

CLERICAL SERVICES / ADMINISTRATIVE ESPs AND BULLYING PREVENTION

Administrative Staff Hear Bullying Reports from Students, Parents

Bullying behavior is a growing concern among America's educators. Bullying is generally defined as repeated aggressive acts intended to do harm, and is characterized by a power or status difference between the students. Bullying includes not only physical aggression such as hitting or stealing, but also verbal aggression, such as threatening, name calling, spreading rumors, socially rejecting and isolating someone, or cyberbullying (where perpetrators can hide behind the anonymity of the Internet).

Students who have been bullied report feeling depressed, anxious, and isolated. Many have low self-esteem. Their school attendance and performance may suffer. And as the nation has seen recently, in some cases they are so tormented they take their own lives.

Bullying seldom happens in the school office, but the fall-out from it makes the school office the front line of prevention and intervention. Clerical services ESPs (secretaries, administrative aides, office assistants, accountants, receptionists, etc.) are frequently in the position to hear reports of bullying from students and parents. With a shortage of counselors in many schools, clerical services personnel often become the informal counselor to the bully, the target, and their parents at a highly emotional time.

While there are many curriculum materials that provide educators with tools to teach students about bullying, few training opportunities are provided to clerical ESPs on how to deal with bullying situations. We know that for any bullying prevention initiative to be successful, all staff members need to be engaged and trained on prevention and intervention strategies.



NEA has long been committed to bullying and harassment prevention and intervention. For decades, members have received training in how to recognize and intervene in student-to-student bullying situations. In 2010, NEA conducted the first nationwide survey to include the opinions of education support professionals as well as teachers on issues relating to bullying in public schools. Among the 2900 ESP respondents, 375 were clerical services ESPs.

Highlights of their responses are presented on the next page.



What Clerical Services ESPs Said

Students and parents tell them about bullying. Given the nature of their job and their limited interaction time with students (relative to other ESPs), clerical services ESPs are less likely to witness bullying and more likely to feel that other staff is doing enough to stop it at their school. At the same time, they are in the unique position to be far more likely to hear about bullying from both students and parents, and thus might be more likely to view bullying as a problem at their school. Approximately 46% of clerical services ESPs indicated that a student reported bullying to them within the past month, more than any other ESP category. Forty percent stated that a parent reported bullying to them, more than any other group of school staff, including teachers (16%). This puts clerical services ESPs in the valuable role as central connectors who can share important information with all school staff—administrators, teachers, and other support professionals—and with parents (who seem to trust them) to prevent further bullying.

They feel it's their job to intervene. A significant majority—82%—of clerical services professionals surveyed reported that it is “their job” to intervene in bullying situations.

They need training on bullying prevention and intervention. Ironically, while nearly all clerical services ESPs surveyed—98%—reported that their school district has a bullying prevention policy, and many of them are involved in the administrative details of reporting incidents occurring on school grounds, only a third said they had received training on that policy. Including clerical services ESPs in training on bullying prevention and intervention strategies is especially important since they interact directly with the bully, his or her targets, and the parents of those involved when they arrive at the front office.

Students and parents are likely to report bullying to clerical services professionals.

They want training on different forms of bullying. Research shows that clerical ESPs do not differ much from the rest of the school staff in their needs for additional training across all forms of bullying. Training on cyberbullying and sexting are most needed, with two-thirds of clerical workers indicating they want additional information on those topics as well as on what to do in situations involving children being bullied because of sexual orientation.

They need to be encouraged to join school committees on bullying prevention. The survey found that few clerical services ESPs are involved in bullying prevention efforts at their school. Only 21% reported being involved in school teams, committees or prevention programs dealing with bullying. This seems like a missed opportunity to include the one category of school staff that receives the most reports by both students and parents. Enlisting clerical services staff can prove invaluable to prevention efforts because they are more likely to know all the students: the

VIEW FROM THE OFFICE

From her post in Leslie Middle School's office, Debbie Pavon knows what to do when she spots one of her “frequent fliers.” That's what she calls students who land again and again in the principal's office for being disruptive. Sometimes, they're bullies. Other times, they're the ones who have been bullied.

“They're not bad kids, they just make bad choices,” says Pavon. She offers them a listening ear and helps them talk through their problems. “Some of these kids just need the extra one-on-one attention.”

Pavon recognizes how important it can be for students to have a caring adult lending a listening ear. Though a little out of her comfort zone as a bookkeeper, it's a strategy she knows can help.

“If it changes one kid's life to say, ‘Somebody does care to stop what they're doing and help me,’ and say, ‘You know what? I am special,’ it makes me feel good. Hopefully it'll make them turn their life around,” she says.

“Everybody needs to be involved,” Pavon concludes. For her fellow ESPs, she says to keep an eye out for the frequent fliers in your school—your help might be just what they need.

