Bullying:
What We Can Do

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THREE PRELIMINARY POINTS

1. **School/school-based relationships the predominant setting for bullying**

2. **Bullying typically a pattern not a single incident**

3. **Most bullying can be prevented through actions schools can take – which is the focus of my talk**

SCHOOL CLIMATE IS KEY

(e.g.) Our Students/Their World - 2010 Survey of One District's High School Students

Almost a third of students regularly feel hopeless (about their school careers).

Almost a half of students have no vision for their future beyond high school.

And more than one-third don't believe that any of us care.

(ref. Jean Synodinos, ICF Macro, OSDFS National Conference, August 8, 2011)

Essential Supports for School Climate Improvement
Carol Nixon, *Ph.D., Edvantia, Inc.* (posted by National
School Climate Center, 11/7/11)

School climate impacts attendance, *engagement*, achievement, behavior, teacher turnover, instructional time/effectiveness, success of school improvement and reform efforts, and drop-out rates.

(Essential supports for school improvement include:
-student-centered learning climate,
-school leadership,
-parent-community ties,
-professional capacity of faculty and staff,
-ambitious instruction.)

Elementary schools that demonstrated strengths in these areas were ten times more likely than others to show significant gains in reading and math.

WHAT TO DO

Whole School or Systemic Model (e.g., Olweus/OBPP), or School Climate Model (e.g., Cohen/NSCC), or Elias/Rutgers-CASEL Model

- **school the most common site**

- **change the culture of schools**

- ***adult*-initiated and led (children involved)**

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What Does Not Work – and What Does
(**ref. Stan Davis/Youth Voice Project)**

Does Not Work:
-telling youth to solve their own problems
(leaves least able least protected)
-telling youth to ignore it or say 'stop'
-telling youth bullying is 'wrong'

Does Work:
-positive staff-student connections
-fair/consistent rules and discipline collectively
agreed upon/fairly enforced
-staff action to discourage and interrupt
low-level mean student behavior (fire
prevention vs. fire fighting)
-supporting mistreated youth
-positive peer norms/actions

Strengthen School Climate

• emphasize warmth, engagement, school community

• positive relations and shared understanding between staff

• positive staff-student interactions

• support/inclusion for all (diverse clubs/activities, proactive education, increase support for vulnerable groups)

• character education /social-emotional learning/ 'universal' social skills training

• clear/consensus expectations ('how we do things here')

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School-Wide

- **Administrative support**

- **Coordinating group/staff discussions/training**

- **Assessment (surveys, reporting system)**

- **Positive staff-staff and staff-student relations**

- **Proactive effort to identify all incidents/relationships**

- **Supervise high-risk areas (schoolyard, lunchroom, school bus, bathrooms, team activities, locker room, cyberspace)**

- **Consistent rules and sanctions (staff consensus) (well-known to students, staff, parents, community)**

- **Involve parents**

- **Activate peer bystanders**

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Classroom

- Clear, consistent rules

- Regular meetings

- Collaborative learning

- Curriculum integration

- Proactive work on relationships

- Parent involvement

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Individual

• **Proactive information-gathering on vulnerability and relations**

• **Meeting with each child who was bullied and call/see parent (apologize, take responsibility, absolve)**

• **Meeting with each child who bullied and call parent**

• **Consequences for the bullying child (reasonable, invariable, escalating), then (post-incident) reflection/empathy**

• **Assure and arrange increased support for the bullied child.**

• **Active monitoring after incidents.**

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Staff Responses to Negative Behaviors

• *Behaviors that violate law* - Report/follow policy

• *Severe risk of harm* - Report/follow rubric

• *Moderate severity* - Intervene and track behavior

• *Unacceptable* - Intervene, using own approaches
(e.g., "Why do you think we don't allow those words?", micro-consequences: "Sit there to help you remember not to say/do) that again", encourage reflection: "What did you do? What was wrong with that?", signal student the action is unacceptable via a look, short whispered conversation, or brief talk after class)

• *Negative but acceptable* - Use discretion
(e.g., ignore, advise, use mediation strategies if both students have done something wrong, or use small, in-the- moment consequences)

Ref: Stan Davis, www.stopbullyingnow.com

Seven Measures Which Positively Impact Bullying

1. collaborative learning models

2. friendship circles

3. mentoring to strengthen school engagement

4. diverse clubs/activities

5. proactive diversity education

6. staff-student positive relations

7. staff-staff positive relations

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What can parents do about bullying? (1)

• Good relations/communication with children.

• Inform yourself.

• Expect/ ask/ demand adequate school action.

• Expect/ ask/ demand that owners of social organizations, including networking sites and internet providers, address bullying.

• Ask your child how children treat other children at school (and how your child is treated); listening is more important than advice.

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What can parents do about bullying? (2)

• When you hear children speak badly of another child, *gently* express discomfort, and empathy for the scorned child.

• Be present at your child's school; don't wait to be invited, ask to volunteer.

• Take action with other concerned parents. Meet (as a group) with school leaders; ask specifically about the school's approach.

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What can parents do about bullying? (3)

- *Never* ignore bullying, don't walk by; if you can't intervene directly, report it.

- Support bullied kids in every possible way.

- Seek legal advice and government support.

- Don't accept leaders who bully, including teachers; speak out, insist on change.

- Consider changing schools, if possible, as a last resort.

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (1)

• **Have a bullying-aware classroom (materials, meetings)**

• **Proactively identify all incidents/relationships**

• **Actively scan for bullying involvement, consider bullying as a factor in behavior change/problems**

• **Actively identify/track at-risk children**

• **Anticipatory support for at-risk children through education, activities, relationship-building, counseling**

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (2)

- Address/engage negative peer 'leaders'

- Model positive relations with other teachers/staff

- Increase positive staff (teachers, aides, any adults in classroom) and student interactions

- Consistent rules/sanctions (well-known to students, staff, parents, community)

- Collect data on bullying

- Supervise high-risk areas/activities

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (3)

- Self-aware of biases and compensate

- Pay as much positive attention to improvement as achievement

- Emphasize diversity/tolerance (even more if low staff-student matching)

- Use character education /social-emotional learning /'universal' social skills approaches

- Address culture/expectations/norms ('how we do things here')

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (4)

- Collaborative learning ('jigsaw' – Aronson)

- Curriculum integration (all subjects)

- Parent involvement

- An atmosphere of warmth, acceptance and support

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What Can Professionals Do?

• Screen for bullying involvement, consider bullying as a factor or even a cause of presenting problems

• Proactive identification of at-risk children, creative support through school action and/or preventive counseling

• Have a bullying-aware office

• Challenge negative leaders

• As a community leader, expect schools to address bullying, raise parental expectations

• Be clear about what works and doesn't work

• Advocate for stronger law

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Systemic approach works

• shown to reduce bullying in intervention studies in multiple countries, including the U.S., with improvements in subsequent years … if*

•*if administrative commitment and support*

•*if staff 'buy-in'*

•*if ongoing*

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Be clear about what doesn't work

Zero tolerance

Social skills training/psychotherapy
as *primary* modalities and only directed at those bullying or those bullied when incidents have occurred

Peer mediation and conflict resolution

One-shot (e.g., assemblies)
or short-term interventions.

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OLWEUS

Our moral obligation to help bullied children.

RESOURCES

NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention
www.njbullying.org, (908) 522-2581

Stan Davis' *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*
www.stopbullyingnow.com)

National School Climate Center (www.schoolclimate.org)

www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov

www.cyberbullying.us

www.bullyinginfo.gov

www.csriu.org

www.responsiveclassroom.org