

WHAT SCHOOLS *MUST* DO TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS BULLYING (rev. 1-15)

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School strengths and needs are assessed

- **in a comprehensive, reliable, and valid manner;**
- **do surveys, focus groups, other assessment forms;**
- **multiple stakeholder perspectives;**
- **vigorous efforts to acquire the fullest possible response;**
- **beyond sole reliance on administrator self-report or occurrence of reported bullying incidents.**

Every child has an adult in the school who knows them as a person

- **and whom the child knows has a special interest in them (cares);**
- **there are positive relations between staff and students;**
- **there are positive relations between staff, observed by students;**
- **Responsive Classroom approaches (meetings and greetings) are actively used.**

Every child is actively engaged in the school community:

- **takes part in school activities;**
- **every child engages in activities which actively support peers;**
- **every child - especially children with special needs or vulnerabilities - is engaged in activities which serve others and which children consider meaningful;**
- **school officials engage isolated children in school activities, and arrange for positive, protective peer relations;**
- **school staff create social activities for the child;**
- **take advantage of the child's strengths and interests to engage the child in new activities;**
- **SE/CD learning and activities for all students; collaborative learning, teamwork, groups.**

Every child has peers who are supportive:

- **who have a positive relationship with that child;**
- **every child has friends;**
- **peers are ‘negatively’ present when children are bullied (‘upstanders’);**
- **peers actively engage isolated children;**
- **if friendships are not ‘naturally’ present, use friendship circles or other means to create peer support;**
- **a child’s isolation is always observed and addressed (e.g., sitting alone at lunch, ongoing tensions between the child and other children, having few friends, not engaged in school social activities, sitting alone in classes with small group activity such as art);**
- **peer leaders model positive attitudes and behavior.**

All minorities have staff mentorship, support and advocacy:

- **especially when staff composition does not reflect the community;**
- **diverse clubs and activities,**
- **positive diverse education for all;**
- **school administrators and staff are actively involved in community organizations and activities;**
- **identify and actively address gaps in school-community involvement, which provides the infrastructure for student service, and for minority advocacy;**
- **the school should consult with appropriate professionals if the targeted child has special needs, or with community-based resources if a bias-pattern is observed.**

Every parent or guardian has at least one staff member who especially knows them

- **and whom the parent knows has a special interest in them (cares);**
- **a parent coordinator makes active, ongoing efforts to maximize parent involvement and connectedness;**
- **most parents attend PTC and similar meetings;**
- **parent support groups (especially for minorities, including for special needs) exist, are created as/if needed, are robust, or growth efforts are actively underway.**

The school actively communicates with parents fully when bullying occurs:

- **doesn't use confidentiality as an excuse to limit communication - unwarranted emphasis on the confidentiality of the school's interventions with the aggressor child frustrates parents;**
- **if the parents instead hear first from the child or from others (e.g., friends, other parents), it conveys the impression the school is not taking responsibility for addressing the problem;**
- **an injury to a child is inevitably also an injury to the family - the school is responsible for supportive and remedial action toward the family, as toward the child.**

The school actively communicates with the family (2):

- **incomplete information about what has occurred limits the appropriateness or effectiveness of the family's response and their support of the child;**
- **parents not well informed and supported may decide to address the problem outside of school on their own, directly with the child who bullied or that child's family;**
- **families have a reasonable need to know what has been done, in order to feel assured that their child will be safe;**
- **there should be regular, scheduled, structured appointments with the parents of bullied children, and/or with the child, to address continuing issues;**
- **school-initiated contacts with the parents after multiple incidents should be frequent;**
- **school-initiated contacts with the parents, other than form letters sent out by the school after incidents;**
- **contacts should not be primarily initiated by the parents or the child.**

Staff always responds to mean behavior:

- the response can be creative, small-scale, or just observation;
- when bullying occurs, there is an urgent, appropriate adult response;
- don't wait to react to incidents or suddenly noticed problems, proactively search for incidents and problems;
- anticipate problems, identify vulnerabilities and gaps;
- assume patterns when incidents are noted, until proven otherwise;
- patterns are commonly missed because schools over-focus on incidents, treating each incident as isolated from larger patterns;
- if a minority (or perceived minority) child was hurt, assume a culture/climate gap (e.g., inadequate support);
- the pattern may be a child's prior or ongoing victimization, or the social context (e.g., school culture and climate, community attitudes, etc.).

A school team focuses on bullying and other violence issues:

- **meeting frequently (even quarterly, while twice as much as the minimum the ABR requires, is not enough to reflect an urgent focus on the issue, especially when there is still bullying regularly occurring);**
- **expect the team to repeatedly make changes, improvements, impact;**
- **the anti-bullying specialist (per the ABR) *leads* the school safety team;**
- **the ABS has ongoing responsibilities for school culture and climate beyond investigating incidents;**
- **there is a written description of ABS duties, of which the ABS is aware;**
- **the ABS takes primary responsibility for convening processes to assess and address the overall experience of the bullied child and his family in the school.**

Ensure adequate training and ‘buy-in’ when new programs/initiatives are introduced:

- following guidelines, using/distributing materials, carrying out all steps;
- seeking a good ‘fit’, integrated into other approaches in use (“unjumbled schoolhouse”);
- program content adjusted to reflect specific setting (e.g., what types of bullying are prevalent);
- vigorously pursue ‘buy-in’, school community (primarily teachers) understands and supports the program;
- ensure sustainability – ongoing or only present for a limited time; actively assess – systematically collect data about program effects;
- don’t assume that having programs is itself an indicator that problems have been addressed - the true test of efficacy is whether bullying is reduced.

