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Bullying Intervention Strategies That Work

"Bullying," according to noted expert Dan Olweus, "poisons the educational environment and affects the learning of every child." Learn what you can do to keep bullying behavior from poisoning your school. Included: Practical tips for changing the behavior of bullies and their victims.

In 1982, three Norwegian boys, ages 10 through 14, committed suicide, apparently as a result of severe bullying by their classmates. The event triggered shock and outrage, led to a national campaign against bullying behavior, and finally, resulted in the development of a systematic school-based bullying intervention program. That program, developed by psychologist Dan Olweus, was tested with more than 2,500 students in Bergen, Norway. Within two years, incidents of school bullying had dropped by more than 50 percent. Since then, a number of countries, including England, Germany, and the United States, have implemented Olweus's program with similar results.

HOW IT WORKS

Olweus based the program on principles derived from research into behavior modification techniques for aggressive or violent children. The program restructures the learning environment to create a social climate characterized by supportive adult involvement, positive adult role models, firm limits, and consistent, non-corporal sanctions for bullying behavior.

In order to effectively accomplish its goals of reducing existing bullying problems and preventing the development of future

problems, the program leads teachers, administrators, and staff through a series of tasks that make them aware of the extent of the bullying problem and help them solve it. Those tasks include the following:

At the school level:

- a bullying survey to determine the extent of the problem.
- a conference day to educate teachers, administrators, school staff, parents, students, and community members about bullying behaviors, response strategies, and available resources.
- increased supervision in the cafeteria, hallways, bathrooms, and on the playground, where most bullying behavior occurs.
- a coordinating group --, typically consisting of an administrator; a teacher from each grade level; a guidance counselor, psychologist, and/or school nurse; and parent and student representatives -- to manage the program and evaluate its success.
- ongoing meetings between parents and school staff.
- discussions of bullying issues at regularly scheduled PTO meetings.

At the classroom level:

- a curriculum that promotes kindness, communication, cooperation, and friendship and includes lessons and activities stressing empathy, anger management, and conflict resolution skills.
- class rules against bullying. Rules should be brief and clear. Olweus suggests the following examples:

1. We will not bully other students.
2. We will try to help students who are bullied.
3. We will include students who might be left out.

- immediate consequences for aggressive behavior and immediate rewards for inclusive behavior. Possible sanctions include having the bully

1. apologize;
2. discuss the incident with the teacher, principal, and/or parents;
3. pay for damaged belongings;
4. spend time in the office or another classroom;
5. forfeit recess or other privileges.

- weekly meetings to communicate to students clear and consistently enforced expectations and to engage them as resources in preventing bullying behavior.
- ongoing communication with parents.

At the individual level:

- Serious talks with bullies and victims.
- Serious talks with the parents of bullies and victims.
- Role-playing of non-aggressive behavior with bullies.
- Role-playing of assertive behavior with victims.

The key components of the bullying intervention program, according to Olweus, are increased adult supervision in all areas of the school, increased consequences for bullying behavior, and a clear message that bullying will not be tolerated.

Steps for Intervening in Bullying Situations

The Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System of the London Family Court Clinic recommends the following steps for dealing with a bullying situation at school:

- Intervene immediately to stop the bullying.
- Talk to the bully and the victim separately. If more than one student is involved in bullying behavior, talk to each separately, in quick succession. (Expect bullies to minimize and deny their actions.)
- Remind the bully about school and classroom rules, reiterate what behavior is expected, and discuss sanctions that will be imposed for future bullying behavior.
- Reassure the victim that everything possible will be done to prevent a recurrence.
- Make other students aware of the consequences of the bullying behavior. Reiterate the school's policy of zero tolerance toward bullying.
- Phone the parents of both the bully and the victim as soon as possible. If possible, involve the parents in designing a plan of action.
- Continue to monitor the behavior of the bully and the safety of the victim.
- Consult administrators, teachers, and staff members to alert them to the problem and to get a better understanding of it.
- If the situation doesn't change, remove the bully -- not the victim -- from the classroom.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Olweus also recommends that for a bullying intervention program to be successful, schools must do the following:

- Place primary responsibility for solving the problem with the adults at school rather than with parents or students.
- Project a clear moral stand against bullying.
- Include both systems-oriented and individual-oriented components.
- Set long-term and short-term goals.
- Target the entire school population, not just a few problem students.
- Make the program a permanent component of the school environment, not a temporary remedial program.
- Implement strategies that have a positive effect on students and on the school climate that go beyond the problem of bullying.

