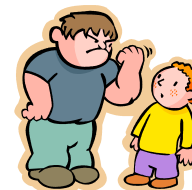


Successfully Combating Bullying in Schools and Cyberspace

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Abstract

One of the most difficult problems that educators face today is dealing with bullying. This pervasive issue occurs in classrooms, lunch rooms, unsupervised areas, on playgrounds, and through electronic media. Based on the principles of protecting the child and establishing a safe environment for all students, this paper investigates the causes and consequences of bullying, and provides information on essentials needed by schools and teachers, for dealing effectively with bullying in schools and cyberspace.

Keywords: Bullying, Bullies, Olweus, School violence, Victims

Nearly everyone has experienced bullying at one time or another, whether as victims, observers, or perhaps even perpetrators. Headlines of violence, bullying, and harassment have become increasingly frequent. For example, the following incident of bullying, which made national headlines, cites an example of the problem: "Two girls arrested on bullying charges after suicide" (Stanglin & Welch, 2010).

Two teenagers were charged in the death of a 12-year-old girl who killed herself by jumping off cement factory tower after months of bullying through online message boards and texts messages from fellow students in a Florida school. Rebecca took her life in desperation after months of being terrorized by 15 girls. Her death, along with several others, prompted the Florida legislature to approve an anti-bullying law.

According to the website www.how-to-stop-bullying.com school bullying statistics and cyberbullying statistics show that 77 percent of students are bullied in at least one way—mentally, verbally or physically. Fifteen per cent of high school students reported one to three bullying incidents in the last month and 3.4 per cent reported 10 incidents or more. Twenty-three per cent of elementary students reported being bullied one to three times in the last month. Furthermore, recent bullying statistics show that half of all bullying incidents go unreported. Cyberbullying statistics indicate even less of these are reported. In summary,

bullying is a pervasive problem that must be taken seriously by educators.

To help educators better address bullying among students, this article investigates the causes and ramifications of bullying in schools and provides knowledge, resources, and assistance to PreK-12 school administrators and teachers, university professors, and future teachers. Included in this information aimed at decreasing bullying problems is a critique of Olweus's well-researched and highly-successful model for bully prevention.

Bullies and Their Victims

If serious scholarship is to be undertaken concerning bullying, it is best to have general background knowledge of those who bully. Insights into this portion of the population are crucial because, if steps are not taken to understand bullies and potential bullies, remediation and prevention will never occur. It is known that the long-term ramifications of bullying are immense: "Long-Term Effects of Bullying: Pain Lasts Into Adulthood" (Pappas, 2013).

Students become aggressive for a plethora of reasons: harsh physical punishment in the family, inhibition, peer victimization, aggressive fantasy, and low self-esteem. (Maryland State Law Library, 2013).

Once aggressive, bullies tend to focus their attention on those perceived as weaker than themselves. "They select

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victims that they think are unlikely to retaliate" (Aluede et. al 2008, 151). Those who appear abnormal physically and those who exhibit poor social skills are most at risk of being bullied.

In general, victims tend to be anxious, careful, and insecure compared to most students. They often experience a great amount of peer alienation. Most likely, victims are less confident in themselves and less popular among schoolmates than normal. Victims also are more likely to be suicidal than their non-bullied counterparts (Aluede et. al 2008, 158). These statistics underscore the importance of teachers quickly identifying those who might be potential victims before harm ensues.

More revealing statistics have emerged regarding this issue. "Bullies are more likely to smoke cigarettes, to drink alcohol regularly, to be drunk, to play computer games, and to be sexually active" (Alikasifoglu et. al 2007, 1256). Bullying can ultimately also impact education, and the effects on health and safety are still prevalent in research today. (Pacer, 2013) Sometimes those who struggle with their

instantaneous communication that can have lasting and irretrievable effects. "Technology has created the capacity to quickly, efficiently, and anonymously deliver messages of ridicule, put-downs, threats and exclusion through a 'connected' community" (National School Safety Center 2006). Common types of behavior include text-based name-calling, use of coarse language, profanity and personal attacks, harassment or denigration, cyber-stalking, or sending humiliating photos or video messages. (Srivastava et al, 2013) This is just one more area in which teachers, parents, and the extended community need to provide guidance and safeguards against bullying.

