

KEY POINTS ABOUT BULLYING *(from the work of Stan Davis)*

Not all bullying can be prevented.

Most common adult strategies are ineffective – wrist bands, one-shots, exhortations, pledges, apologies, posters, etc. – are ineffective.

Language commonly used isn't helpful:

“bully”, “victim”, “bystander” wrongly imply stable roles, are emotional, derogatory, stigmatizing, labeling, lead to false media links to ill effects, including suicide falsely. Instead, shift language to ‘person who mistreats’, ‘person who is mistreated’ and ‘person who sees mistreatment’. Describe the action instead of labeling the person.

Least effective things adults tell kids:

- Tell them to stop
- Tell them how I feel
- Pretend it doesn't bother
- Walk away

Least effective adult actions:

- “You should have....”
- Told me to change
- Told me to solve it myself
- Told me to stop tattling

Most helpful adult actions:

- Listened to me
- Gave hopeful and supportive advice
- Checked in with me to see if the behavior stopped

(excerpted, edited from article by Frank DiLallo, Toledo Free Press, about the work of Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon, from their book, Youth Voice Project, 2014)

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Least effective peer actions:

- **Confrontation**
- **Asked kids to stop**

Most helpful peer actions:

- **Spent time with me, sat with me or hung out with me**
- **Talked to me at school to encourage me**
- **Listened to me**

Don't:

- **Use exaggerated "facts" that emphasize negative outcomes to shock or scare youth into changing behaviors.**
- **Ask whether or not there was an intent to harm, repetition in the behavior or a power differential because these are usually not very observable.**

Do:

- **View bullying as peer mistreatment, similar to what can happen in an abusive relationship.**
- **Ask "Does the action have the potential to do harm or prevent learning?" (high potential - most likely to harm, moderate potential - moderately likely to harm, low potential - least likely to harm) and responding accordingly.**
- **Prevent the behavior if possible.**
- **If behavior occurs, ask: "How do we deal with the aftermath?" "How do we strengthen youth so bullying behaviors do less harm?" and "What can we do?"**

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Ten specific approaches to effective bullying prevention:

1. *Build community* (“the airbag of life”): Mistreated youth who are part of their schools or valued and respected at school are significantly less likely to be traumatized by mistreatment. Use class meetings to hear and work through student concerns, set up interest-based activities during school, implement adviser/advisee efforts focused on connection, involve students in meaningful group service projects, provide diversity activities and focused mentoring, as well as peer leader/peer mentor approaches.

2. *Build equity*: We need to collect data about youth of color, youth with disabilities, LGBT youth and other subgroups most likely to be mistreated and traumatized. Activities to promote sensitivity for diversity and support for student diversity translate to a more accepting school environment.

3. *Build peer support*: Encourage peer to peer messages that emphasize to all students, “We care about you” and “You matter here.” Visible peer support translates to a more welcoming school climate and ultimately a safer school.

4. *Build resiliency*: Build self-efficacy (not self-esteem)—young peoples’ knowledge that their actions make a difference in their lives and others’ lives, which translates to effort, service to others and achievement. Use hobbies and interests to bring joy and mastery, service to others to build a sense of positive power

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5. Connect kids with adults: Create positive kid to adult connections via formal or informal mentoring opportunities. Traditionally sports is a successful way adult coaches mentor youth, but not everyone connects with sports — potentially leaving some youth marginalized. Open alternative pathways connecting kids with adults that share common interests: theater, dance, chess, art, music, scouting, woodworking, coin and stamp collecting, cooking, technology, gaming — just to name a few. Involving youth in service projects naturally connects kids with adults.

6. Prevent harm for mistreated youth: Put a stop to mean behavior whenever possible.

7. Connect kids with peers: Help increase opportunities for all youth to build stronger peer connections that support and encourage youth who witness peer mistreatment via informal and formal methods of peer outreach in an effort to reduce harm for mistreated youth and to create a safe and thriving school environment overall.

8. Reduce negative student behavior: Schools should garner student input via surveys or other means to develop clear definitions of wanted and unwanted behavior. From this input, consistent approaches can be developed whereby students and adults come to agree on what specific behaviors constitute moderate to high potential to harm, using small and escalating consequences to deter behaviors. Student survey data can also be used to create new norms that show students their peers disapprove of negative actions and help them see the value in acts of kindness and inclusion.

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9. *Help mistreating youth change:* Help mistreating youth build empathy with opportunities to reflect and write about the consequences of their actions, and to do restorative acts help heal the harm they have done. Some mistreating youth need to learn social skills, self-control or anger management. Some may need to deal with past trauma. Mistreating youth can also benefit from experiences with the positive power of service to others.

10. *Support youth who witness peer mistreatment:* Youths who witness violence also suffer, so helping others through positive acts is important for them as well. The most effective actions are done by peers, including encouraging, helping youth get away and helping them tell adults, including encouragement away from school.

Somewhat helpful (but still limited) actions kids take to help themselves:

(These acts have the most limited impact, as compared to actions taken by adults and peers.)

- Told an adult or a friend
- In grades six and higher, youth said things got better when they reminded themselves that the mistreatment is not their fault and that those who are mistreating them are the ones who are doing something wrong.

Least helpful actions kids take to help themselves:

- Confronting the mistreater
- Pretending not to be bothered

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