



# The Challenge

A Publication of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

## Bullying Prevention in the School

### *Research-Based Strategies for Educators*

Children learn best when they feel safe, secure, and respected. But significant numbers of students across the country are targets of bullying by their peers. Bullying is serious business. Once thought to be simply an unpleasant rite of passage, bullying can actually result in long-term social, academic, psychological, and physical consequences.

A recent study of school shootings shows just how serious bullying can be. Conducted by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service, the Safe

School Initiative was an extensive examination of 41 individuals who had committed 37 incidents of targeted school violence. The goal of the Initiative was to better understand and ultimately prevent future school-based attacks.

Researchers examined investigative, school, court, and mental health records and conducted in-depth interviews with 10 of the attackers in order to gain insight into their motives, life circumstances, relationships with others, and other information that could be useful

in understanding their pre-incident thinking and behavior.

One of the key findings of the Safe School Initiative was that many attackers had felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the event. Bullying was not a factor in every case, and clearly not every child who is bullied in school will pose a risk for targeted school violence. However, in a number of the incidents studied, attackers described being bullied in terms that suggested that these experiences approached torment.

For example, in one case, most of the attacker's schoolmates described him as "the kid everyone teased." In witness statements from that incident, schoolmates alleged that nearly every child in the

school had at some point thrown the attacker against a locker, tripped him in the hall, held his head under water in the pool, or thrown things at him. Several schoolmates noted that the boy acted differently in the days preceding the attack, seeming more annoyed by and less tolerant of the teasing than usual.

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The prevalence of bullying found in this and other recent studies highlights the importance of efforts to prevent and reduce bullying in America's schools. Educators can play a key role in ensuring that schools not only do not permit bullying but also empower students to let adults know if other students are being bullied.

### What Is Bullying?

According to Dr. Dan Olweus, one of the world's leading authorities on bullies and their victims, a student is being bullied when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.

A negative action is an intentional, aggressive behavior that can be either physical—such as hitting, kicking, or pushing—or indirect, such as name-calling or shunning. For these acts to be defined as bullying, an imbalance of power must exist between the bully and the victim.

In short, for an action to be defined as bullying it must:

- ▶ be intentional,
- ▶ be repeated over time, and
- ▶ occur in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power.

### How Common Is Bullying?

Bullying is widespread. According to a survey funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, bullying affects nearly one in every three American schoolchildren in grades six through ten.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 25, 2001), is the first large-scale national study to document the actual extent of bullying in the U.S.

Almost 30 percent of the 15,686 public school students surveyed for the study reported occasional or frequent involvement in bullying, either as a bully, a victim, or both. Boys were more likely than girls to be both bullies and targets of bullying. (See *Survey Findings*, p.3.)

### How Can Bullying Be Stopped?

Research and experience suggest that comprehensive efforts that involve teachers and other school staff, students, parents, and community members are likely to be more effective than purely classroom-based approaches.

One successful program that uses such comprehensive methods is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, which has been recognized as a model program by both the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

The program uses a combination of school-wide interventions, classroom-level interventions, and individual-level interventions. (See *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, p.4.)

The goal of the program is to create a social environment that is characterized by warmth

and positive adult involvement, firm limits for unacceptable behavior, consistent use of sanctions for rule violations, and a recognition that adults are the authorities.

Scientific evaluations have shown that students who participated in the program reported a 30 to 70 percent reduction in being bullied and bullying others. Evaluations also have shown significant reductions in student reports of general antisocial behavior such as vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy, and significant improvements in classroom order and discipline.

Schools and communities across the country are using this and other programs to address the causes and consequences of bullying. Recently, *The Challenge* had an opportunity to check in with several school districts to find out what they are doing to reduce and prevent bullying and to create positive school climates. Following are some examples of what we found.

### Mesa County, Colorado

Colorado has legislated that schools and districts must have policies in place to address bullying as part of their school safety plans. In response to this legislation, Mesa County Valley School District #51 has designed several initiatives to prevent and reduce bullying while strengthening students' relationships and feelings of school connectedness.

