

The importance of bullying prevention



Introduction

Bullying can negatively impact children's social, emotional, physical, and psychological development, both in the short term and long term. This bullying behavior not only affects the victim, but also the bystanders; and though many might not believe it, the bully too. It is no longer understood as a simple act of physical or emotional aggression, but a complicated set of predatory behaviors and attitudes that manifest themselves in all facets of the child's life. The invention of the internet has allowed the bullies behaviors to have no bounds, creating a whole new host of issues for the aggrieved party and his/her family. In short, bullying has become a national crisis, and steps must be taken immediately if we are to combat this growing menace among our school age populations.

There has been a tremendous amount of research on this topic, and as a result, there are many anti-bullying programs which have been developed to address this ever growing problem that affects so many in our schools today. Schools can play a critical role in the reduction of bullying and its negative impact upon the child, family and friends.

Bullying is not just part of growing up as was long believed with the oft quoted line, " oh, it's just boys being boys." Clearly, it is not something that children should have to just deal with; it's not a rite of passage nor something that one should have to endure as part of our educational process. In order to create and maintain a safe learning environment for all children where they can thrive and reach their full potential, it is imperative

that school districts intervene and work toward reducing bullying in all its manifestations.

Bullying

Definition:

According to the official United States government website, Stopbullying.gov, bullying is defined as:

unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real

or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to

be repeated, over time. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include—

- An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Types of Bullying:

There are typically three types of bullying. One type is verbal, which includes actions such as teasing, threatening, and name calling. Another type is

relational/social, which can have a negative impact on a person's reputation. This may include spreading rumors, intentional exclusion, or embarrassing someone. Finally, there is physical bullying, which could include harm to a person or their property.

Bullying can occur before, during, or after school, in person, or online. Some specific examples of bullying include children being teased about their clothes or their physical appearance, children intentionally excluding someone from a recess game, or a child being tripped, pushed or beaten. In recent years, cyberbullying, which is defined as “ willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices”(“ Bullying Statistics”, n. d.) has become much more prevalent. Now, there really is no end to the potential opportunities for bullying.

At-Risk Students:

Any child can be the victim of bullying, however children who are bullied tend to have certain risk factors. They are often less popular or may not have many friends. They may be depressed, anxious, or have poor self esteem. Often children who are bullied are viewed as different, perhaps due to being overweight, being new to school, wearing attire that doesn't fit the norm, or being from a different culture. They may be perceived as irritating, obnoxious, or attention seeking. These students may also have a physical or mental handicap. These risk factors are not a guarantee that a child will be bullied, but it puts them at much greater risk because they are perceived as weak, and unable to defend themselves(“ What is Bullying”, n. d.)

Prevalence:

<https://assignbuster.com/the-importance-of-bullying-prevention/>

The federal government began its efforts against bullying behavior in 2005 by collecting data regarding bullying in schools. In fact, bullying has become such a widespread problem that it is now considered to be a significant public health issue impacting children worldwide (Shetgiri, 2017). As expected, reports vary greatly on the incidence of bullying, with some indicating that that rates range anywhere from nine to ninety-eight percent (“Bullying Statistics”, n. d.). However, according to the Pacer’s National Bullying Prevention Center and Stopbullying. org websites, between twenty and thirty percent of school-aged children have been a victim of bullying. Unfortunately, the incidence is likely even greater as children often do not always report when they have been bullied, often due to reasons such as fear of retribution or the social stigma attached.

Short and Long Term Effects:

Children who are bullied have the potential for both short term and long term mental and physical health problems. Being a victim of bullying often impacts a child’s health and well-being. Short-term effects can include low self-esteem, increased anxiety, depression, and sleep difficulties.

Bullied students often show an unwillingness to attend school, and this impacts their academic performance. According to the 2017 article, Bullying and Children’s Academic Performance, being a victim of bullying is associated with lower test scores in math and reading. Studies show that over 160, 000 children don’t go to school each day due to a fear of being bullied (Loveless, 2018). Victims are also twice as likely to suffer from stomachaches and headaches (“Bullying Statistics”, n. d.). “Nearly 75% of

school shootings have been directly linked to harassment and bullying (Loveless, 2018). This increase in school shootings across the United States is further evidence of the consequences of bullying. It is evident that bullying has a tremendous impact on children's education process.

In recent years, there has been an increase in childhood suicides, and although other factors are often present, being a victim of bullying plays a role as well ("Bullying Statistics", n. d.). Children who have been bullied often continue to have mental health problems throughout their education. "Being bullied is shown to be a significant predictor of depression an average of seven years later, even after controlling for other major childhood risks" (Fox, 2012).

Research also shows a correlation between a child being a bully, and an increase in aggressive and violent behavior, rule breaking, and a higher incidence of delinquency. Additionally, studies show a higher rate of involvement in illegal activity as an adult; "A systematic review of bullying and its effect on later criminal behavior suggest that school bullying perpetration is a significant predictor of offending, an average of nearly six years in the future" (Fox, 2012).

Bullying can also affect the entire school population, as well as the culture and climate of the building. Even those students who are not bullied often witness bullying behavior, and it can disrupt the learning process for many students. Over 70% of students say that bullying is a problem in their school (Loveless, 2018). According to Bullying Statistics (n. d.), even those children who observe bullying behavior can have an increased risk of

adverse mental health issues. Clearly the impact of bullying is far reaching and the effect on children is often life-changing with potentially devastating consequences.

Anti-Bullying Laws and Policies:

The federal government does not have any anti-bullying laws, and therefore bullying would not be a federal violation unless it was identified as harassment. However, almost all of the states have passed some kind of anti-bullying legislation (Loveless, 2018). School districts often have anti-bullying policies in place as well, and it seems to fall on the schools to actually carry out the work to decrease the incidence of bullying. It is clear that the responsibility falls on schools to put measures into place to help to combat bullying.

