

# Bullying and school

[Sociology](#), [Bullying](#)



Bullying has become one of the most serious issues facing our schools today. We've all heard the sad tales of children, some as young as 11, committing suicide because they could no longer deal with the bullying they experienced in school. In July 2008, the U. S. Congress began work on legislation for H. R. 2262, the Safe School Improvement Act, which would require schools to collect data, establish disciplinary guidelines and develop a system for registering complaints to combat bullying in our schools. However, as school counselors we can't wait for laws to be passed to take action. We need to make a difference now. I started my quest to stop bullying at Midway Elementary School in Midway, Utah, six years ago. I attended conferences, read books and studied various programs. I learned a lot about the statistics and issues but little about specifically what to do. So I began taking steps to develop a program that would help my school and others combat school bullying. In my search for knowledge I discovered a fascinating study by Dr. Kenneth Merrell from the University of Oregon on the effectiveness of school bullying intervention programs. The study results showed that bully intervention programs, especially those aimed specifically at bullies, were effective in raising the level of awareness among students and staff but did little to reduce bullying behaviors. Merrell, along with others, recommend a schoolwide comprehensive approach to bully prevention. According to the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, programs cracking down on individual bullies rarely work, but when there is a schoolwide commitment to end bullying, it can be reduced by up to 50 percent. Program Framework As my program evolved over the years I identified four hallmarks of a successful schoolwide bully prevention program. Lead to systemic change: Successful

programs bring about systemic change. The factors contributing to bullying in any school environment are complex and nebulous. The only way to have an impact on these critical factors is to cast a wide net. There must be change at all levels in the school environment and in the community. You are literally changing the culture of the entire school. You need to utilize all existing programs and resources such as comprehensive school counseling programs, positive behavior interventions and supports, character education, the parent-teacher organization, schoolwide discipline programs, grade-level teams or professional learning communities and more. Garner commitment from all: Schoolwide bully prevention programs require commitment from all stakeholders. Although your school may have a small team to oversee the bully prevention program, collaboration among administrators, school counselors, teachers, students, parents, secretaries, custodians, lunch workers, librarians, bus drivers, etc. is essential for success. Teach comprehensive strategies and skills: Effective programs are comprehensive. Teaching students about specific issues related to bullying is only one aspect of an effective schoolwide program. There are many supporting concepts and social skills you also need to address, such as conflict resolution, tattling vs. reporting, respect, accepting differences, teasing, cliques, relational aggression, cooperation and more. Effective data analysis will help you identify many of these specific needs. Continue year after year: Many times schools will bring in a pre-packaged bully prevention program, have a big anti-bullying campaign, raise a lot of awareness and then call it good. Effective bully prevention programs are not a one-shot deal. Effective prevention programs are nonstop. They require intervention, data to assess

the program's effectiveness and components, and ongoing specific targeted interventions for bullies, their victims and the bystander population. Key Components Eight key components, best implemented sequentially, have led to the success of Midway Elementary's bully prevention program.

**Administrative support:** An extremely important aspect of starting a bully prevention program is soliciting the support of your school administrators. Without strong and effective leadership, systemic change is difficult. As leaders in the school, administrators should become experts on bullying issues. They should form a bully prevention team and identify a go-getter staff member to lead this team. The administrators need to develop an anti-bullying code of conduct and communicate it to all stakeholders, especially students. Most importantly, administrators should establish the tone and expectations for students and staff and outline clear and consistent consequences for students who violate the anti-bullying code of conduct. Consequences should be based on a level system for first and subsequent offenses. It is important to follow district guidelines when establishing the level system. School administrators should utilize a behavior referral system to provide valuable data. The behavior referral system should include specific information that will help provide meaningful data to identify areas of concern and needs. Administrators should involve parents of both victims and bullies, especially for repeat offenders, to discuss concerns, outline consequences and form a strategic plan to stop the bullying behaviors.

**Schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports program:** If your school doesn't have a PBIS program, I would highly recommend implementing one. Use the PBIS program to establish clear schoolwide rules.

The rules should be specific to location, taught to all students and posted throughout the school. Introduce desired behaviors, clearly teach them and then model them. Once you've taught the behaviors, reinforce student compliance using a variety of incentive programs. Use data to measure the effectiveness of your program and to identify ongoing areas of concern.