Mesa County is offering a series of staff/parent trainings on the use of science-based programs, policies, and practices to reduce and prevent bullying. The school district is also using the Peace Builders Program to build student skills. The goal is to engage students in strengthening social skills that can neutralize or prevent bullying behaviors and create new social cultures. Mesa County has focused on fostering connectedness between children and adults, building relationships through service-learning, and developing peer mentoring programs at the high school level.



Students, parents, and staff have responded positively to the program, expressing that they feel involved in the planning process, and that they believe that the multiple strategies approach is making a difference.

### San Diego, California

San Diego County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Rudy Castruita has made school safety a top priority. Recognizing the link between bullying, victimization, and various forms of school violence, Dr. Castruita and the San Diego County Office of Education have undertaken a major effort to train personnel from the county's 42 school districts in research-based strategies that contribute to bullying reduction and prevention.

During the past two years, school personnel, community group leaders, after-school program coordinators, child care providers, and parents have attended workshops that focus on the relationship between bullying behaviors and school climate. The workshops have included information about bullies, victims, and bystanders, and have presented practical steps that schools and other groups can take to work collaboratively to address the problem of bullying.

Particular attention has been paid to bringing the most up-to-date research about bullying and school violence prevention to schools in San Diego. As a result of these trainings, schools have begun

to take action and implement various science-based strategies to improve and strengthen school policies and practices.

### York, Pennsylvania

The Spring Grove Area School District, a semi-rural school district located near York, Pennsylvania, has been successfully implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Using a comprehensive approach, the school district ensures that adults are visible and accessible to students throughout the school day. A strict anti-bullying policy is posted throughout hallways and classrooms. Teachers, principals, guidance counselors, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers all undergo training. Students are taught team-building skills, and a bullying prevention committee meets monthly to sustain the program.

Data from an annual confidential student survey confirms that the district's efforts are working. The latest survey shows a 21 percent reduction in bullying over the previous year, and a 66 percent increase in students who believe that another student will try to stop a bullying incident.

According to Donna Hake, Spring Grove's director of pupil services, the program has answered a real need for the district. "Ultimately, our responsibility is to provide a safe, nurturing environment for students to come to each day so that they can achieve their fullest potential," she said.

## Survey Findings

### Bullying Widespread in U.S. Schools

More than 16 percent of U.S. schoolchildren say they have been bullied by other students, according to a survey funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

Another 13 percent of students say they have bullied other students, but have not been victims of bullying themselves. The study appears in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 25, 2001).

The NICHD researchers surveyed 15,686 public, private, and parochial school students across the country in grades six through ten. The children were asked to complete a questionnaire that asked how often they either bullied other students or were the target of bullying behavior.

In all, a total of 29.9 percent of the students surveyed reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying, either as a bully (13.0 percent), one

who was bullied (10.6 percent), or both (6.3 percent).

Bullying occurred most frequently in sixth through eighth grades, with little variation between urban, suburban, town, and rural areas. Males were both more likely to bully others and more likely to be victims of bullying than were females.

The study's authors reported that both bullies and their victims were more likely to have difficulty adjusting to their environment both socially and psychologically. In addition, bullies were more likely to be involved in other problem behaviors such as smoking and drinking alcohol.

The NICHD is part of the National Institutes of Health, the biomedical research arm of the Federal government. For more information, visit the NICHD Web site at [www.nichd.nih.gov](http://www.nichd.nih.gov).

### Steps for Educators

Clearly, there is no "silver bullet" for preventing bullying or other forms of violence at school. But a comprehensive approach shows the most promise in helping to create a safe school environment that will help children grow academically and socially.

Before implementing any efforts to address bullying or

other violence at school, educators should keep the following points in mind:

- ▶ Ideally, these efforts should begin early—as children transition into kindergarten—and continue throughout a child's formal education.
- ▶ Effective programs require strong leadership and an ongoing commitment from school personnel.

# Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

## At-a-Glance

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a multi-level, multi-component, school-based program designed to prevent or reduce bullying in elementary, middle, and junior high schools. It uses a combination of school-wide interventions, classroom-level interventions, and individual-level interventions.

### School-Wide Interventions

- ▶ Distribution of anonymous student questionnaire on bullying
- ▶ Formation of an anti-bullying coordinating committee
- ▶ Training of all staff
- ▶ Effective adult supervision during recess and lunch times
- ▶ Posting of school rules against bullying

### Classroom-Level Interventions

- ▶ Class meetings with students about bullying and consequences of violating school rules
- ▶ Meetings with class parents about bullying and its consequences

### Individual-Level Interventions

- ▶ Individual meetings with bullies
- ▶ Individual meetings with victims of bullying
- ▶ Meetings with parents of all involved students
- ▶ Development of individual intervention plans
- ▶ Evaluations of the program, including one evaluation of 10 schools in Oslo, Norway, have proven results, including:
  - ▶ A 30 to 70 percent reduction in bully/victim problems among various age groups
  - ▶ Significant reductions in student reports of antisocial behavior (e.g., vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy)
  - ▶ Significant improvements in classroom order and discipline
  - ▶ More positive attitudes toward schoolwork and school

For additional program details and contact information, please visit the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Model Programs Web site at [www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov](http://www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov) or call 1-877-773-8546 (toll-free).

- ▶ Staff development and training are essential to sustain programs.
- ▶ Programs should be developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive to student diversity issues.
- ▶ Parental and community involvement in the planning and execution of such programs is critical.
- ▶ When considering use of a given curriculum or program to eliminate bullying, educators and administrators should be sure to request from the publisher evaluation data and names of persons to contact for information about the program's effectiveness, procedures, and materials.

By creating schools with a culture of connection, teachers and administrators can establish a foundation for pro-social behavior and build a safe climate that promotes respect for all members of the school community.

### Suggested Resources

*The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States.* (U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education, 2002). To order, call 1-877-4ED-PUBS or download the report at [www.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS/publications.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS/publications.html).

*Preventing Bullying: A Manual for Schools and Communities.* A U.S. Department of Education pamphlet. To order, call 1-877-4ED-PUBS.

## School Rules

### Against Bullying

- ▶ We will not bully others.
- ▶ We will try to help students who are bullied.
- ▶ We will make it a point to include students who are easily left out.
- ▶ When we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

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# Learn More About Bullying

## Frequently Asked Questions



**Q** Haven't kids been bullying each other for generations? Why are we focusing on the issue now?

**A** Kids have been bullying each other for generations, but that doesn't make it right. The difference today is that we know just how harmful it can be. Bullying often leads to greater and prolonged violence. Not only does it harm its intended victims, but it also negatively affects the climate of schools and the opportunities for all students to learn and achieve in school.

**Q** Is bullying something that only boys engage in?

**A** No. Both boys and girls engage in bullying, but they often use different means. Research shows that boys are twice as likely to use physical and verbal bullying as girls. Girls, however, are more likely to use social isolation and exclusion from the group as a form of bullying.

**Q** Are there any promising bullying prevention programs?

**A** Yes. Several prevention programs have been scientifically evaluated and proven to be successful. One is the Olweus Prevention Program, described on page 4. Another is the Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders Program discussed on page 7.

**Q** What can happen to someone who has been bullied?

**A** The consequences can be serious. In addition to physical harm, students who have been bullied may lose or fail to develop self-esteem, experience feelings of isolation, and may become withdrawn or depressed. Fear may lead to absenteeism, truancy, or dropping out. Victims of bullying are more likely than non-victims to grow up being socially anxious and insecure, displaying more symptoms of depression than those who were not victimized as children.