Address teacher behavior:

- **the most critical element in addressing bullying;**
- **analysis of failed anti-bullying interventions shows that lack of teacher buy-in and understanding is the major barrier to successful implementation of an anti-bullying program (Rigby);**
- **teachers fail to notice most bullying;**
- **negative teacher modeling/behavior especially corrosive, especially teacher bullying of students;**
- **ensure that teachers and other school staff (such as school nurses, coaches, aides) adequately understand and address bullying through training and support.**

Engage the school nurse:

- **assume that children who visit the school nurse multiple times, especially for diffuse complaints (headache, stomach ache) often associated with stress, or for reported incidents involving being hit, even accidentally, by other children, may be targeted;**
- **ensure that school nurses are informed of the child's social/emotional status, including history of incidents.**

Apply consequences for bullying:

- **have rubrics which describe to the school community (children as well as parents) the school's response when incidents occur and when patterns of bullying behavior are identified;**
- **the school's response, its form and intensity, is not primarily driven by child and parent preferences and demands;**
- **"zero-tolerance" approaches fail because teachers and administrators fail to administer the harsh consequences such approaches mandate to students who are popular or in majority groups (e.g., racially), while 'over-prescribing' such consequences to children with minority status (esp. race);**
- **ensure that consequences are reasonable, reasonably escalate (by frequency, severity), clear, invariable, accompanied by reflective activity;**
- **the response to each incident should not be the same even as incidents continue to occur.**

Help children who bully:

- **children not helped to become less aggressive during school years are at significant risk for future life problems, including a higher likelihood of anti-social behavior as adults, including legal problems;**
- **children who both bully and are bullied (repeatedly) need additional attention;**
- **children who hurt other children are often popular with adults;**
- **many high-social-status children bully other children (including other children of slightly lower social status);**
- **it is difficult for teachers, as well as parents, to believe that (otherwise) high-performing and/or popular children can hurt peers;**
- **if the bullying child is suspended or removed from the setting, the goal is to return the child to school, so work to help the aggressive child improve behavior, such as reflective activity or arrangements for counseling.**

Increase supervision when bullying occurs:

- **emphasize staff direct observation, especially of high-risk areas, especially at the beginning;**
- **once incidents have occurred, staff observation/monitoring must be proactive;**
- **both direct observation and obtaining collateral information are needed.**

Don't ask children (or parents) to write a report about a bullying incident:

- **this is not required by the ABR and is commonly experienced as stressful and negative by hurt children – it conveys being involved in a legal – as opposed to educational and supportive – environment;**
- **it conveys to children (and parents) that administrators have a law enforcement (rather than supportive and educational) role;**
- **children asked to write statements feel as if they – rather than the school – are ‘making the case’ or bringing accusations, their word (informal, spoken) questioned, or they are viewed as potential perpetrators, or liars.**

Don't ask targeted children to ignore, minimize or befriend:

- **most bullying does not end because the target attempts to ignore or minimize its occurrence, or befriend those who hurt them;**
- **bringing targeted children together is stigmatizing;**
- **don't ask students to work out their differences by themselves**
 - **when there is an imbalance of power, the 'working out' can only happen on terms dictated by the child with more power;**
- **don't tell targeted children and those hurting them to “stay away from each other”.**

Don't bring the targeted and targeting child together to discuss the aggression:

- **it inevitably implies that both children bear equal responsibility for the aggressive act, not true in the case of bullying;**
- **don't have children discuss their victimization experience in front of the aggressor, or publicly (in front of an authority figure) – this inevitably re-traumatizes the victim and empowers the aggressor;**
- **even if the children involved (the child hurt, the child harming) seem equal (e.g., in social or physical power), if one child is more consistently aggressive, the relationship is unequal;**
- **children often describe feeling discouraged (by staff) from complaining;**
- **don't tell children they are “sensitive” or “over-reacting” - such remarks convey a common misattribution of the violence to the victim, implying that the problem is arising or continuing because of the behavior of the child who is hurt.**

Don't assume the bullying is a 'bad family' 'bad community' (or 'bad child') problem:

- **problems most commonly arise or become problematic in school, and are attributable to school culture and climate;**
- **direction of causality is from school out to home and community, as with gang-related behavior, with school violence functioning as a major conduit for gang recruitment and retention;**
- **an inadequately controlled school environment is the major trigger for children's' weapon carrying;**
- **of course sibling problems" can often be very significant and community and societal problems exist and should be addressed;**
- **families need support.**

Get the history and context:

- **look for other children who have been hurt (by the same child);**
- **when a child is hurting other children, actively seek *their* records from other schools and programs;**
- **actively seek information about a child's previous social and emotional experiences and status;**
- **a history of vulnerability, such as minority status, loneliness, past negative peer encounters, or past victimization, is a strong indicator that a child will be at-risk in the current school setting.**

Arrange for activities to support the bullied child's interest and strengths:

- **there should be a meaningful attempt to change other students' perception of the targeted child by highlighting his or her strengths;**
- **parents often feel teachers and administrators have not sufficiently supported and engaged (as well as protected) the targeted child.**

Counseling the bullied child is not enough:

- **once a child is targeted, having access to counselors/staff is not sufficient;**
- **adult mentorship is critical - a specific staff member designated to engage with the child, become aware of his or her situation, preferences and needs and actively working to increase the child's involvement with the school;**
- **descriptions of school processes in response to incidents often state: "Follow-up counseling services will be provided." But commonly no structured counseling services are actually provided;**
- **when counseling is offered to the targeted child, it should be made clear to the child and family that the counseling is supportive because of what the child has experienced, not because the school feels the child needs to change;**
- **children should be aware that counseling is provided to children who hurt other children, to help them behave differently.**

Change of school setting is recommended to parents of bullied children as a “last resort” in order to protect children from further harm.