Bullying: Causes and Consequences

Olweus (1993, 9), a noted authority who began studying bullying in the 1970s, argued that bullying happens when "a student is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students." He also stated that there is an imbalance of power favoring the one who bullies. Olweus summarized the common forms of bullying in Table 1:

Table 1. Description of Common Forms of Bullying

Description of Common Forms of Bullying		
Racial Bullying	Direct Bullying	Indirect Bullying
Verbal Bullying	Threatening, taunting, teasing, and name calling Derogatory comments and bad names	Spreading rumors
Physical Bullying	Hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting	Enlisting a friend to assault someone for you
Nonverbal/ Nonphysical Bullying	Threatening or obscene gestures	Bullying through email, instant messaging, chat room exchanges, web site posts, or digital messages/images to cellular device

social environment turn to less desirable coping strategies to deal with unresolved conflict. Statistically those with aggressive personalities exhibit greater amounts of high risk behavior. On the other hand, victims are more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic status and have difficulty talking to the opposite gender or making new friends (Alikasifoglu et. al 2007).

Finally, with the advent of modern technology, there is an alarming increase in youth using cyberspace to bully others. With the popularity and easy access to various social media, youth have found another setting and means to carry out behaviors once common mostly to school grounds and community parks. The social environment of youth today is rapidly changing. It is imperative that educators realize the potential hazards not only of the Internet, but also of cell phone messaging and e-mail,

As will be discussed later, schools have previously not intervened with demonstrative action unless physical bullying is identified. Yet, the stakes are high. Early adolescents who are targets of peer victimization might be particularly vulnerable to adjustment difficulties (Graham and Bellmore 2007). This makes many students vulnerable to the devastating physical, emotional, and spiritual harm that the next section addresses.

Causes of Bullying

The family has an enormous impact on youth bullying behavior. Bullies suffer from more family problems than students not involved in bullying. Most bullies come from families that are authoritarian (using physical means of discipline), hostile, not accepting, and inconsistent in discipline. "Strategies employed by the child . . . during

conflict situations with adults and . . . with peers support the significance of social learning in child development whereby the behavior of models is imitated” (Henry 2004, 25). Bully-victims are also more likely to come from dysfunctional families (Lereya, Samara, & Wolke, 2013) or have preexisting behavioral or emotional problems.

It is only natural that children often repeat the behaviors of their parents, and when the parents’ behaviors are negative, the model that is recorded in their children’s thinking becomes a negative one. Therefore, this behavior has a great likelihood of being repeated.

It is important for educators and others who work with children and adolescents to realize that though parents do serve as guardians and role models, they are not the only social contributors to bullying behavior. “Increasingly, peers play a role in shaping social and emotional development, as well as children’s academic and physical self-concepts” (Coyle 2009, 404). A child’s social network inevitably influences him or her for better or worse. As expected, findings indicated that high levels of reactive, not proactive, aggression were uniquely associated with low levels of academic performance, and peer rejection accounted for this association. (Fite, et al, 2013)

The development of positive, sustaining relationships is crucial for growth as an individual and as a student. “Research indicates that supportive peer relations are related to adolescents’ positive school-related behaviors, intentions, and attitudes” (Coyle 2009, 406). Likewise, a child that lacks a healthy peer network is in greater danger of displaying and exhibiting anti-social behaviors such as bullying.

Consequences of Physical and Psychological Aggression

Until the 1970s the nature and effects of bullying in schools lacked systematic research (Rigby 2003). Since that time, numerous studies have been conducted that have examined the short- and long-term consequences of bullying. The problem of bullying is now so serious that the American Medical Association has designated school bullying a public health concern. (Graham and Bellmore 2007).

Indeed, the health of both the bully and the victim are affected by bullying behavior. In a study of more than 3,000 students from London, the victimized children had significantly more sleeping problems, bed-wetting incidents, headaches, and stomachaches than others in their age group in general. Victims develop a pattern of assumed inadequacy as they feel little success in dealing with the bully and do not have any ideas for resolution of the bullying. This lack of external support makes them more vulnerable in the future as they feel discouraged in developing pro-active behavior (Hunter and Boyle 2002).

The long-term consequences of being bullied may lead to serious mental health problems such as depression or suicidal thoughts (Fritz 2006).

Bullying Prevention Efforts in Schools

Legislation, Schools, and Teachers

Society endeavors to create legislation and pass laws to protect children. Recognizing the need for safer school environments in 2001, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002), or PL 107-110, with Title IV of the act having the specific purpose of addressing the problem of violence in the schools. In Title IV, Part A, Section 4001, the components of the “Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Community Act” are detailed: “The purpose of this part is to support programs that prevent violence in and around schools and to provide Federal assistance to states for grants to local educational agencies and consortia of such agencies to establish, operate, and improve local programs of school drug and violence prevention and early intervention.” Currently, congress is putting the Safe Schools Improvement Act closer to passage, this will ensure that The act, introduced in the Senate by Democrat Bob Casey of Pennsylvania and in the House by Democrat Linda Sanchez of California, addresses bullying and harassment for all students, including those who are bullied on the basis of their actual or perceived race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, if they are from a military family, or any other distinguishing characteristic. (Davidson, 2013).

