Evidence Based Practices in School Mental Health: Bully Prevention and Intervention

Although many adults vividly remember what it feels like to be bullied at school, they often underestimate the amount of bullying that still takes place and the impact that it can have on today’s children (Nansel et al., 2001). Recent research has suggested that more than a quarter of students report having been bullied (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011), and that bullying behaviors can result in significant adverse outcomes for all involved (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV), 2004). This Fast Facts defines issues around bullying behaviors and presents ideas and resources for creating a more positive school climate that reduces incidences of bullying behaviors and improves the learning environment for all.

Background Information
Traditionally, bullying behavior is thought of as one student being physically aggressive towards another student. However, this is not true in many instances, and several forms of bullying behaviors, including cyberbullying, relational aggression, and identity-based bullying (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religion) do not involve physical aggression at all. In fact, Colorado legislation defines bullying as “… any written or verbal expression, or physical or electronic or gesture, or pattern thereof, that is intended to coerce, intimidate, or cause any physical, mental, or emotional harm to any student (C.R.S 22-32-109.1 (a)(X)(B)).”

Adverse social-emotional implications have been documented for all involved in bullying, including the target of bullying behaviors, those who initiate bullying behaviors, and bystanders. Targets of bullying behavior may become depressed, anxious, have decreased self-esteem, exhibit psychosomatic symptoms, and decreased academic outcomes. Students who demonstrate bullying behaviors are more likely to engage in behaviors that escalate to criminal activities if adequate and timely interventions are not provided (CSPV, 2004).

Research also indicates that both students who demonstrate bullying behaviors and targets of the bullying behavior exhibit reactive aggression (Camodeca & Goossens, 2004). Bystanders of bullying, including those who do not become involved but actively observe bullying take place, are at increased risk of feeling fearful, powerless to act, and guilty for not acting (Olweus, 2011). Finally, research indicates that bystanders may likewise contribute to the problem by providing attention and assistance in bullying situations. Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig (2001) found that in greater than 80% of bullying situations, bystanders were involved in the bullying and typically reinforced the aggression.

One of the most important consequences of bullying behaviors is the impact it has on overall school climate. A school culture where bullying behavior is ignored or not properly addressed can undermine students’ sense of safety while at school. This in turn can hinder students’ ability to learn by impacting concentration and sustained attention (Farrell, Meyer, Sullivan, & Kung, 2003). As such, addressing bullying behavior is important to not only the social-emotional health of students, but for academic success as well.

Effective Bully Prevention and Intervention
Even though the research base on effective bully prevention and intervention is still growing, there are specific program features that have consistently been proven to be effective when addressing bullying school-wide. The US Department of Health and Human Services has proposed 10 “best practices” in bully prevention and intervention efforts (Stop Bullying Now, 2011):
1) **Focus on the social environment of the school.** Social norms at the school must be changed so that bullying is no longer an acceptable activity. This climate change requires the involvement of not only students, but staff and administration.
2) **Assess bullying at the school.** Climate surveys can help assess the nature of the bullying problem, assist in tailoring a school-specific prevention approach, and allow for data to track prevention and intervention progress.

3) ** Garner staff and parent support for bullying intervention.** As discussed above, bullying prevention requires support and reinforcement from all those in students’ lives to be effective.

4) **Form a group to coordinate the school’s bullying prevention efforts.** This group should collect and maintain data and design and implement bully prevention efforts.

5) **Train your staff in bullying prevention.** All adults who interact with students should be trained.

6) **Establish and enforce school rules related to bullying.** Clear, straightforward expectations should be developed and made easily visible.

7) **Increase adult supervision in bullying “hot spots.”** Increase adult presence in areas where bullying occurs most frequently.

8) **Intervene consistently and appropriately in bullying situations.** Staff should be trained to intervene on the spot when bullying occurs.

9) **Focus some class time on bullying prevention.** Aim for 20-30 minutes every other week.

10) **Continue these efforts over time.**

Schools may wish to implement a formal bully prevention curriculum in concert with the suggestions provided above. A list of research-based strategies, programs, and approaches is provided in table form at the end of this document. While it may be tempting for school personnel to implement these strategies in isolation, it should be noted that doing so may possibly exacerbate the problem and cause unintended outcomes (Good, McIntosh, & Piorer, in press), as in isolation it may be difficult to develop enough buy-in to implement program curriculum successfully (Biggs, Vernberg, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Dill, 2008). As such, care should be given to implementing any anti-bullying curriculum within a supportive school-wide framework that addresses school culture as a whole and creates clear expectations for acceptable behavior. Doing so will support the best conditions for reducing school bullying behaviors and improving student outcomes.

It is also important to note that while most students will respond to primary bully prevention efforts such as those discussed above, some students will require more individualized support at a higher level of intensity (e.g. targeted or intensive needs); as such, a multi-tiered system of support should be in place to most effectively address bullying.

**Disclaimer**

The information gathered for this evidence-based practice sheet is a summary of common practices and/or programs with a strong research base and definitions found in recent literature. This summary is by no means a comprehensive representation of all information, definitions, programs, and standards to be found. The listing of a specific program within this sheet does not constitute as an endorsement from CDE for the program.