**Q** What are schools doing about bullying?

**A** A great deal. Many states, such as Colorado, Georgia, New Hampshire, and Vermont, now have laws mandating that schools have anti-bullying policies in place. Schools employ a variety of approaches to prevent and reduce bullying. See pages 2-3 to read about what some schools across the country are doing.

**Q** What can parents do if their child is bullied?

**A** Parents should call the school if their child is involved in a bullying conflict and work collaboratively with school personnel to address the problem. They should offer support to their child, but not encourage depen-

dence on adults that can undermine their self-confidence. Parents should never encourage a child to strike back. Instead, they should teach children to be assertive. A bully is often looking for an indication that his/her tactics are working. Tears or passive acceptance only reinforces the bully's behavior.

**Q** What can students do about bullying?

**A** Students may not know what to do when they observe a classmate being bullied or experience such victimization themselves. Teach them to seek immediate help from an adult and to report bullying incidents to school personnel. Encourage them to offer support to victims when they see them being bullied, and to express disapproval of bullying behavior by not joining in the laughter, teasing, or gossip.

**Q** Are schools' efforts working?

**A** Research shows that when schools employ comprehensive efforts that include school-wide interventions, classroom activities, individual interventions, and community activities, they are more likely to be effective than when they simply use purely classroom-based approaches.

**Q** What can parents do generally about bullying?

**A** The best protection parents can offer is to foster their children's self-confidence and independence and to be willing to take action when needed. Teach children that respect is a basic right: all children are entitled to courteous and respectful treatment. Parents should model kind and respectful behavior toward others.

# Palm Beach County Teaches Students to “Keep Cool”

## *Success with Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders*

The Palm Beach County school district in West Palm Beach, Florida, is implementing *Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders: Thinking and Acting to Prevent Violence (AVB)*, a 12-session program designed for use with students in grades 6 through 9. The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools has recognized AVB as a promising program.

AVB aims to prevent or reduce violence by altering patterns of thought and action that lead individuals

to become involved in violence as either aggressors, victims, or bystanders. The program encourages young people to examine their roles as aggressors, victims, and bystanders and helps them develop problem-solving skills and new ways of responding to conflict.

Developed by Dr. Ron Slaby, the program uses the four-step Think-First model of conflict resolution. Students are taught to:

- ▶ keep cool,
- ▶ size up the situation,
- ▶ think it through, and
- ▶ do the right thing.

This model provides students with a framework for changing the habits of thought that can result in violence.

One unique aspect of the Palm Beach County program is the use of police officers as teachers for the program. The district conducts a training program periodically, teaching officers how to conduct each lesson and manage a classroom. Supplemental training continues throughout the year.

According to Sandy Cunningham, coordinator of Palm Beach County's AVB program, the school district is experiencing great success with the program: “The officers have different relationships with

the students than they ever had before. Now, kids will approach officers on the street and tell them about an issue or conflict they need help with. The students see the officers as people who care.”

The district currently implements AVB in the 6th grade in almost all of its 28 middle schools. To reinforce the learning, a supplemental 7th grade curriculum and a new CD-ROM entitled “Bullying: Bystanders Can Make a Difference” also have been developed.

“This program works,” says Cunningham. “We observe the students using the Think-First model in the classroom and in their daily lives. They've changed their approach to conflict.”

For more information about the *Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders* program, see p.7.

For information about violence prevention efforts in Palm Beach County, contact Sandy Cunningham or Chief James P. Kelly at (561) 434-8435, or visit the following Web sites:

- ▶ [www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/schoolpolice](http://www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/schoolpolice)
- ▶ [www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/SafeSchools/indexexpl.htm](http://www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/SafeSchools/indexexpl.htm)



# National Bullying Prevention Campaign

## *New Multi-Year Campaign Targets Tweens*

The Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Bureau is developing a new national bullying prevention campaign designed to reach tweens—9- through 13-year-old youth—and the adults who shape their world. The campaign will launch in October 2003.