Prior to the enactment of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Community Act, no state in the nation had passed legislation that incorporated bullying intervention into its laws. In 2005 a total of seventeen states had laws in effect that specifically prohibited bullying. Today, 49 of the 50 states have laws against it (Olweus, 2011). An example of such a law comes from the state of New Jersey. In 2002 legislators passed AB1874 which said:

Each school district is required to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation, or bullying on school property, at a school-sponsored function or on a school bus. The policy must include a definition of bullying behavior, consequences for engaging in such behavior, a procedure for investigation of such behavior, a statement prohibiting retaliation or reprisal against persons reporting bullying behavior and consequences for making a false accusation. School employees, students, and volunteers are required to report any of these incidents to school authorities (National Conference of State Legislatures 1994–2004).

The difficulty with the development of legislation against bullying becomes evident when the laws are analyzed. States are only beginning to require appropriate training for school personnel for dealing with the prevention and

treatment of bullying even though nearly all are encouraging it. One of the most progressive is North Carolina which offers and requires extensive training for all teachers and administrators, as well providing many Web resources to help teachers recognize and mitigate any signs of bullying or victimization (www.ncpsychoanalysis.org/peaceful_schools_nc.htm). Enforcement without proper training and adequate resources makes the action subjective at best.

Prevention and Intervention Bullying Strategies for Schools

Preventing bullying begins when children are young. At this time they are more susceptible to parental and teacher influence. Early childhood is the ideal time to foster anti-bullying behavior in children. The longer they persist in negative behaviors, the harder and more costly it becomes to correct later in life. In general, initiatives designed for primary schools show more positive results than those aimed at adolescents (Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan 2007). In elementary school, teachers deal with the same group of students for longer periods of time, thus giving them greater influence over the actions of the students. Students in high school are more involved in various activities and less influenced by parents or teachers as they spend more time with peers.

Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) have cited proven strategies to help fashion a school culture that promotes respect, recognition, learning, safety, and positive experiences. Five ways of fostering this climate are to: 1) reach out to victims; 2) set and enforce clear consequences for bullying behavior; 3) supervise students during breaks, especially on playgrounds, in restrooms, and in busy hallways; 4) engage class members in discussions and activities related to bullying so that students who might otherwise passively watch become empowered to intervene, and victims are allowed to have a voice without shame; and 5) create community action teams comprised of students, parents, and other adults to address bullying issues. These strategies focus on clear rules that are consistently enforced under proper supervision, along with creating a responsibility for others among both peers and adults such as parents and teachers.

Programs for intervening in school settings fall into two general categories: primary prevention and secondary prevention. Primary prevention programs involve all the students. The goals of these programs are to: 1) alter the school environment; 2) provide substantial training for teachers and other school staff; 3) elicit parent involvement, and 4) involve members of the school staff, student family members, and community members. Secondary prevention programs focus on those students with identified risk factors or emerging problems with aggression or victimization. A school that wants to deal with bullying in the most

comprehensive manner should implement a primary prevention program.

Examination of Primary Prevention Programs

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

To help school administrators and education faculty understand the importance of implementing a quality and comprehensive primary prevention program, the authors looked at several programs and examined in depth the most recognized bully prevention program, the Olweus Bully Prevention Program which was developed by the bullying-research pioneer Dan Olweus. As one of the most researched and comprehensive bully prevention programs used in schools throughout the world, it is in use in 12 elementary schools in the Philadelphia School District (Black & Washington 2007). Studies conducted with 2,500 students in grades 4-7 in Bergen, Norway, 6,468 students in grades 3-10 in Sheffield, England, 6,468 students in grades 3-10 and 6,388 students in grades 4-6 in South Carolina, U.S., yielded very encouraging results (Olweus and Limber 1999). The outcome indicated a 50 percent reduction in bully/victim problems, a clear reduction in general antisocial behavior, and a marked improvement in the overall social climate in the schools with an increase in student satisfaction with school life (Olweus 2003). His "Bully Prevention Program," which has been developed and evaluated for more than 20 years, builds on four key principles: 1) warmth, positive interest, and involvement from adults; 2) firm limits on unacceptable behavior; 3) consistent application of non-punitive, nonphysical sanctions for unacceptable behavior or violation of the rules; and 4) the involvement of adults who act as authorities and positive role models.