**Resources**


Colorado School Safety Resource Center [http://www.safeschools.state.co.us/](http://www.safeschools.state.co.us/)

OSEP’s Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: [http://www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)


The Colorado Trust: [http://www.bullyingprevention.org](http://www.bullyingprevention.org)

**References**


Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (2004). *Blueprints Model Programs: Bullying Prevention Program (BPP).[Brochure].*


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
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<th>Key Outcomes and References</th>
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<td>Bully Prevention in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (BP-PBIS)</td>
<td>Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports</td>
<td>Elementary Middle School High School</td>
<td>By investing in the implementation of multi-tiered prevention frameworks like PBIS, schools are creating cultures that prevent the development and occurrences of bullying behavior. If bullying behavior occurs, a team-based and data-driven problem-solving process is initiated to address the bullying. Ross et al., (2009)</td>
<td>Blueprints for Violence Prevention: N/R NREPP/SAHMSA: N/R Communities that Care: N/R OJJDP Model Program Guide: N/R</td>
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<td>Bully Proofing Your School (BPYS)</td>
<td>Sopris West Learning</td>
<td>Elementary Middle School High School</td>
<td>Research at the elementary level suggests BPYS results in: - Increased safety in the classroom and cafeteria - Increased playground safety - Reduced bullying and violence - Change in attitudes about bullying Epstein et al. (2002), Menard et al. (2008), Gallagher et al., (2008).</td>
<td>Blueprints for Violence Prevention: N/R NREPP/SAHMSA: N/R Communities that Care: N/R OJJDP Model Program Guide: N/R</td>
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<td>Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)</td>
<td>Channing-Bete</td>
<td>Preschool Elementary</td>
<td>Research has demonstrated that the PATHS program results in significant:</td>
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| **Summary:** The PATHS Curriculum provides elementary school teachers with a systematic developmental procedure for helping children understand their feelings, tolerate frustration and come up with constructive solutions for dealing with conflict. In the classroom, teachers give frequent, short lessons on interpreting social cues and others’ perspectives, developing positive relationships, using self-control and solving interpersonal problems. Students also learn how to reduce stress, communicate better, develop a positive attitude, and understand the difference between feelings and behaviors. | http://www.channing-bete.com/ | Preschool Elementary | • improvements in self control, understanding and recognition of emotions, conflict resolution skills, thinking and planning skills, and academic achievement.  
• reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression, and conduct problems, and aggression. | NREPP/SAHMSA: 2.6-3.2  
Communities that Care: Effective  
OJJDP Model Program Guide: Exemplary |
| Second Step                                 | Committee for Children      | Preschool Elementary        | Research has demonstrated that Second Step results in:                                         | Blueprints for Violence Prevention: N/R                 |
| **Summary:** Second Step is a classroom-based social skills curriculum for students from preschool through middle school. The curriculum aims to reduce impulsive and aggressive behaviors and increase protective factors and social-emotional competence. Organized by grade level, the program teaches children empathy, problem-solving skills, risk assessment, decision-making, and goal-setting skills. | www.cfchildren.org          | Elementary Middle School | • Increased prosocial behavior and social competence  
• Decreased levels of aggression. | NREPP/SAHMSA: 2.4  
Communities that Care: Effective  
OJJDP Model Program Guide: Effective |
| Steps to Respect                            | Committee for Children      | Grades 3-6                  | Steps to Respect has been found  
• to significantly decrease bullying and destructive bystander behavior  
• To significantly decrease malicious gossiping | Blueprints for Violence Prevention: N/R                 |
| **Summary:** This program is designed to teach students how to effectively address bullying by promoting social-emotional skills and learning how to recognize and report bullying. The program also increases staff awareness and responsiveness by involving teachers as coaches in bullying situations. | www.cfchildren.org          |                           | Frey et al. (2005 & 2009), Low et al. (2010). | NREPP/SAHMSA: N/R  
Communities that Care: N/R  
OJJDP Model Program Guide: Effective |
Blueprints for Violence Prevention Ratings System: Model Programs, Promising Programs  www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints

Blueprints Model Programs must meet three criteria: evidence of effect with a strong research design (experimental or quasi-experimental), sustained effect (at least one year beyond treatment), and multiple site replication. Promising Programs must have evidence of effect with a strong research design (experimental or quasi-experimental).

NREPP-SAMHSA Ratings System: 0-4 www.nrepp.samhsa.gov

NREPP uses a ‘quality of research’ rating for each criminal and substance abuse outcome, ranging from 0 to 4, on six criteria: reliability, validity, intervention fidelity, missing data and attrition, potential confounding variables, and appropriateness of analysis. An overall rating for each outcome is provided.

Communities that Care Ratings System: Effective  http://www.samhsa.gov/about/csap.aspx

Communities That Care focuses on preventing adolescent substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout, and violence as well as promoting the positive development of youth and children. Programs focus on the family, school, and community. The criteria include: (1) programs that address research-based risk factors for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school dropout and violence; (2) programs that increase protective factors; (3) programs that intervene at developmentally appropriate ages; and (4) show significant effects on risk and protective factors in controlled studies or community trials.

OJJDP Model Programs Guide Ratings System: Exemplary, Effective, Promising  www.ojjdp.gov/mpg

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Model Programs Guide (MPG) is designed to assist practitioners and communities in implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention programs that can make a difference in the lives of children and communities. The MPG evidence ratings are derived from four summary dimensions of program effectiveness: (1) conceptual framework, (2) program fidelity, (3) evaluation design and (4) empirical evidence. Exemplary programs are implemented with a high degree of fidelity, demonstrate robust empirical findings and have experimental evaluation design. Effective programs are implemented with sufficient fidelity and demonstrate adequate empirical findings using a high-quality (quasi-experimental) evaluation design. Promising programs are generally implemented with minimal fidelity and demonstrate promising (perhaps inconsistent) empirical findings using a reasonable conceptual framework and a limited evaluation design (single group pre-post-test).

Program References