This multi-year public awareness and prevention effort is the largest campaign ever designed to reach 9- through 13-year-old youth to help prevent bullying. The Campaign will include advice from young people,

public service announcements, online materials, bullying prevention resource kits, and a national launch event. It will employ a cast of animated characters to depict bullying scenarios and their resolutions in entertaining “Webisodes” on the Web site. The characters also will appear in the public service announcements.

The Campaign messages will be developed based on up-to-date research on bullying and will be culturally sensitive relevant to the target audiences.

The Campaign also will include outreach to a variety of potential partners, including

educators, community-based organizations, and media representatives.

HRSA's Maternal and Child Health Bureau is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This project is part of the congressionally funded National Youth Media Campaign.

To learn more about this effort, contact Captain Stephanie Bryn, HRSA's director of injury and violence prevention programs, at (301) 443-6091 or e-mail [Sbryn@hrsa.gov](mailto:Sbryn@hrsa.gov).

## Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders

### At-a-Glance

*Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders: Thinking and Acting to Prevent Violence (AVB)* encourages young people to examine their roles as aggressors, victims, and bystanders and to develop new ways of responding to conflict.

The 12-session curriculum, which targets students in grades 6 through 9, was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education's Expert Panel on Safe, Disciplined,

and Drug-Free Schools as a promising program.

The backbone of the curriculum is the four-step Think-First model of conflict resolution. The model helps students pause and keep cool, understand what is going on before jumping to conclusions, define their problems and goals in ways that will not lead to violence, and generate positive solutions.

The program has been field-tested with nearly 700 students

in urban, suburban, and small-city school districts. Evaluations of the curriculum found that, as compared to a control group, students who participated in the program demonstrated the following characteristics:

- ▶ increased beliefs that aggression is not a desirable response to conflict
- ▶ increased attempts to avoid violence and seek relevant information

- ▶ increased intentions to resolve conflicts without aggression
- ▶ decreased bystander acceptance and encouragement of aggression

For additional program details, contact:  
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A Publication of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools.

The Challenge provides critical information and resources to assist schools in creating safe and healthy environments for young people. It is published by Learning Systems Group under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools.

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools is the Federal government's primary vehicle for reducing drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, and violence, through education and prevention activities in our nation's schools. Visit them online at [www.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSDFS).

Expressions of opinion in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Education or Learning Systems Group.

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We encourage reproduction and distribution of this publication.

### Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do

(Olweus, 1993.) This book gives an overview of bullying problems and outlines the key elements of a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention. To order, call Blackwell Publishers at 1-800-216-2522 or visit [www.blackwellpublishing.com](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com).

### What You Can Do to Prevent Violence

This Maternal and Child Health Bureau booklet contains information on preventing violence in children's lives—including bullying—and lists steps parents can take to protect their children. To order, call the National Maternal and Child Health Clearinghouse at 1-888-434-4624 or order online at [www.nmchc.org](http://www.nmchc.org).

### Bullying Prevention

This fact sheet, part of the Safe and Responsive Schools



Project's "What Works in Preventing School Violence" series, provides an overview of the prevalence of bullying and evidence-based prevention strategies. To order, call 1-812-855-6888 or access the publication online at [www.indiana.edu/~safeschl](http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl).

### Addressing the Problem of Juvenile Bullying

This Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention fact sheet reviews recent research on bullying and offers information on effective prevention approaches. To order, call the National Criminal Justice Reference Service at 1-800-851-3420 or access the publication online at [www.ncjrs.org](http://www.ncjrs.org).

### Blueprints for Violence Prevention: The Bullying Prevention Program

(Olweus, Limber, and Mihalic, 1998.) This blueprint outlines in detail the elements of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. To order, call the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at 303-492-1032 or visit [www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints).

## Mark Your Calendar

**The U.S. Department of Education's 17th Annual National Meeting on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention in Higher Education.**

October 16-19, 2003, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Austin, TX. View complete meeting details at [www.edc.org/hec/natl/2003](http://www.edc.org/hec/natl/2003).

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