Bullying behavior, according to Dr. Olweus, is evident even in preschool and the problem peaks in middle school. It's important, therefore, that bullying intervention strategies be implemented as early as possible. Even if only a small number of students are directly involved, Olweus points out, every student who witnesses bullying is affected in some way. Even students who initially sympathize with or defend victims may eventually come to view bullying as acceptable if responsible adults fail to say otherwise. Over time, ignoring -- or being ignorant of -- bullying behavior will result in a social climate that fosters bullying, fighting, truancy, and other social and learning problems in all students.

"The school," said Olweus, "has a responsibility to stop bullying behavior and create a safe learning environment for all students."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources provide additional information about the bullying prevention program developed by Dan Olweus:

- Overview of the Bullying Prevention Program - <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>
- The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, offers online information excerpted from "Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Nine: Bullying Prevention Program," by Olweus, Limber, and Mihalic.
- *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*, by Dan Olweus
- This book provides information about the results of Olweus' bullying surveys, as well as a detailed description of his school-based bullying prevention program. (To obtain a copy, contact Blackwell Publishers, c/o AIDC, P.O. Box 20, Williston, VT 05495.)

For information on how to order a teacher handbook, student questionnaire, or other materials from the Bullying Prevention Program, write: BVP-Dan Olweus, Vognstolbakken 16, N-5096 Bergen, Norway.

MORE BULLYING RESOURCES FROM EDUCATION WORLD

Education World has provided extensive coverage of the "bullying" issue as it affects your classroom and your school. Following is a sampling of the stories we've published:

- Sticks and Stones and Names Can Hurt You: De-Myth-tifying the Classroom Bully! - http://www.education-world.com/a_issues/issues102.shtml Bullies are raised in the home, but their victims are too frequently created in the classroom. Learn how what you believe about bullies can

hurt your students! Included: Ten myths about bullies, and the research that helped identify those myths!

- Stop Bullying Before It Starts! - http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin117.shtml Bullying is no longer seen as the norm in the school or the community at large, and prevention has become the name of the game. Included: Poor and good solutions to bullying.
- Bully-Proof Your School - http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin018.shtml Recognized as more than just a problem between kids, schools are called upon to put forth a team effort to end bullies' longtime reign of terror.
- Taking the Bully By the Horns - http://www.education-world.com/a_books/books107.shtml All kids know how to recognize bullies -- or do they? *Taking the Bully by the Horns*, written by Kathy Noll and Jay Carter, teaches kids how to spot a bully, how to recognize bully "games" -- and how *not* to play.
- Picture Books Help Kids Handle Anger and Bullying - http://www.education-world.com/a_books/books106.shtml This week, Education World reviews *Bullies and Gangs*, *The Ant Bully*, and *When Sophie Gets Angry -- Really, Really Angry...* These three new picture books support classroom discussions of anger, bullying, violence, and tolerance.
- Ten Web Sites for Exploring Conflict Resolution in the Classroom - http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr170.shtml Education World offers ten sites that provide a wide range of practical materials for supporting and instituting conflict resolution programs in our schools.

- One Character Education Program That Works! - http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr114.shtml Many schools, lacking the time and resources required to develop their own character education curricula, are instead turning to established programs that have proven successful in other school districts. Read about one such program -- recently adopted by schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania -- in which the whole community is involved.
- Is Character Education the Answer? - http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin097.shtml As incidents of in-school violence become more common, and strict disciplinary techniques and increased security measures fail to control the problem, many parents, educators, politicians, and social leaders are looking for reliable methods of prevention. Is character education the answer?
- Teaching Citizenship's Five Themes Activities - http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr008.shtml from the editors of Weekly Reader can help develop K-6 students' understanding of the five citizenship themes -- honesty, compassion, respect, responsibility, and courage.

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