Source: NEA Today, March 21, 2011

TIPS FOR CLERICAL SERVICES ESPs

To Prevent Bullying

- ✓ Establish a positive atmosphere in the front office and/or your clerical work site.
- ✓ Treat students the way you want to be treated and the way you want them to treat each other.
- ✓ Focus on developing empathy and respect among students and co-workers.
- ✓ Model empathy and respect with parents, especially after a bullying incident.
- ✓ Use positive, non-verbal interactions—a smile, a nod, a thumbs up, a high five, a pat on the back.
- ✓ Notice something positive the students do and say something about it to them or someone else where they can hear it.
- ✓ Avoid physical forms of discipline or intimidation.
- ✓ Initiate conversations with students about bullying.
- ✓ Don't expect students to solve bullying incidents themselves; they lack the skills.
- ✓ Encourage students to report incidents of bullying to you and other adults.
- ✓ Ensure younger students know the difference between tattling and telling.
- ✓ Report incidents as required by your school's policy.
- ✓ Maintain a log of bullying incidents: who's involved, description of behavior, date and time, location on school campus, etc.
- ✓ Analyze bullying logs to search for and report out patterns of bullying.
- ✓ Maintain a log of bullying prevention in-service training offered at the school site.
- ✓ Track and report out which staff have and have not had training on bullying prevention.

To Intervene in Bullying

- ✓ Learn about bullying and share handouts so you and your coworkers know what you're looking for (see resources)
- ✓ Learn and share information with all staff about your school's consequences for bullies.
- ✓ Research and share information with all staff about what supports for targets exist.
- ✓ When you see something, do something—be assertive and calm.
- ✓ Express strong disapproval of and stop bullying when it occurs.
- ✓ Start with verbal warnings. Use the name of the student who is bullying.
- ✓ Label the behavior as bullying and refer to your school's anti-bullying rules or policy.
- ✓ During an incident, stand between the bully and the target, blocking eye contact.
- ✓ Safeguard the target; ask: Are you alright?
- ✓ Address the bully and advise of or initiate consequences for the behavior.
- ✓ Address bystanders and advise how they might intervene next time; use the teachable moment.
- ✓ Do not argue with or try to convince the student who is bullying.
- ✓ Deal with all bullying incidents consistently, appropriate to the situation.
- ✓ Inform other school staff about a student bullying incident so they are alert to possible retaliation during the balance of the school day.
- ✓ Maintain copies of school policies around student bullying behaviors to share with parents and community members.

Sources: US Department of Education and US Department of Health & Human Services

new students, foreign-born students, those with hidden or visible disabilities, and others who are easy targets of bullies.

They report feeling connected to their school community, which influences bullying intervention.

Connectedness is the belief by adults in the school that they are cared about as individuals and professionals involved in the learning process. Research has shown there is an important link between feeling connected to the school

and being comfortable intervening with all forms of bullying among all types of students. The more staff members, including clerical services ESPs, feel connected to their school, the more likely they are to intervene and stop bullying when they see it. Furthermore, given the evidence that both students and parents report bullying to them, clerical ESPs can play a critical role as connectors in implementing whole school programs by serving as liaisons between students, parents, teachers, and all other school staff.

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They are likely to live in their school community. The NEA survey found that 69% of clerical services ESPs live in the school community where they work, a rate twice as high as that of teachers. This means they are more likely to know the students and their families outside the school setting, and can be an invaluable resource when seeking answers to bullying incidents.

Inform Yourself and Your Association

- ❑ Visit www.nea.org/neabullyfree, a good go-to source for resources about how to help bullied students and how to prevent bullying in your school.
- ❑ Seek input and collect data from other school staff to whom students go for support.
- ❑ Request a bullying prevention and intervention training session from NEA at www.nea.org/neabullyfree (there is a training link). Make sure the training is scheduled at a time that is convenient for clerical services ESPs to attend.
- ❑ Ask your school district to invest in clerical services ESPs and provide training on the content of current policies for bullying prevention and intervention. Work with your local affiliate to ensure these trainings are scheduled at times that are convenient for clerical staff to attend along with other school staff.
- ❑ Become involved in bullying prevention teams, committees and other activities at your school or Education Association.
- ❑ Initiate meetings with other staff to share concerns about bullying in general or specific students in particular.

NEA'S BULLY FREE PLEDGE

I agree to be **identified** as a caring adult who pledges to **help** bullied students. I will **listen** carefully to all students who seek my help and **act** on their behalf to put an immediate stop to the bullying. I will work with other caring adults to create a safe learning environment for all students in my school.



Be that caring adult. Take the pledge at nea.org/neabullyfree

Bully Free: It Starts With Me!

Resources:

www.nea.org/neabullyfree

NEA's official website for the NEA Bully Free: It Starts with Me campaign

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html

Guidance on bullying from the U.S. Department of Education

www.pta.org/bullying.asp

National PTA guide on safeguarding children from bullying

www.bnetsavvy.org/wp/

NEA Health Information Network cyberbullying resource

www.nea.org/home/3207.htm

Education Support Professionals website with links to bullying resources, including the *2010 NEA Nationwide Study of Bullying*

www.stopbullyingnow.samhsa.gov

Educator Tip Sheets are available, such as: *How to Intervene to Stop Bullying: Tips for On-the-Spot Intervention at School*

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