Documenting Bullying at Your School: Tips for School Administrators

Documenting bullying at your school is an important element of any bullying prevention effort. Effective documentation should include: (1) assessing the nature and prevalence of bullying at school and (2) tracking suspected and confirmed incidents of bullying among school children.

Assessing Bullying at Your School?

Why is it important to assess bullying at your school?

- Adults often are not very accurate in predicting the types and amount of bullying among children and youth in school. It is important to ask students about their experiences.

- Getting an accurate picture of the prevalence of bullying at your school may *motivate* your teachers, other staff members, parents, and students to take action. If, for example, your teachers perceive that bullying is a rare event at school, it may be difficult to motivate them to implement a bullying prevention program. If, on the other hand, teachers see that bullying affects many students at your school, they may be more inclined to focus on bullying prevention.

- Understanding bullying at your school can help you to plan strategies to address the problem. For example, it is important to know where bullying occurs at your school so that you can increase adult supervision in those "hot spots."

- Assessing bullying at different points in time can help you to evaluate your school's progress in dealing with bullying.

What are good ways to assess bullying?

- It is a good idea to have students (grade 3 and higher) complete a written, *anonymous* questionnaire about their experiences of bullying, being bullied, and observing bullying. Students are likely to feel more comfortable reporting their bullying experiences if they don't have to include their name or other identifying information on the questionnaire.

- Several bullying prevention programs include a student questionnaire as part of their materials. Other questionnaires have been published in research articles. Refer to the list of **Bullying Prevention Programs** and the fact sheet on **Research-Based Articles and Books on Bullying/Peer Victimization** for references to several questionnaires for students.

- In addition to surveying students, consider inviting teachers, other school staff, and parents to complete questionnaires about bullying at school. Not only may it be helpful to assess adults' perceptions of bullying and ideas for bullying prevention in your school, but it also may be instructive to compare adults' perceptions of bullying with those of your students.

- Be sure to share summaries of data with students, parents, and school personnel.

Tracking Bullying Incidents at Your School

In addition to assessing the nature and prevalence of bullying at your school, it's also important to document bullying by tracking suspected and

confirmed incidents of bullying. This will help to ensure that children who are bullied receive protection and support and that children who bully are held accountable for their actions.

- In order to effectively track bullying incidents, adults must be educated about bullying. Offer training for all staff at school that will help them to be more aware of signs of bullying.

- Develop a logical and timely reporting system that will inform school personnel and parents of suspected and confirmed bullying incidents. No single system will work for all schools.
  - Some schools have developed a triplicate incident report form for bullying and other problem behaviors. (One copy goes to the student's teacher, the second copy is filed in the office, and the third copy is sent to the student's parents).
  - Other schools keep a log of bullying incidents in the main office.

- Make sure that teachers and *all* school personnel (e.g., bus drivers, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodial staff) are familiar with the school's reporting procedures and understand their obligation to report suspected or confirmed bullying.

- In addition to filing written reports, encourage school personnel to share their concerns verbally and in a timely way with colleagues (e.g., in grade-level team meetings, or one-on-one with other staff). If, for example, the 3ʳᵈ period math teacher has observed bullying among two students, he or she should make a written report *and* discuss the issue quickly with other teachers and staff to make sure that the bullying doesn't continue.

- Consider tracking bullying through the use of computer software programs. Many larger school districts already have software programs to document critical behavior incidents. New upgrades of these programs and customized data fields can be used to track bullying incidents. Some schools may find the cost of such computer programs prohibitive. Free computer programs are available that may help you to analyze and map bullying and other problem behaviors that occur in and around your school. *(See, e.g., www.schoolcopsoftware.com).*

- Documentation of known or suspected bullying incidents is a critical component of an effective bullying prevention effort. However, documentation alone will not solve bullying problems at school. See factsheet, "Steps to Address Bullying at Your School: Tips for School Administrators" for information about how you can implement bullying prevention programs in your school.