One research study, using the Rasch Measurement Model, analyzed the Olweus questionnaire typically provided to students for research and data gathering. After rigorous testing, the questionnaire employed by Olweus proved to be accurate and judicious. "The present study has provided support for the validity and reliability of the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire using Rasch Modeling" (Kyriakides, Kaloyirou, and Lindsay 2006, 797). Even in the small details, Olweus produced quality work.

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, or others similarly designed, need to be implemented wholeheartedly. Research supports this notion: "The modest results of several intervention programs might be due to the low degree of actual implementation of these programs" (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, and Voeten 2005, 469). The more integrated a reform is, the more likely it is to generate positive results. Furthermore, deliberately modifying aspects of the program may lead to less than desirable results. "In addition, programs should be carried out as they were designed" (Whitted and Dupper 2005, 169). It

is like receiving a recipe from a master chef, then deciding to change the ingredients or proportions, only to discover the dish is not as delicious.

However, if a school does decide to adopt alternative methods, any possible innovation should be thoroughly researched and tested prior to wholesale implementation. If, over the course of time, certain approaches prove to be incompatible with a particular school, then there is no reason to prolong its existence. At the time of its initial implementation, a program should strongly resemble and follow the originally intended format.

The Olweus framework is now widely used and has gradually become the archetype and basis for many successive anti-bully programs. “Most intervention programs have since been inspired by, and modeled after, the Bergen study, and their core components have been similarly defined at the three systemic levels” (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, and Voeten 2005, 466). One anti-bullying initiative retains much of the Olweus design. Known as the Bullying Project, it includes a zero tolerance policy and personal interventions for the

bully and the victim (Smokowski and Kopasz 2005). In this model, however, there is a unique emphasis on art therapy. “Expressive arts therapies are recommended so that victims can write, act out, draw or talk about their experiences” (Smokowski and Kopasz 2005, 106). Each new model contributes its own creative energy.

Table II provides a summary of the important aspects necessary to implement the Olweus program (Olweus and Limber 1999). The success of the program relies on a comprehensive effort by all those in the school environment. The major part of the planning and execution of the program involves the non-mental health experts in the school environment—teachers, students, and parents—who play a major role in the desired restructuring of the social environment. Olweus and Limber share that, “Other experts such as mental health professionals, guidance counselors, and social workers also serve important functions as planners and coordinators, in counseling and consulting with the school, and in possibly handling more serious cases” (Olweus and Limber 1999, 19).

Table 2. An Overview of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

<p>++ Core component + Highly desirable component</p>
<p>General Prerequisite</p> <p>++ Awareness and involvement of adults</p> <p>Measures at the School Level</p> <p>++ Administration of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (filled out anonymously by students) ++ School conference day (Provides an opportunity for program consultants and school personnel to review results of the survey, discuss elements of the Bullying Prevention Program, and make specific plans for implementing the program during the coming year.) ++ Formation of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee ++ Effective supervision during recess and lunch periods + Training of staff and time for discussion groups</p> <p>Measures at the Classroom Level</p> <p>++ Classroom and school rules about bullying ++ Regular classroom meetings (Various aspects of bullying and antisocial behaviors and adherence to agreed upon classroom rules are discussed. . They are also used to engage students in a variety of activities, i.e. role playing, writing, and small group discussions, through which they gain a better appreciation of the harm caused by bullying and learn strategies to combat it). + Meetings with parents of each class</p> <p>Measures at the Individual Level</p> <p>++ Serious individual talks with bullies and victims ++ Serious talks with parents of involved students + Development of individual intervention plans</p>

Recommendations for Teachers

The classroom teacher plays a crucial role in a bullying prevention program. A teacher's response in addition to inadequate class management skills influences future bullying behavior and contributes to the students' perceptions of the classroom climate. The critical role of the teacher in sanctioning bullying behavior, either intentionally or unintentionally, is paramount (Newman-Carlson and Horne 2004). "coercive, chaotic, disconnected, and uncaring school environments promote or permit the existence of antisocial, bullying, and violent cultures within classrooms and schools." (Allen, 2010)

Teachers who correctly practice both consequences and reinforcement techniques are best able to handle hurtful behavior. Teachers must deal firmly and directly with all misbehavior in a classroom, on the playground, or in any other area for which they have been entrusted. Students want to feel safe and protected by a teacher who genuinely can be trusted with their health, safety, and well-being.

