STOP BULLYING NOW!
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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

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Steps to Address Bullying at Your School: Tips for School Administrators

Why does my school need a bullying prevention program?

- Bullying can seriously affect the emotional, physical, and academic well-being of children who are bullied.
- Dealing with discipline problems related to bullying incidents can take a good deal of administrators' and educators' time during a school day.
- Bullying can contribute to a negative climate in schools.
- Bullying is more prevalent than many adults suspect.

Everyone in the school environment will benefit from implementation of an effective bullying prevention program.

Before implementing any efforts to address bullying or other violence at school, keep in mind that:

- Effective programs require strong administrative leadership and ongoing commitment on the part of the adults in the school system.

- Those programs that show the most promise are comprehensive in approach. They involve the entire school community including families and include school-wide interventions, classroom activities, and individual interventions.

- Bullying prevention efforts should begin early - as children transition into kindergarten - and continue throughout a child's education.

- Effective bullying prevention programs should have no "end date" but should become part of the life of your school. Ongoing staff development is important to sustain bullying prevention programs.

Following are suggested initial steps that school administrators can take to develop an effective bullying prevention program in their schools.

Initial Steps for School Administrators

1. Assess bullying at your school and the level of commitment of your staff to address bullying.

- Form a bullying prevention coordinating committee (a small group of energetic teachers, students, administrators, counselors, non-teaching staff, and parents) to help you explore the problem of bullying and possible solutions at your school.

- Administer an anonymous student questionnaire (grades 3 and higher) to assess the nature, extent, and location of bullying problems in your school. A number of bullying prevention programs include such questionnaires.

- Talk with your staff members about their perceptions of bullying at your school, their current efforts to address bullying, and their time and motivation to implement a bullying prevention program.

- Hold an open house or a PTA meeting to solicit parent feedback about bullying and bullying prevention needs at your school.

2. Learn about good bullying prevention programs

- With the help of your coordinating committee, research existing bullying prevention programs that your school might adopt.

- Talk with colleagues in other schools who have implemented bullying prevention programs. Often program developers can put you in touch with educators who can share their experiences with implementing bullying prevention programs.

- Assess your school's current prevention and intervention programs. Determine whether they would be compatible with bullying prevention

programs that you are considering. Note: Conflict resolution programs are **not** a good idea.

- Share information about programs with committee members and staff. Most programs have fact sheets or other summary information available. Some have trainers who are available to provide brief "overviews" of the program to you and your staff.

- Carefully select a program that best fits the needs of your school, with attention to the proven effectiveness of the model.

- Consider which program best fits the financial constraints of your school's budget.

3. If you do not have the resources or staff commitment to fully implement a bullying prevention program at your school, what can you do to address bullying?
- Provide in-service training to your staff so that they can learn more about the issue of bullying. Include non-teaching staff who interact with students (such as bus drivers, school resource officers, school nurses, and cafeteria workers).

- Develop clear rules and sanctions related to bullying. Post and distribute the school rules and discuss them with students, staff, and parents.

- Develop strategies to reward students for positive, inclusive behavior.

- Using information obtained from your student questionnaire, increase supervision in areas that are "hot spots" for bullying and violence in the school.

- Establish a confidential reporting system that allows students to report victimization and that records the details of bullying incidents.

- Ensure that your school has all legally required policies and grievance procedures in place for bullying or harassment. Make these procedures known to parents, students, and staff members.

- Receive and listen receptively to parents and students who report bullying. Establish procedures whereby such reports are investigated and resolved quickly and effectively at the school level in order to avoid perpetuating bullying.

- Ensure that all staff members take immediate action when bullying is observed. All teachers and school staff must let students know that they care and will not allow anyone to be mistreated. By taking immediate action and dealing directly with students who bully, adults support students who are bullied and those who are bystanders to bullying.

- Notify the parents of all involved students when a bullying incident occurs, and seek to resolve the problem expeditiously at school.

- Make referrals to your counseling and/or mental health staff, when appropriate, for further work with students who are bullied and with students who bully.

- Ensure protection for students who are bullied. Such protection may include creating a buddy system whereby students have a particular friend or older buddy on whom they can depend and with whom they can spend time.

- Encourage teachers to hold class meetings during which students can talk about issues related to bullying and peer relations. Encourage teachers to integrate bullying prevention themes throughout the curriculum.

- Avoid common misdirections in bullying prevention and intervention. See factsheet, "Misdirections in Bullying Prevention and Intervention."