Data: I use two types of data, behavioral referral data and surveys given to students, parents and staff. Data can provide baseline information, measure the effectiveness of your program, discover areas of concern and identify chronic bullies and their victims. Online surveys will help gather subjective data to assess stakeholders' level of concern, to measure student awareness and knowledge, to solicit input from staff members and to assess parent perspectives and concerns. Office behavior referral data provide objective data for analysis. Behavior referral forms or systems should include information directly related to bullying. By regularly reviewing these data, you can identify types of bullying, locations, repeat offenders and victims. Upon identifying specific problems, bully prevention team members should develop a plan of action to deal with the issues. Staff training: All staff members should receive training to include definitions of bullying, types of bullying, effects of bullying on victims, school code of conduct and expectations, legal liability based on state law and, most importantly, how to intervene when they witness bullying incidents or a student reports it to them. Make sure your staff training includes teachers, administrators, specialists, secretaries, lunch staff, custodians, aides and bus drivers. Student awareness and education: Give all students a basic introductory lesson including definitions for bullying, types of bullying with examples,

school code of conduct and expectations, what to do when they are bullied or how to help others as bystanders. Students need to learn about the importance of speaking up and supporting each other with the skills they learn. Establish a common language for discussing bullying issues, and post it in every classroom and in key locations throughout the school. Critical social skills training: Once you've taught them the basics, students need additional information and skills to increase their level of awareness and to deal with bullying issues. At Midway Elementary, we've spent time on topics such as tattling vs. reporting, conflict resolution, teasing, relational aggression/cliques, cooperation, caring, respect and any other topics that come out of the stakeholder surveys or behavior referral data. Develop classroom guidance lessons to specifically address these needs, and teach students the skills and knowledge necessary to reduce the problem.

Targeted interventions for bullies and victims: Data analysis will help you identify chronic bullies and their victims. These students most likely will need highly targeted interventions and supports. When it comes to intervention for bullies there is no silver bullet. The factors contributing to the reasons why children bully others are complex and often almost impossible to identify. Research also suggests that interventions such as out-of-school suspension, peer mediation and group counseling for bullies aren't effective. Effective interventions include individual counseling/education on issues such as developing empathy; perspective taking; social skills training; anger management; conflict resolution; and identification of psychological disorders such as ADHD, depression and anxiety. Teaching bullies pro-social leadership roles and opportunities for self-competence and success may also

be useful. Behavioral strategies such as behavior contracts, check-in/check-out programs, parent meetings, etc. may also be required to facilitate change. It is also important to provide intervention for repeat victims, especially chronic victims. Interventions may include providing an adult advocate, individual or group counseling, social skills training, peer support, structured recess, etc. You may need to refer some students to outside help for more therapeutic interventions to address self-esteem issues, depression and anxiety. Program generalization: Once you've taught pro-social behaviors in the classroom, you need to generalize these newly acquired behaviors to various conditions and situations. An effective PBIS program is a great way to teach, model and reinforce desired behaviors. Give appropriate incentives to students who demonstrate the desired behaviors along with verbal praise providing specific examples of why the student is being rewarded. Other program generalization ideas may include: \* Posters placed in key locations throughout the school to remind students and staff about the bullying code of conduct and a schoolwide common language. \* Buttons worn by both students and staff as a symbol of the school's commitment to stop bullying. \* Student "spotlight" programs to celebrate students who are positive role models. \* Assemblies and student pledges to kick off the school year and to promote school commitment or unity. \* Parent and community education via parent/teacher conferences, parent newsletters, school Web sites, community newspaper articles, PTA and community council meetings. School bullying and hazing issues are complex and multifaceted. They require a comprehensive approach to increase the probability of addressing many of the contributing factors. School counselors are in a unique position

to promote a comprehensive approach because of their training and expertise in the social and emotional wellness of children and adolescents. School counselors who are trained in the ASCA National Model are familiar with the use of data to drive programs and the delivery of interventions. School counselors understand the importance of early intervention and prevention to promote positive outcomes in behavior and academics. Systemic change requires leadership and, as John Quincy Adams said, " If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. " Be a leader in your school, and do something to combat our national bullying and hazing epidemic. [http://www.ascaschoolcounselor.org/article\\_content.asp?article=1215](http://www.ascaschoolcounselor.org/article_content.asp?article=1215) Parents can play a central role to preventing bullying and stopping it when it happens. Here are a few things you can do. \* Teach kids to solve problems without using violence and praise them when they do. \* Give children positive feedback when they behave well to help their build self-esteem. Help give them the self-confidence to stand up for what they believe in. \* Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about school, social events, their classmates, and any problems they have. \* Take bullying seriously. Many kids are embarrassed to say they have been bullied. You may only have one chance to step in and help. \* If you see any bullying, stop it right away, even if your child is the one doing the bullying. \* Encourage your child to help others who need it. \* Don't bully your children or bully others in front of them. Many times kids who are bullied at home react by bullying other kids. If your children see you hit, ridicule, or gossip about someone else, they are also more likely to do so themselves. \* Support



bully prevention programs in your child's school. If your school doesn't have one, consider starting one with other parents, teachers, and concerned adults. When Your Child Is Bullied Many kids are embarrassed to be bullied and may not tell their parents or another adult right away. If your child comes to you and asks for help with a bully, take it seriously. Many times, if kids aren't taken seriously the first time they ask for help, they don't ask again. Even if your child doesn't turn to you for help, you can watch for these warning signs that he or she is being bullied. Kids who are bullied often experience \* Withdrawal \* A loss of friends \* A drop in grades \* A loss of interest in activities he or she previously enjoyed \* Torn clothing \* Bruises \* A need for extra money or supplies If you think your child is being bullied or if your child has told you that he or she is being bullied, you can help.