Bullying Prevention

There are numerous avenues to address the growing problem of bullying, and they come with mixed reviews. Zero-tolerance policies are often enforced with the hope that children will get a clear message that bullying will not be accepted, however research does not support this method as it does not reduce the problem, and can even make the problem worse. There are numerous anti-bullying programs available, but in order to be effective, there must be certain components in place to help increase the effectiveness of the program (Morgan, 2012):

Educators need to understand that implementing an effective anti-bullying

program is not a simple task that can be fulfilled in a single session, but rather

must be a prolonged and detailed effort involving all members of the school community in order to change the culture of bullying. (Morgan, 2012, p 177).

Research has shown that if a school implements a stand-alone bullying prevention program, which focuses on addressing the harmful effects of bullying and how to help those who are bullied, the program will likely be ineffective (Good, 2011). These stand-alone programs are based on the belief that if supervision is increased, bullies are identified and then subsequently punished, the incidence of bullying will decline. However, they have been shown to actually increase reports of bullying behavior (Good, 2011). These stand-alone programs are also often in response to a bullying problem, so they tend to be more reactive than proactive. When a bully prevention program's focus is on educating all children how to utilize social skills without bullying, teach specific skills if they are confronted by a bully, as well as changing the climate and the culture of the school, which may inadvertently promote bullying behaviors, it will likely succeed in reducing the prevalence of bullying.

Bully Prevention Programs:

One program that has proven to be successful in Finland is the anti-bullying program, KiVa. In a recent meta-analysis of 53 anti-bullying programs worldwide, KiVa was found to be the most effective (Wolpert, 2016). The evaluation of this program indicates that it improved the students'

perception of the school environment, it helped to improve depression and other mental health issues, as well as improved self-esteem among the students who had been bullied. This program includes role playing to increase the bystanders' empathy and fosters discussions for effective methods to help students intervene in the event that they are a witness to bullying. It does not include a zero-tolerance policy, but instead focuses on helping students be kinder to one another (Wolpert, 2016).

One particular anti-bullying program has gained a lot of national attention and seems to be more effective than the others. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is being used in over 6, 000 schools across the United States and other countries with notable results (Morgan, 2012).

The Olweus program is built on four basic principles. Adults should: (a) show warmth and positive interest in students; (b) set firm limits to unacceptable behavior; (c) Use consistent positive consequences to acknowledge and reinforce appropriate behaviors and non-physical, non-hostile consequences when rules are broken; and (d) function as authorities and positive role models. (Limber, S. P., Olweus, D., Wang, W., Masiello, M., & Breivik, K., 2018).

This program uses a comprehensive approach that has multiple schoolwide components and includes individuals, classrooms and the community (Limber et al., 2018,). Each of these eight components play a key role geared at decreasing the incidence of bullying. Training for both teachers and parents play a significant role as well (Fox, 2012). It's important for families to be educated about what signs to look for in a child who may be being

bullied, as well as ways to handle these situations. The duration of the program, as well as the intensity of the program, are key factors that significantly decrease the number of students who are victims of bullying (Fox, 2012).

In one study, the schools that used the Olweus Bullying Prevention program in Virginia reported significant changes in the incidence of bullying behaviors. There was a decrease of 63 percent in the frequency of students being bullied, as well as a 75 percent decrease in children bullying others (Morgan, 2012). There was also a significant increase in the amount of time teachers spent preventing bullying, and addressing bullying behaviors. In addition, the “ Virginia schools using the program reported a growth in academic achievement” (Morgan, 2012). The Olweus Bullying Prevention program succeeded in helping the Virginia schools decrease bullying and as a result, improve student learning.

A comprehensive study of The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was conducted by researchers at Clemson University and the University of Bergen in Norway over a two year period and included almost 70, 000 students in 210 schools in Pennsylvania (Staton, 2018). The results demonstrated a clear reduction in reports of students being victims of bullying, as well as the number of children bullying others (Staton, 2018).

Dan Olweus, the creator of The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, was quoted as saying, “ This study clearly shows that bullying prevention can positively affect behaviors and perceptions of all students of all ages.”

Olweus also indicates that “... the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is not

a program in a narrow sense, but rather a collection of research-based components that form a unified whole-school approach to bullying” (Staton, 2018). It is the involvement of the entire school community that makes the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program so effective, and this program must be used to fidelity in order to have the desired effect (Limber et al., 2018).

Conclusion

In a perfect world, no child would ever be bullied, and schools would be a safe place where teachers can simply focus on educating children. However, it is evident that bullying has become a nationwide public health crisis, and it is the responsibility of all members of the school community to work toward reducing, and hopefully eliminating, the incidence of bullying in our schools.

Research has shown that there are both short and long term effects on children who are victims of bullying, children who witness bullying, and the bullies themselves. Schools must take steps to address this growing problem; many are implementing bullying prevention programs to combat this crisis. It is important to consider that there are certain components that greatly impact the effectiveness of the implementation of a bully prevention program. “ The best schools are those that have a positive culture and ethos – with expectations and rules of engagement spelt out for pupils. These schools respect individual differences, give time to develop empathy, and take responsibility for preventing bullying” (Seager-Smith, 2012). All children are entitled to a safe learning environment, and educational leaders have the responsibility to implement programs that will help to reduce the incidence of bullying in schools. If there are no interventions, there will

continue to be victims who suffer as they fall prey to children who have been given a license to bully (Morgan, 2012). This is not risk that anyone should be willing to take. Bullying prevention must be addressed in all schools in order to help our most precious resource, our children, reach their full potential.

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