Conducting class meetings is a proactive means for dealing with bullying and associated behaviors such as intolerance, exclusion, or put-downs. In class meetings problems are discussed and solutions formulated and implemented as a whole class. A student's ability to speak his mind with acceptance from a wider audience also leads to emotional healing. Class meetings might be the only opportunities students have to safely voice their opinions and be listened to with respect. "Creating safe spaces where stories of harm and of hope can be told and listened to is an important social agenda for schools and civil society" (Morrison 2006, 390). "Classroom meetings provide a forum for students to talk about school-related issues beyond academics. These meetings can help teachers stay informed about what is going on at school and help students feel safe and supported." (stopbullying.gov)

The administration of justice in a classroom may mean that severe measures are taken to address the problem. Establishing a "no tolerance" zone for bullying others will prove absolutely beneficial to demonstrate a clear expectation that bullying is not permitted in any form. "The key ingredient in many bullying interventions is maintaining a zero tolerance policy with swift and serious consequences for engaging in bullying" (Smokowski and Kopasz 2005, 108). Punitive measures-from office detention to suspension-help students understand that bullying has no place in schools and will not be tolerated. Such measures do not mean that the teacher will be harsh, unkind, or disrespectful in dealing with the misbehavior. Rather, punitive actions demonstrate that everyone, including the bully, is responsible for his or her own behavior, and reasonable consequences will be exacted for cruel, unacceptable behavior.

In a teacher's arsenal, arguably the greatest weapon

in combating bullying behavior is curriculum reform. "Classroom interventions include encouraging teachers to integrate bullying prevention material into their curriculum" (Whitted and Dupper 2005, 171). Integrated materials stimulate and motivate students to ponder social dynamics and how they might relate as individuals. "Videos and books are also helpful [media] for educators to introduce awareness of bullying to their students" (Crothers and Kolbert 2008, 134). With the proper tools and mindset, teachers can effectively communicate important information to the class in an engaging and worthwhile fashion.

Parents, of course, play an integral role in bullying reform. Involving parents increases the odds of maintaining healthy classroom behavior. Facilitating a class parent meeting and distributing informational packets are two proven strategies to deal with bullying in schools (The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program 2005). "Teachers may also encourage parents to think about how they might help to promote their child's social development" (Crothers and Kolbert 2008, 137). With parents as partners in a child's education, a child's social and academic future becomes more secure.

Conclusion

Bullying is now an international issue with organizations such as the Committee for Children and the United Nations working around the world to prevent bullying. States are recognizing the importance of anti-bullying legislation. Children need to be protected from their abusive peers. Programs such as the Olweus Bully Prevention Program and others cited as examples in the paper have been researched and developed. Though there are numerous programs available, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) considers "The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program a 'model program' and a proven way for a school to intervene" (The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program 2005, 6). Second Step is also listed on the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices for SAMHSA (www.cfchildren.org/). Also, the Maryland State Department of Education has established the "Bullying Prevention Program" The Student Services and Alternative Programs Branch staff provide leadership and technical assistance to local school systems to promote a safe environment conducive to learning and free from bullying and harassment. (http://www.msde.maryland.gov/MSDE/divisions/studentschoolsvcs/student_services_alt/bullying/)

As stated in this research paper, allowing victims of bullying to express themselves can be very beneficial, the PACER: Bullying Prevention Interactive Web Site for KIDS! Is a great program where children in second through sixth grades now have an entertaining, safe way

to learn how to respond to bullying. PACER's new Kids Against Bullying Web site includes a cast of 12 animated characters, celebrity videos, kid videos, Webisodes, games, contests, stories, artwork, poems, information, and much more. The site is for all children. Children with disabilities are integrated throughout the Web site. (<http://www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org/#/home>) The Stop Bullying Now Foundation was founded to address the epidemic of bullying that exists in our schools today. Their main objective is to raise funds to assist all 67 school districts in Florida as well as School Districts around the country in creating a sustainable and powerful anti-bullying program. <http://www.stopbullyingnowfoundation.org/main/>) The Utterly Global Bullying Prevention program provides training for youth and adults in addition to comprehensive, school-wide programs designed for use in elementary, middle, and high school. We have been industry leaders for over a decade helping to create safe school and social environments through positive character development. (<http://antibullyingprograms.org/>) The Peace Builders program is a science-based, research-validated prevention curriculum as well as professional development program for grades pre-K to 12 that helps in the effort of providing a safe learning environment for students. (<http://www.peacebuilders.com/>)

Any anti-bullying program should be carried out as was intended, to the fullest extent, including any training available. Teachers must maintain strict standards in order to safeguard potential victims. Principals should examine different programs to discover which one best fits their school's environment and community.

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