Parents are often the best resource to build a child's self-confidence and teach him or her how to best solve problems. Here are a few ways you can help \* Talk to your child's teacher about it instead of confronting the bully's parents. If the teacher doesn't act to stop the bullying, talk to the principal. \* Teach your child nonviolent ways to deal with bullies, like walking away, playing with friends, or talking it out. \* Help your child act with self-confidence. With him or her, practice walking upright, looking people in the eye, and speaking clearly. \* Don't encourage your child to fight. This could lead to him or her getting hurt, getting in trouble, and beginning more serious problems with the bully. \* Involve your child in activities outside of school. This way he or she can make friends in a different social circle. Some children seem to be bullied all the time, while others rarely get picked on. Why do some kids seem to attract all of the bullies? Kids who are bullied

often \* Are different from other kids, whether by size, race, sexually, or have different interests \* Seem weak, either physically or emotionally \*

Are insecure \* Want approval \* Won't tell on their bullies

When Your Child Is a Bully It's hard for any parent to believe that their child is a bully, but sometimes it happens. But just because your child bullies doesn't mean that he or she will bully forever. Parents are one of the best resources to help their child stop bullying and start interacting positively with their classmates. Your child may bully if, he or she \* Lacks empathy and doesn't sympathize with others \* Values aggression \* Likes to be in charge \* Is an arrogant winner and a sore loser \* Often fights often with brothers and sisters \* Is impulsive

What you can do to stop your child from bullying \* Take it seriously. Don't treat bullying as a passing phase. Even if you're not worried about long-lasting effects on your child, another child is being hurt. \* Talk to your child to find out why he or she is bullying. Often, children bully when they feel sad, angry, lonely, or insecure and many times major changes at home or school may bring on these feelings. \* Help build empathy for others and talk to your child about how it feels to be bullied. \* Ask a teacher or a school counselor if your child is facing any problems at school, such as if your child is struggling with a particular subject or has difficulty making friends. Ask them for advice on how you and your child can work through the problem. \* Ask yourself if someone at home is bullying your child. Often, kids who bully are bullied themselves by a parent, family member, or another adult. <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/bullying/what-parents-can-do> How can parents help to prevent bullying at their child's school? \* Talk with and listen to your kids - every day. Research shows that approximately half the

children who have been bullied never tell their parents about it. Children are often too ashamed of themselves to tell anyone; sometimes they feel that no one can help, not even their parents. 1 \* Spend time at school and recess. Research shows that 67% of bullying happens when adults are not present. Whether you can volunteer once a week or once a month, you can make a real difference just by showing up. \* Be a good example of kindness and leadership. Your kids learn a lot about power relationships from watching you. Any time you speak to another person in a hurtful or abusive way, you're teaching your child that bullying is ok. \* Learn the signs. If you suspect that your child might be bullied, talk with your child's teacher or find ways to observe his or her peer interactions to determine whether or not your suspicions might be correct. \* Create healthy anti-bullying habits early. Help develop anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits early in your children, as early as kindergarten. Coach your children what not to do - hitting, pushing, teasing, being mean to others. Equally if not more importantly, teach your children what to do - kindness, empathy, fair play, and turn-taking are critical skills for good peer relations. \* Help your child's school address bullying effectively. Whether your children have been bullied or not, you should know what their school is doing to address bullying. Research shows that " zero-tolerance" policies aren't effective. What works better are ongoing educational programs that help create a healthy social climate in the school. \* Establish household rules about bullying. Your children need to hear from you explicitly that it's not normal, okay, or tolerable for them to bully, to be bullied, or to stand by and watch other kids be bullied. If your child is bullying, you can help him or her find other ways to

exert their personal power, status, and leadership at school. Work with your child, his or her teachers, and the principal to implement a kindness plan at school. \* Teach your child how to be a good witness. Children can often effectively diffuse a bullying situation by yelling “ Stop! You’re bullying! ” Must bullies stop within 10 seconds when someone tells him or her to stop. \* Spread the word that bullying should not be a normal part of childhood. Some adults hesitate to act when they observe or hear about bullying because they think of bullying as a typical phase of childhood that must be endured. It is important for everyone to understand that all forms of bullying - physical, verbal, social (gossip, rumors, exclusion from the group), and cyberbullying are NOT a normal part of childhood. \* Adults (teachers and parent volunteers) in the classroom should be aware of class social structures. Which children typically affiliate together? Which children are leaders and socially influential? Which children are socially marginalized? Purposefully pairing and grouping children so that children who bully and those who are victims can work together helps to prevent bullying outside the classroom. <http://www.education.com/reference/article/help-prevent-bullying-at-school/>