of the student body, teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders in program development and implementation.
- Use multiple forms of assessment and data to guide decision making. This would include a needs assessment and such evaluation measures as school-wide school climate surveys of students, teachers, and parents; student self-reports; peer reports; and office referrals.
- Develop a clear definition of bullying. Beginning in the earliest grades, embed the prevention of bullying in written policies, including mission statements and the school's code of conduct.
- Increase public awareness of bullying and its negative impact via signs/posters, assemblies, newsletters, and classroom lessons and discussions on bullying.
- Recognize that bullying is more likely to occur in certain contexts than others (e.g., on playgrounds, buses, and other less supervised settings) and respond accordingly with increased supervision and structured activities in those settings.
- Provide on-going staff development and training related to all aspects of bullying, including the critical importance of positive teacher-student and student-student relations in preventing bullying.
- Provide skill instruction to students that target social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of bullying, including those skills for bullies, victims, and bystanders. (e.g., teaching bystanders to "take a stand" against bullying).
- Encourage students not to follow the "code of silence" that supports bullying and that seeking help is not "snitching." For example, promote slogans such as "friends don't let friends be bullies."
- Provide more intensive interventions to those identified as bullies or who are at-risk of aggression, such as anger management training, mentoring, etc.
- During disciplinary encounters involving bullying, focus not only on the consequences of the behavior for the bully but also on the impact of the behavior on the victim.
- Consider adoption of an evidence-based program that includes the above recommendations, such as *Steps to Respect*, *BullyProofing Your School*, and *Bullybusters.*

CAUTIONS

- Avoid under- or over-identifying "bullies." Whereas harm certainly occurs by not indentifying and providing interventions and supports to those at-risk of or actively engaged in bullying, it may also occur when a child is labeled a "bully" for actions that do not constitute bullying.
- Don't overlook harm caused by relational aggression and cyber bullying; too often the focus is on physical or verbal bullying.
- Avoid assuming that all bullies are necessarily lacking in self-esteem, perspective taking, or general social skills. Some are, but many are not lacking in those areas. Many are popular among their peers.
- Avoid focusing exclusively on punishing bullies (e.g., suspension). Punishment always should be used in combination with positive techniques that teach and encourage replacement behaviors.
- Recognize that short term and fragmented initiatives are ineffective, especially when they lack teacher and administrative support, a clear link to the school's mission, and fidelity in implementation.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.cfchildren.org – Committee for Children
http://cyberbully.org – Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use.
Batsche, G.M., & Porter, L.J. (2006). Bullying. In G.G. Bear & K.M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs III: Development, prevention, and intervention. Bethesda, MD: National Association of SchoolPsychologists.*
Orpinas, P. & Horne, A. M. (2007). *Bullying prevention: Creating a positive school climate and developing social competence.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
Espelage, D.L., & Swearer, S.M. (Eds.), *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

The Consortium to Prevent School Violence (CPSV) is non-profit group of researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders who are focused on advocacy that promotes effective implementation of positive school violence prevention practices, and fostering technical assistance, information dissemination, and professional development based on high-quality scientific research. CPSV promotes open access where stakeholders in schools and surrounding communities are an integral part of the Consortium's work.